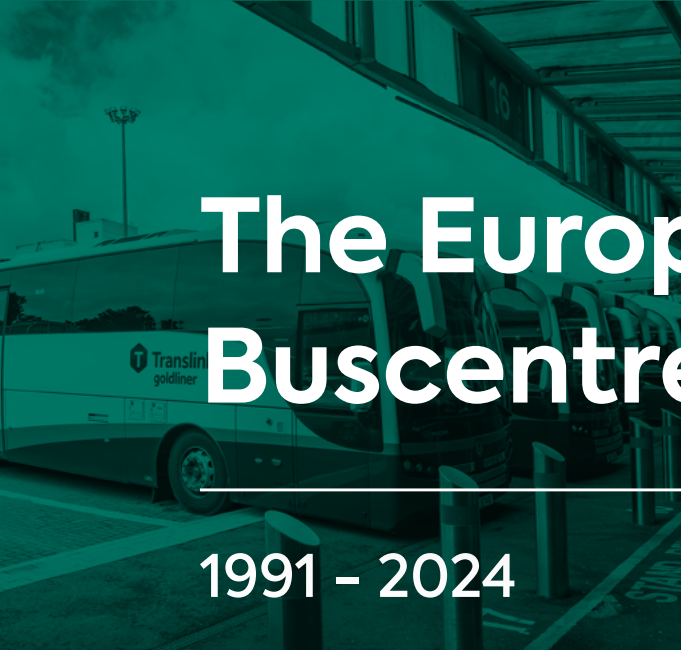


The Europa Buscentre History

1991 – 2024





Work on Great Victoria Street Bus Station Following The Removal of Platform 5. © Translink



Use of Former Railway Platform Canopies by Ulster Transport Authority Bus Services 1966. © Translink



Flexibus Harbour Airport Service, Launched in 1984. © H Nicholson



Great Victoria Street Bus Station September 1986. © R Bell



During Construction 1991. © Translink



Introduction

A bus station has been located on the site of the Europa Buscentre since 1962, when the Ulster Transport Authority removed platform 5 at Great Victoria Street Railway station to make way for Belfast's first joint bus and rail terminus.

Originally, omnibus services operated by the Great Northern Railway Company (Ireland) and other bus operators served Great Victoria Street Railway Station by stopping at the front of the station building, under the porte-cochère.

Great Victoria Street Bus Station was opened by the UTA to increase capacity in Belfast, to operate local bus services and parcels services as well as the very popular Day and Extended Bus Tour operation throughout Ireland. It continued to be used by Ulsterbus when it became the successor to the UTA in April 1967.

Ulsterbus further developed the local and express bus network throughout Northern Ireland during the early 1970's. Although Great Victoria Street Railway Station closed in April 1976, Ulsterbus continued to operate a bus station on the site, expanding the bus parking and maintenance area.

In 1978 Interlink Ireland was launched which saw Ulsterbus services from Great Victoria Street, linking with

CIÉ bus services, providing all-island connections. The late 1970's and early 80's also saw the development of Cross Channel Coach services from Great Victoria Street to various locations including Glasgow, Edinburgh, Blackpool, London, Bristol, Manchester, Leeds and Leicester.

Express bus services direct to Belfast International Airport from around Northern Ireland operated from 1969 as Airlink, in addition to the direct service from Great Victoria Street to the Airport; and in 1984 a new mini-coach service operated by Flexibus from Great Victoria Street to Belfast Harbour Airport (now George Best City) Airport, was launched.

Although bus operator HMS Catherwood had operated a Belfast to Dublin direct express coach service between 1927 and 1933, it was not until 1989 that such a service was reintroduced by Ulsterbus, operating between Great Victoria Street and Busáras, in conjunction with Bus Éireann.

Ulsterbus Flagship Europa Buscentre:

