

The latest news, views, and announcements

A Day of Innovation and Inspiration

The Annual UKCOA Dinner and Conference was a resounding success, bringing together industry leaders, policymakers, and key stakeholders for an exciting day of discussion, collaboration, and forward-thinking solutions. Hosted by Volvo, the event provided an invaluable platform to tackle the biggest challenges facing the coach sector while showcasing exciting opportunities for growth and innovation.

The day began with UKCOA Driver Academy taking centre stage. Mark Anderson and Andy Palmer shared the incredible progress made in bringing new talent into the sector. A particularly moving moment came when Kevin, a former candidate, shared his journey. Having been made redundant during the pandemic, he retrained as a coach driver in his 50s and has since flourished in the role. His story was a powerful reminder of the life-changing impact of UKCOA's work in partnership with the DWP and coach operators.

A thought-provoking discussion on workforce diversity, led by Candice Mason, challenged attendees to rethink recruitment strategies. She raised a vital question: With a driver shortage, why are only 1 in 20 of her drivers female? The conversation sparked real momentum, reinforcing the need for targeted efforts to make the profession more inclusive and welcoming to a broader workforce.

Innovation was another key theme of the day, with Ulric Björkén, COO of Ferdia, presenting cutting-edge software solutions designed to revolutionise the way operators work. His message was clear: standing still is not an option. If the industry is to thrive, it must embrace change and adapt to the evolving expectations of modern customers.

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UKCOA President, Stephen Telling with Alex Mayer MP

One of the standout moments came from Alex Mayer, Labour MP for Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard and a member of the Transport Select Committee. She showed a deep understanding of our sector, clearly recognising that coach operators are a unique and vital part of the UK's transport network. Her willingness to engage and explore solutions alongside UKCOA members promises exciting opportunities for the industry.

Adding to the excitement of the event, Volvo took the opportunity to make a major announcement, choosing the UKCOA conference as the platform to unveil their new full-size luxury coach for the UK and Irish markets. Managing Director Domenico Bondi signed a landmark bodybuilder agreement with Eloy Pérez Martínez, CEO of UNVI, for the Volvo B13R UNVI XL.

Domenico described the new model as setting the benchmark for coach travel, with first-class build quality, exceptional chassis geometry, a smooth-riding suspension, and a high-performance, efficient driveline. This exciting launch reinforced Volvo's commitment to innovation and demonstrated the significance of the UKCOA conference as a key event for the sector.

The day was packed with valuable insights, engaging discussions, and a shared commitment to driving the industry forward. With so many exciting opportunities on the horizon, UKCOA remains dedicated to championing progress, fostering innovation, and ensuring a bright future for coach operators across the UK.

Dates for Your Diary



27th March

The Big Coach Conversation
Derbyshire County Cricket Club

12th & 13th April

UK Coach Rally, Blackpool

1st April

Updated PSV Inspection Manual
comes into effect

29th April

Online Members Meeting

SME Finance Consultation

The government has launched a call for evidence to understand the challenges small businesses face in securing finance. This initiative aims to gather insights across all industries to inform future policies that support business growth and financial accessibility.

The consultation seeks to explore the current lending market, the demand for finance among small businesses, and the experiences of businesses during the application and approval process. By gathering this information, the government hopes to evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and explore opportunities to improve access to finance.

For the coach industry, securing finance is essential for maintaining and expanding fleets, investing in new technologies, and complying with evolving regulations. Challenges in obtaining funding can limit business growth, impact service quality, and make it harder for operators to transition to cleaner and more efficient vehicles.

The UKCOA encourages coach operators to participate in this consultation and share their experiences. The government's decision-making will be influenced by the feedback received, so it is vital that the coach industry's voice is heard. The deadline for submissions is 8 May 2025, and full details can be found at [Small business access to finance - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/small-business-access-to-finance)

Updates to the PSV Inspection Manual



The DVSA has announced forthcoming revisions to the PSV Inspection Manual, set to take effect on 1 April 2025. These updates aim to enhance safety standards and align inspection procedures with current industry practices.

Key Revisions Include:

- **Brake Performance Testing:** The updated manual will introduce refined criteria for assessing brake performance.
- **Emissions Standards Compliance:** There will be stricter guidelines to verify compliance with emissions standards.
- **Steering System Inspections:** Enhanced procedures for inspecting steering systems will be implemented to improve the detection of potential defects.
- **Lighting and Signalling Requirements:** The revisions will clarify requirements for vehicle lighting and signalling.
- **Passenger Safety Measures:** New protocols will be established to ensure passenger safety features meet the latest regulatory standards.

Operators are advised to familiarise themselves with these updates to ensure compliance and maintain high safety standards within their fleets. The revised manual is available at [Public service vehicle \(PSV\) inspection manual \(from 1 April 2025\)](#).

Staying informed about these changes is crucial for all PSV operators to ensure that vehicles meet the updated inspection criteria and continue to provide safe and reliable services.

M3 Junction 9 Upgrades Approved

A £290 million project to improve M3 Junction 9 in South Hampshire, aimed at reducing congestion and improving safety, has just been approved. The upgrade is expected to cut peak journey times by nearly 30% and support the construction of 2,000 new homes in Winchester.

The project forms part of the government's Plan for Change, which seeks to deliver 1.5 million new homes over the next five years.

The new design will enhance safety by extending the southbound slip road onto the M3 so that traffic has more time to join the motorway, and the upgrades are expected to improve journey reliability and reduce congestion on a key route connecting London and the South Coast.