



Little Owl Farm, Halebourne Lane, Chobham, Surrey GU24 8SL

Email: [info@uk-coa.co.uk](mailto:info@uk-coa.co.uk)

Tel: 07802 679795

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## Members Meeting

Tuesday 21 September 2021 at 10:30 - Via ZOOM

### Present

Stephen Telling	UKCOA Chairman
Mark Anderson	Anderson Travel
Amy Baker-McCormack	Leoline Travel
Mark Ballam	Alexander Dennis
Richard Bamber	Anthony's Travel
Andrew Bassom	Golden Tours
Blaine Betts	Coopers Tours
David Blake	Blakes Coaches
Peter Bradley	Managing Director – UKCOA
Peter Brown	Princess Coaches
Alan Cooper	Coopers Tours
Graham Cooper	Cooper Tours
Shaun Concannon	Coopers Tours
Darren Curd	Wrightsure
Peter Evans	MET Coaches
Paul Flisher	Ready Tours Ltd
Nathan Hadley	Prospect Coaches
Del Haggarty	DH Team Ltd
Paul Harnden	Chauffer Hire Coaches
Julie Hartley	Irizar
Ilir Hoxha	Big Ben Coaches
David Hull	Wrightsure
Tom James	York Pullman
Laura Li	Membership and Administration Officer -UKCOA
Anthony Marett	Maretts Chariots
Richard Matthews	Princess Coaches
Kevin Mayne	Maynes Coaches
Terry McIntyre	Golden Boy Coaches
Sanjay Patel	Mazza Coaches
Mark Peace	Cheney Coaches
Neil Pegg	City Circle
Darren Player	AAMP Global
Marc Preston	SBC Coaches

Peter Rice	Southgate and Finchley Coaches
Elaine Scrivens	Southgate and Finchley Coaches
Richard Slack	Slacks Coaches
Stephen Spiller	Centurion Travel
Richard Telling	Falcon Travel (Surrey)
Mark Watts	Watts Way Travel
David West	Westway Coaches
Robert Whelan	Corbel of London
Kevin Wilde	Mitcham Belle
John Williams	Williams Coaches
Su Winch	Novadata
Matthew Winson	Winson Coaches

### 1. **Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from:

Snake Ambrose	Bridgnorth Bus & Coach Co
Jamie Brown	Princess Coaches
Judy Dale	Royale European

### 2. **Minutes of last meeting 11 August 2021, and any Matters Arising**

Minutes agreed with no amendments. No matters arising.

### 3. **PSVAR**

#### **Mark Watts - Watts Way Travel**

Watts Way Travel is one of the few operators who have carried a wheelchair with side loading. The wheelchair was carried for around 3-4 weeks. The pick-up was on Putney Hill, a very busy road, and added around 10 - 15 minutes to the journey each way. **Mark Watts** noted:

- There is not enough space for the wheelchair and a member of staff to go up on the lift with it;
- The driver had to secure the wheelchair and then run up to meet them and secure them onto the coach;
- The lift has side barriers but nothing at the rear to stop the wheelchair from falling backwards;
- It is a hazard at the side of the road. There is a risk of pedestrians walking into the lift or tripping over it when deployed on the pavement;
- Drivers need to be micro-trained to secure the wheelchair;
- It is not ideal for a child left on their own. It would need to be deeper to accommodate a staff member, but this would eat into more pavement space;
- The lift goes up 4-5ft in the air. Is it safe? What are the building site regulations for working at heights?
- The lift is a not a practical arrangement for home to school runs; buses are a better choice with a ramp that deploys much more easily;
- A conversation is needed with manufacturers to come up with a better and safer configuration;

- For a longer contract would think about using a second member of staff and utilising the police. Concerned with the possibility of a lawsuit as things are.