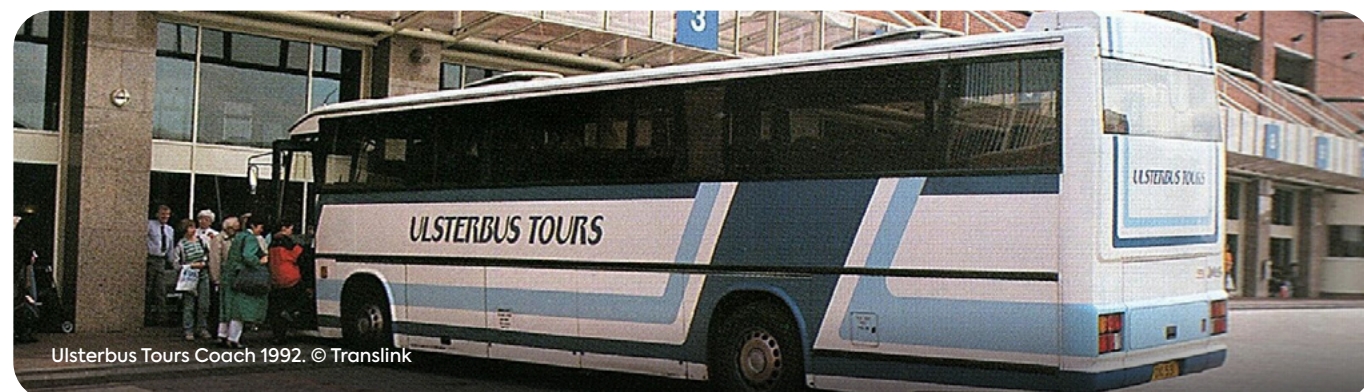
Plans for the redevelopment of Great Victoria Street station as a transport and commercial centre secured grant assistance from EEC Regional Funds in 1987, including a multi-storey car park, shop development, bus station, travel centre and the possibility of a railway interchange. The multi-storey car park was completed in 1990 with the ground floor ready to house the bus station and travel centre.

In 1991, Ulsterbus opened new bus station facilities at Omagh and Newcastle, but the Europa Buscentre, officially opened in September of that year, was without doubt the show piece and flagship location for Ulsterbus. It provided much enhanced facilities for customers and staff, over what went before – a portacabin! Initially the Europa Buscentre had 20 bus stands, airport style departure boards, information/ticket kiosk, public toilets, photo booth, public telephones, shop, cafe/restaurant and even an ATM! The new station was later connected via a direct pedestrian link out onto Great Victoria Street, with the opening

of the Great Northern Mall. The Travel Centre located within the new station offered luxury coach touring holidays with Ulsterbus Tours throughout Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales and Continental Europe. Also located within the Travel Centre was Ulsterbus Cross Channel, Bus/Coach Hire, Educational Tours and later Northern Ireland Railways Travel. An office for Flexibus, offering luxury mini-coach hire was located adjacent to the Travel Centre.

Ulsterbus relaunched Ulsterbus Express services as Goldline in 1990, operated with new Goldliner liveried coaches. Maiden City Flyer (Derry/Londonderry), Lakeland Express (Enniskillen), Orchard Express (Armagh), Antrim Coaster and Atlantic Coast Express, are just some of the branded Goldline services that operated from the new Europa Buscentre.

A separate dedicated Ulsterbus Parcels Office was located within the Europa Buscentre yard, dispatching parcels to any destination in Northern Ireland or Cross Border, offering a same day or next day delivery service.



Ulsterbus Tours Coach 1992. © Translink



Meeting Point. © Translink



Flexibus Counter. © Translink



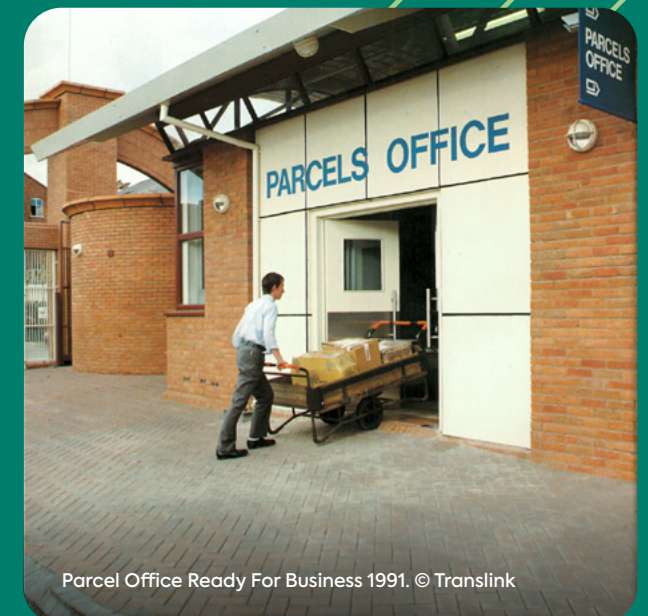
Café Area Beside Great Northern Mall Entrance. © Translink



