

The latest news, views, and announcements

Significant Toll Increase at Dartford

A recent decision by the government to raise Dartford Crossing tolls by 40% comes into effect on 1st September. A one-off journey by a coach or van will rise from £3.00 to £4.20. This marks the first toll adjustment since 2013.

This increase is intended to “manage traffic” across the Bridge and Tunnels linking Essex and Kent. However, with some 180,000 vehicles using the crossing on peak days, many users, coaches included, have little choice but to pay.

For coach operators, this rise means higher journey costs when using Dartford. Whether for cross-border day trips, school runs, or scheduled tours, crossing here will now add £1.20 per journey. While this isn't a decision operators can avoid today, weighing the impact will be important when planning future routes and pricing.

At the same time, the government has approved the £9 billion Lower Thames Crossing, a 2.6-mile long tunnel running between Essex and Kent, to reduce congestion at Dartford. Operators may see longer-term relief in congestion, though there are concerns that tolls on the new tunnel could match or exceed Dartford's charges due to private financing. More than £800 million of taxpayers' money has already been spent on planning.

While it may be early days, these developments are notable. If you're operating services across the Dartford crossing, it's worth factoring in these higher tolls alongside potential changes in traffic patterns as the Lower Thames Crossing develops.

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15th July

Online Members Meeting

Guest Speaker -

Mark Haddon, National Counter Terrorism Security Office

1st August

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Compliance Level Increases

23rd September

UKCOA & Ilesbus Event,
Swansea

Temporary Coach Parking Changes in Stonehaven

With Stonehaven seeing a welcome rise in tourist coach visits, Aberdeenshire Council has introduced temporary parking restrictions in the town centre. The aim is to reduce traffic congestion around popular drop-off zones — especially the harbour area — and create a safer, easier-to-navigate environment for residents and visitors alike.

To help, the local authority has identified several designated short-stay parking spots for coaches, including Market Square, Robert Street, Forest Drive, and near Mackie Academy (the latter during school holidays and weekends only). Operators arriving to find a bay full are asked to move on to the next listed location.

These temporary measures will stay in place while longer-term solutions are explored, and coaches are requested to follow the signage and guidance to ensure smooth traffic flow and accessibility.

The council notes that drop-off/pick-up in Market Square may overlap with the Land Train service, which operates on weekends with scheduled runs from 10 am to 4 pm. Coaches should be mindful of this activity when planning stops.

Aberdeenshire Council has thanked coach operators for their cooperation, acknowledging their role in supporting local tourism while helping to keep Stonehaven welcoming and easy to navigate. Operators with questions can contact Diane Henderson, the council's Area Project Officer, at 01467 530848 or via email at diane.henderson@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Join Us in Swansea for the UKCOA Event

We are excited to announce that our next UKCOA Event will take place on Tuesday 23rd September 2025, hosted by one of our Platinum Partners, Ilesbus UK, at their brand-new headquarters in Swansea.

This event is open to all coach operators across the UK, whether or not you are a UKCOA member, and offers a fantastic opportunity to connect with fellow professionals, meet key suppliers, and hear from leading voices in the industry.

We're especially pleased to welcome Victoria Davies, Traffic Commissioner for Wales, as our guest presenter. She will share valuable insights into compliance, regulation, and the challenges currently facing coach operators across the country.

Attendees will also be able to visit a range of exhibitors from our Industry Partners, who will be showcasing their services and products throughout the day. Each partner will also have a short presentation slot, giving you the chance to hear directly how they can support your business.

The event will begin at 10:30am with coffee and pastries, and lunch will be provided. It's also a great opportunity to explore the new Ilesbus UK Headquarters, which boasts significantly enhanced facilities and showcases their ongoing investment in the UK coach industry.

UKCOA members are warmly encouraged to bring along fellow coach operators, particularly those who may not yet be members, who would benefit from experiencing firsthand the value of the Association's work, the strength of its network, and the support it offers to operators across the UK. This is a perfect occasion to introduce prospective members to the UKCOA community in a relaxed and informative setting.

Places are free but must be reserved in advance. To book your place, simply contact us at info@ukcoa.co.uk with the names and organisation of who will be attending.

We look forward to seeing you in Swansea for what promises to be an engaging and informative day.

UKCOA Pushes for Action on Industry Challenges

In response to a request at the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Bus & Coach in March, UKCOA has submitted a detailed briefing to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Simon Lightwood MP, outlining the most pressing concerns facing coach operators.

Following an initial meeting in September 2024, we identified several issues needing urgent attention. Although a follow-up meeting was cancelled in November, we've continued to press forward on behalf of our members.

Our briefing covered four key areas:

Home-to-School Transport

We reiterated our concern over the inclusion of closed-door school services in the Bus Open Data Service (BODS), which risks exposing sensitive tracking data. The DfT acknowledged the issue in 2023, but no update has followed.

PSVAR and Accessibility

With exemptions ending in 2026, we highlighted the need for clear policy direction. We called for practical lead times, support for new builds (rather than retrofits), and immediate action on guidance for deploying wheelchair lifts safely.

Drivers' Hours

We submitted a detailed proposal for targeted changes to domestic drivers' hours rules, developed in consultation with members. The proposals focus on easing driver shortages and increasing flexibility, with no compromise on safety.

Zero Emission Transition

We stressed the importance of including coaches in future funding rounds, improving depot and en-route charging access, and recognising the value of biofuels, especially if aligned with diesel prices via a Fuel Duty Rebate.

Next Steps

We've asked for a further meeting with the Minister to ensure coach operators' views are fully considered in future policy. The UKCOA remains committed to raising your concerns, offering practical solutions, and championing the industry at every level.