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Members Meeting

Tuesday 20 October 2021 at 10:30 - Via ZOOM

Present

Kevin Wilde	UKCOA Director and Vice-Chair
Mark Anderson	Anderson Travel
Amy Baker-McCormack	Leoline Travel
Richard Bamber	Anthony's Travel
Peter Bibby	Bibby's of Ingleton
David Blake	Blakes Coaches
Peter Bradley	Managing Director – UKCOA
Jamie Brown	Princess Coaches
Alan Cooper	Coopers 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
Tina Hailstone	Hailstone Travel
Paul Harnden	Chauffer Hire Coaches
Ilir Hoxha	Big Ben Coaches
David Hull	Wrightsure
Colin Inman	Chandlers Coach Travel
Laura Li	Membership and Administration Officer -UKCOA
Anthony Marett	Maretts Chariots
Robert Marriott	Bayliss Executive Travel
Richard Matthews	Princess Coaches
Kevin Mayne	Maynes Coaches
Sanjay Patel	Mazza Coaches
Mark Peace	Cheney Coaches
Sarah Reilly	Bliss Travel
Peter Rice	Southgate and Finchley Coaches
Stephen Spiller	Centurion Travel
Jamie Thacker	Hearns Coaches
Jackie Thomas	Edward Thomas and Son
Mark Watts	Watts Way Travel

Robert Whelan
Andy Wing

Corbel of London
Golden Boy Travel

1. **Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from:

Mark Ballam	Alexander Dennis
Jim Baxter	London Pullman
Judy Dale	Royale European
Tom James	York Pullman
Andy Palmer	A Palmer Associates
Richard Telling	Falcon Travel (Surrey)
Stephen Telling	UKCOA Chairman
Su Winch	Novadata

2. **Minutes of last meeting 21 September 2021, and any Matters Arising**

Minutes agreed with no amendments. No matters arising.

3. **PSVAR – Update**

Home to School Transport

Peter Bradley reported that there are now only 6 months until the end of the existing derogation. Peter added that he is trying to set up a further meeting with the DfT to discuss next steps to allow for sensible planning within reasonable timescales. This is a hugely important topic for the coach industry and Peter stressed that the UKCOA were exploring every avenue to bring the situation to a satisfactory conclusion.

Peter added that if pressed as to what coach operators could do right now, his suggestion would be to check whether all handrails are colour contrasting with their background and, if not, to seek advice and possibly replace them. However, he stressed that there was no specific intelligence that this would be a requirement from 1 April 2022. He added that he was still hopeful that there would be some form of derogation on not having to fit wheelchair lifts or destination equipment to the standard currently specified, but time was running out.

Rail Replacement

The derogation for use of coaches that do not meet PSVAR requirements on rail replacement services expires on 30 June 2022, which does give some hope that there is leeway to extend the 31 March deadline for home to school transport.

4. **Drivers – Recruitment and Retention – Update and next steps forward for the Association**

Kevin Wilde asked each operator in turn to let the membership know what their current situation was. The broad picture is:

Employment Situation

- OK, not bad. Could probably do with 3 more drivers. Will get through winter and then recruit drivers from the jib centre. (North);
- Struggling, could do with a couple more drivers (London/South-East);

- Not struggling. Saying no to work we can't cover, even long-term contracts. (West);
- Four drivers short as of today. (London/South-East);
- Never had so many applicants. (East);
- Three or four drivers short. (London/South-East);
- Seems alright. Kept all our drivers during pandemic. (West);
- Ok for now. (Midlands);
- Plenty of drivers. Managed to get through the busy times. (London/South-East);
- Coping. Long-term contracts have higher rates so we can afford the squeeze. (London/South-East);
- A few of our drivers left and came back. (North);
- No problem at the moment. Plenty of drivers because we don't have much work. (North);
- Ok. Not many coaches on the road. Management driving. (South);
- Fairly stable, drivers still here. (West);
- Ok – struggling at weekends. (South-East);
- Tight today with 2 off sick. No spare capacity. (South-East);
- Fine. Could do with another 2 or 2 casual drivers. (West);
- At least 5 drivers short. Placed an ad at the job centre – not 1 applicant. (London).