Travel Centre. © Translink



Information Screens. © Translink



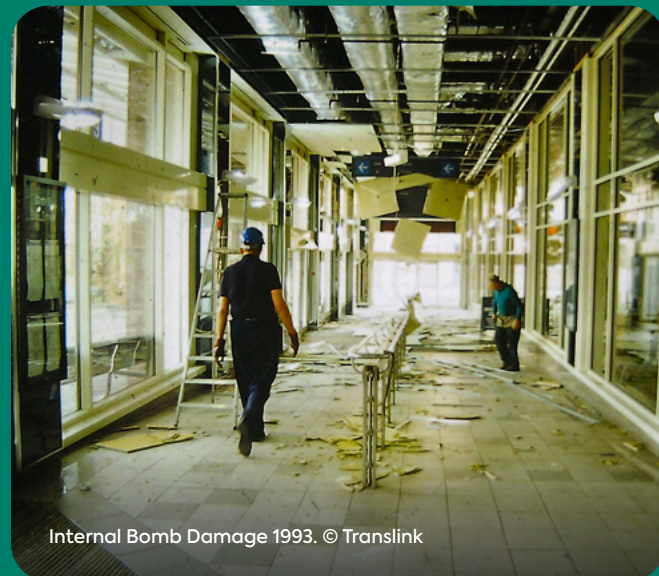
Parcel Office Ready For Business 1991. © Translink

The Troubles

The Europa Buscentre unfortunately experienced two car bombs that were detonated in Glengall Street in 1991 and 1993, which although caused significant damage to the building, bus services kept running, a testament to the determination of the staff.



Bomb Damage at Glengall Street 1993. © Translink



Internal Bomb Damage 1993. © Translink



Bomb Damage at Glengall Street 1993. © Translink

An arrival with a difference:

1995 was a busy year at Europa Buscentre. On top of regular services, a special arrival came in March, in the form of a Lynx helicopter carrying Comic Relief founder Lenny Henry to Belfast, landing within the Europa Buscentre bus yard at stand 7, much to the delight of staff and passengers!

In November 1995 Flexibus and Ulsterbus provided official transport for the cavalcade of the first visit of USA President Bill Clinton to the City, who was staying in the Europa Hotel.

The entire transport operation was co-ordinated from the Europa Buscentre.



Bill Clinton Visit 1995. © Translink



Comic Relief Founder Lenny Henry Arrives at Europa Buscentre by Helicopter. © Translink



Europa Bus Centre March 2003. © Translink



Hourly Goldline Service to Dublin 2005. © Translink



Ulsterbus on Bus Stands 2024. © Translink



Goldliners at Europa Buscentre 2024. © Translink

Return of the Railway

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In September 1995, the former railway station at Great Victoria Street, re-opened. The new combined upgraded facility represented investment of £6million, around 75% of which was funded by the EU.

Great Victoria Street Station provided quick and easy access to the adjacent Europa Buscentre for connections across Northern Ireland. The construction of the new railway station led to a reduction in bus stands from 20 to 17 at the Europa Buscentre.

In December 1996, a “train” with a difference paid a visit to the Europa Buscentre, in the form of the Portrush Puffer road train, to operate a seasonal “Christmas Chuffer” service around the City Centre!



The Original Europa Bus Centre With 20 Stands, Before The Railway Was Reopened. © Translink



The Christmas Chuffer in Royal Avenue November 1996. © R Bell



New Great Victoria Street Station 1995. © Translink



Internal image of Belfast Grand Central Station. © Translink



Internal image of Belfast Grand Central Station. © Translink

Passenger services transferred from the Europa Buscentre to the new Belfast Grand Central Station:

The impressive high-quality Belfast Grand Central Station will offer an enhanced user experience.

The number of bus stands increases from the 17 at the Europa Buscentre to 26 which will open on a phased basis during late 2024 and 2025 – with 8 rail platforms, double the number which had been available at Great Victoria Street Station.

This hugely important flagship project marks a significant step forward in Northern Ireland's public transport system. Ten times larger than the previous facilities and largest on the island of Ireland, it will be able to cater for up to 20 million customer journeys annually.

Funded by the Department for Infrastructure, Belfast Grand Central Station will bring about a step change in public transport.

The fully inclusive hub will be a major international gateway to and from the rest of the world with enhanced connectivity across Northern Ireland, cross border and local airports creating a better connected, cleaner and healthier city for everyone.

Belfast Grand Central Station will significantly improve public transport provision, including bus, coach and rail links. It will also encourage more sustainable travel options such as walking and cycling.

Beyond transportation, this new facility will be a new destination in the heart of the city where people meet thanks to a range of popular hospitality and retail outlets.

Outside there will be a new exciting public realm space – Saltwater Square with a strong emphasis on arts and culture which has potential to become a focal point for everyone to use and enjoy.

An important city regeneration project Translink has partnered with MRP to deliver Belfast's transformational Weavers Cross – the new city neighbourhood surrounding Belfast Grand Central Station with the potential for 1.3 million square feet of mixed-use office, life sciences, residential, student housing, hotels, and retail/leisure space.

The Europa Buscentre closes to passengers on Saturday, 7th September 2024. Belfast Grand Central Station opens for bus service passengers on Sunday, 8th September 2024, with rail services following later in the Autumn. The full project, including dedicated realm space, will follow in 2025.



Thanks to:
Jonathan Miller & Raymond Bell