General discussion centred on:

- The DfT's solution for these problems would be to say use buses instead of coaches for home to school journeys;
- It is better to come up with a solution before raising with the DfT;
- Could try to make the current configuration safer for pedestrians e.g., a chain-link fence around the lift, but this would not be practical;
- Having proper lift facilities will help attract the 10 million people with mobility problems who are not wheelchair users;
- There must be a way to provide accessibility without having a hole in the side of the coach;
- Need to consider the road conditions when using the lift; the designated stop might not be suitable to deploy the lift or to take the weight of the wheelchair and passenger;
- Local Authorities are now specifying PSVAR coaches on all contracts. Complying costs money and coach operators are being undercut;
- What does the DfT want? Buses are fully accessible and easily deploy the ramps but are older, not as green, and not as comfortable as coaches;
- Operators are using buses; drivers do the morning run and then wait in laybys for the afternoon pickup. With the increasing fuel prices and NI contributions how is this cost-effective?
- Second-hand buses are so cheap to buy that there is no need for extra work to make them pay. But this is not the way the industry wants to go;
- Coach operators themselves are dragging the level of service down.

#### **Latest Position**

The PSVAR Members' Summary – September 2021 was sent out with the agenda. We have written to the DfT and are awaiting a response.

#### **4. Drivers – Recruitment and Retention**

##### **Peter Evans - MET Coaches**

**Peter Evans** from MET spoke about driver recruitment and retention:

- We have to put rates up. What choice have we got?
- Coach drivers are an ageing population; many are retiring, or being lost to the haulage industry;
- We should go to the government for grants for driver training;
- We talk a lot about the issues but don't do much. We need to take action;
- Lost 50% of my work because I couldn't cover it. Having drivers available for 6 days a week would help;
- Without the drivers we don't have an industry;
- Need more representation in the trade associations. There are around 3,000 operators but only about 500 are trade association members;
- We should name and shame the cowboy operators;

- Brokers from abroad, with no knowledge or understanding of the industry, are quoting for jobs and undercutting decent operators;
- Wrote to Brain Souter about his investment in KURA with no reply. Perhaps he would have replied to an approach from UKCOA;
- Would be prepared to go on strike for a day – but who else would do that? Have to be prepared to take chances in business;

**Stephen Telling** mentioned that driver retention is key. We have to find a way to recruit the younger generation and make it an exciting career prospect. The government has an Apprentice Scheme. An employer can apply for a £3,000 grant to take on an apprentice. There are limits on the age and distances for young drivers, but it would be ok for school and/or swimming journeys. The grant would cover the training costs at any reputable training school.

UKOCA should set up its own apprentice scheme including a driver training academy and delegated examiners. Stephen knows the Group Engineering Director at one of the main bus companies who is keen to be involved in setting this up with us. This would give us access to his delegated examiners. After driver training it can be difficult to book the test and conducting our own tests would speed the whole process up, especially re-tests.

A potential apprentice scheme for 18 - 19-year-olds could look like:

- Year 1 home to school journeys on cheaper vehicles. Daily limit of 50km;
- Year 2 allowed to do journeys up to 150,000 – 200,000 km in Britain on local work;
- Year 3 progress from there.

It could also apply to older applicants who are retraining from other careers.

We make them feel part of the business and enhance the pride in the industry. Consider the difference between taxi drivers and chauffeurs of limousines. The pay would need to reflect this.

The rules around age restrictions for drivers would be part of the negotiations with the DfT. There are many ways to look at how we do this, and we will take our ideas to the government, but there are ways to make this work.

Having our own training school would mean you don't take on drivers who have already learned bad habits.

**Del Haggerty** said he thought this was an opportunity to clean the industry up. We need to pay drivers more. He has been all over Europe, we can sell the dream, but not on £9 per hour. If you're paying an agency more, you can pay drivers more. And stop paying cash in hand.

**Peter Rice** queried how you can put rates up if schools won't pay. **Stephen Telling** answered that drivers will move to the companies that pay more and the other companies will go out of business. It isn't just about pay, but also terms and conditions.

We can't just keep recruiting from a declining population. Older drivers have to report any medical issues to DVSA, who may remove their license. We have to attract other people.