Wages

- Increasing wages will not improve the quality of drivers;
- We attracted drivers once we put the wages up;
- Don't want to increase rates and then have to maintain them long-term – or increase the rates for existing drivers;
- Increasing rates got applicants in the door quickly – but they are not suitable long-term;
- We have increased wages – the industry would have upped rates anyway;
- Put rates up by 5% after the end of furlough;
- Had to put rates up to between £18-22 ph. Increasing rates is the answer to the driver shortage;
- Increasing wages will cost £100k based on 2019 figures. Drivers deserve more money, it's a hard job;
- Waitrose might be paying £60k but top earners will be managed out (like in the bus industry). We pay an enhancement bonus if performance targets are met. We pay around £35-40k pa;
- Don't agree with the wage increase – drivers are mercenary. A massive increase in wages will put up inflation;
- We are paying higher wages, but the drivers are not good enough. Only bad drivers are mercenary, not the good ones;
- We increased rates two months ago;
- Agree rates should go up. Our drivers are salaried. Good working conditions are also important;

Recruitment

- We are not attracting new people into the industry – the driver shortage is a long-term problem. It is better to take on people with good customer service skills and train them to drive than take on PSV holders with poor people skills;

- Recruitment will be a problem in the future;
- Not hopeful things will get better soon;
- We are aware of the problems in the industry;
- We need more/better staff through the door. Need to attract drivers from outside the industry;
- Looking to see how we can bring in ore/younger drivers;
- Older drivers want to drop back to 3 days a week. There should be a register of poor drivers. We take drivers that have good references but are awful;
- We need to do something to protect the industry. We are working with Backhouse Jones to put a campaign together;
- Cost of insurance is a factor for under 21s;
- Go into schools and recruit school leavers;
- Anticipate this will be a problem for us next year.

Impact on work

- Saying no to work we can't cover – even long-term contracts;
- Not taking on the work. Cuts stress, but also profits;
- Taking on as much as we can comfortably do and saying no to the rest;
- If we have work with no one to drive, we will up the rates to attract drivers;
- We cover jobs by management going out driving;
- We have family driving.

Industry Image

- What other job pays you to travel around the UK and Europe. We need to promote the industry;
- Need better marketing to sell how good this job can be;
- Be careful about negative publicity;
- This is a good industry to work in. There are not many jobs where you be paid to sit around for 10 hours.

Current Driving Workforce

- Most drivers are older and only want to work part-time since lockdown;
- Some drivers are thinking of retiring after furlough;
- We are losing older drivers. They don't want to renew their CPC or they want to work fewer days;

Presentation by Del Haggerty

Del Haggerty started by saying it would be beneficial if we all work together on solving this problem. We can bring in new people and train the future. Grants are available and we can get applicants through the job centre. We can train our own drivers and have our own "shop" for bringing drivers in for the operators.

We can set up a training facility with accommodation and train people in all aspects of the job: driving, how you want them to look after the coach, and housekeeping. We can take people straight away rather than waiting until they have a licence. Let's take them through the CPCs. We can make the job interesting and show them every part of it, especially the travel to Europe.

Del also said:

- We will build our own training facilities. If you don't want to train drivers let UKCOA do it for you. Initially we would like to set up a facility in London and then up in the M62 area.
- Let's make this a proper job with a career path. Let's create a buzz in the industry.
- There are a lot of operators here today and many of you have a driver shortage. If we build this driver training academy this will be a plus for all of you.
- There are grants and subsidies available to train people for driving, management, operations and traffic management. There are incentives for getting people back into work.
- We can recruit from ex-service people and the unemployed. We could also look at lowering the age for coach drivers.
- The academy could also train existing drivers who don't meet the required standard rather than sacking them. It would solve the problem of poor drivers doing the round of operators.
- Let's have some sponsorship from the membership for this. Between all of us we have the vehicles. Let's advertise for drivers and create the training scheme. We can do this very quickly and have something up and running in a few weeks.