**Peter Evans** mentioned that some companies are paying cash. Stephen Telling replied that if you think drivers are being paid cash report them to HMRC.

**Kevin Mayne** said that he works with a local job centre, which pays for the training. He does a presentation at the job centre then does initial selection and training to make sure they're right for the job before sending candidates to a local driver training company. The biggest issue is with already trained drivers – why have they left their previous employer? They should go through a full driver assessment to identify any problems or bad habits. Training fresh is the best way.

**Stephen Telling** asked the meeting if the Board should put something together to show to the DfT. Everybody was in agreement.

**Ilir Hoxha** thought that too much is said and too little is done. This is a very serious topic here for everybody today. For example, only 5 out of 51 drivers were available today because of the restrictions around drivers' hours. We should keep pushing until we get an answer.

**Stephen Telling** replied that there is a lot of unseen work going on in the background. UKCOA completely changed direction 9 months ago and went from being London based to nationwide. We were told we couldn't speak with the DfT, but we got our papers in front of them. We do talk a lot, but that's how we get ideas.

Ilir confirmed that he does value what has been done personally. He feels that as we are the only trade association focused solely on the coach industry we should push more strongly for change.

There was some discussion around the restrictions on drivers' hours and the efficient utilisation of drivers:

- Drivers are returning to coach work at weekends because Class 2 and delivery work is only available on weekdays;
- Drivers are only driving for around 50% of the time they are being paid;
- How many new drivers are needed? Better efficiency in utilising the drivers we have may be the answer;
- Coach drivers are required to have 45 hours rest whereas other industries only require 24 hours. This was subject to EU working hours, which no longer apply, so the 45-hour rule could be reviewed;
- Drivers who only work 3-4 hours each day can't be used at weekends because of the rule;
- You can give 24 hours rest during the middle of the week to comply with the weekly 45-hour requirement;
- Drivers' hours count across all the companies they work for and a letter from their main employer is needed to allow them to work part time with a coach operator;
- Not trying to force long working hours without breaks. The issue is why can bus drivers do domestic hours of 13 hours per day, but coach drivers can't.
- **Peter Evans** asked in the chat for any operators, that are local to MET and who want to set up a driver agency with the help of UKCOA, to contact him.

**Stephen Telling** said we can do a review of coach drivers' hours, although he thought it would be difficult to persuade the DfT to agree to any change.

#### 5. **New Members and Membership Drive**

The best way to recruit new members is by word of mouth. We are doing another membership drive: contacting 3,000 operators. Increasing the membership base would give us more strength when talking to the DfT. It would also help us take on more staff to support the work across all our initiatives.

Application forms were sent out with the agenda. Please think about who you could encourage to join. The joining fee is pro rata being halfway through the membership year.

#### 6. **Any Other Business**

**Stephen Telling** said that having recently moved from a London-centric to a nationwide membership base the UKCOA have added two new Board Members: **Tom James** from York Pullman and **Steve Spiller** from Centurion Travel, who will give us a new dynamic and perspective.

**Tom James:** thank you for asking me to join the Board. I will try and provide some balance from a northern-based perspective. It's an interesting time for trade associations. I'm impressed with the work of Peter Bradley and Stephen Telling. There are difficult issues to address and it's time we made ourselves heard. With an increased membership base we can do that more easily going forward.

**Steve Spiller:** I endorse all the points that Tom made. It is an honour to be asked to join the Board. I am happy to play my part and see if we can push forward with some of the tasks we're faced with and get things done. I'm happy to be involved.

**Darren Curd** ran through some insurance issues with hiring and training young drivers. He is willing to help with any specific queries and you can contact him direct.

**Stephen Telling** thanked **Julie Hartley** at Irizar, **Mark Ballam** at ADL Plaxton and **Jonathan Prime** at EvoBus for their great support with the PSVAR paper for the DfT.

#### 7. **Date of next meeting**

Wednesday 20 October at 10.30

Presentation TBA – Possibly the delayed presentation from **Andrew Blundell** and **Julie Hartley** at Irizar.