Peter Bradley added that the reason we went round the membership this morning was to find out what is happening for operators, and it seems that many are OK. However, he pointed out that the driver training academy could be good for planning for the future. He asked members whether they thought it is a good idea, if it would be useful for members and if individual members wanted to be part of it. Input was vital otherwise projects such as these cannot proceed.

Other comments/views:

- Why just north/south and not north/south/east/west? North/south is just a starting point.
- Are there enough trainers? The operators can train the recruits. We could go to bus companies for trainers, but we need coach specific training.
- The 50k limits stops younger drivers from doing anything other than a morning and afternoon school trip. They won't get to see much of the UK and will leave after 2 or 3 years.
- This was mooted as an apprenticeship scheme for young drivers set up over 3 years and providing a long-term career. They can be mentored by older drivers and taken on longer journeys to learn the ropes of organising a tour;
- The system is outdated for younger drivers/ drivers' hours. Coaching needs its own regulations that enable the industry. There is no point training younger recruits if there is no work they can do to pay their wages.
- Having more staff would introduce more flexibility enabling drivers to have the time off when they need it;
- We can talk to the DfT about changing the 50k limit, but it will require a change in primary legislation and take a few years to achieve. We will come up with a draft proposal and out it to the members.

Next Steps

Del Haggerty said that he is already approaching job centres for grants, but need operators to be part of it. If anybody is interested in participating, please email **Peter Bradley** or **Del Haggerty**.

5. New Members and Membership Drive

Kevin Wilde said it's hugely important that if you know of any operators who could benefit from membership that they are invited to a meeting. He added that we can only grow as an organisation by drawing in new members. We will shortly be sending out our own promotion but the best way to recruit new members is by word of mouth.

Peter Bradley welcomed Turbostyle Coaches of Crawley, who are part of Readybus.

6. 2022 Meeting Programme

Peter Bradley said that the next meeting on 10 November will have a double presentation from the DVSA. Firstly, **Gavin Miller**, Enforcement Policy Specialist (operator licensing and bus compliance) on S19 and S22 permits enforcement following on from the meeting with **Sarah Bell** and **Phil Breen**, Earned Recognition National Account Manager talking about the Earned Recognition scheme.

Peter also said that an additional meeting has been added on 8 December where **Mark Griffin** from Binswood Media will present on next year's ITT Hub and how to make it more attractive for coach operators, including the possibility of hosting a UKCOA members meeting at the event.

The provisional meeting dates for the beginning of next year are:

- Tuesday 18 January
- Wednesday 16 February
- Wednesday 16 March (AGM) – A possible face to face meeting somewhere central
- Wednesday 6 April
- Wednesday 11 May – A possible face to face meeting at the ITT Hub in Farnborough

The Senior Traffic Commissioners will be invited to present at a meeting and other ideas from members are welcomed. Possibilities mentioned were Zeelo and the Job Centre to talk about funding for driver recruitment.

7. Website

Laura Li reported that she is updating various sections of the website including members information, meeting minutes, accounts and board member photos. She will be sending out member passwords for the private section of the website in the next few weeks.

Peter Bradley added that we are now updating the news section with road closures and links are provided in the weekly update. The road closures are London centric because the information comes from contacts at TfL. He added that we are developing contacts in other areas but to inform Laura of any closures that members are aware of locally, so they can be included on the website and the weekly bulletin.

8. **Any Other Business**

Kevin Wilde mentioned that two members had commented on the news that National Express Transport Solutions are now offering a dedicated home to school transport service. **Richard Bamber** felt that there was a problem with the predatory tactics coming up within the industry. **Peter Bradley** said he would like to get an article published about the benefits of using small, local operators and would like some input from one or two members. He will also look to involve Bursars' Association.

There is sufficient interest in a Bonded Holiday seminar. **Peter Bradley** will liaise with Wrightsure to get something organised.

9. **Date of next meeting**

Wednesday 10 November at 10.30

Presentation from the DVSA - **Gavin Miller**, Enforcement Policy Specialist (operator licensing and bus compliance) and **Phil Breen**, Earned Recognition National Account Manager. Please email any questions in advance so they can prepare.