

**UK Coach Operators Association**

# PRESIDENT'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR

# 2024



By Coach Operators For Coach Operators

As 2024 draws to a close, I am delighted to provide an update on the key issues we have been addressing on your behalf and share our plans for the year ahead. Your feedback and engagement continue to shape our efforts, and we encourage you to reach out if you have suggestions or require further information on any topic.

A heartfelt thank you goes to all our members and Industry Partners for their ongoing support. Special thanks to our Platinum members Wrightsure, Ilesbus, DH Team, and to Backhouse Jones for their invaluable assistance with legal queries.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the UKCOA Board members for their unwavering support and dedication. Their guidance, expertise, and commitment have been instrumental in driving the association forward and ensuring that we remain a strong and united voice for the coach industry.

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## 2024 AGM and Conference

Our 2024 AGM and Conference, held in March, brought together key stakeholders in the coach industry and we are immensely thankful to our partner, Volvo, for hosting the event.

We welcomed insightful contributions from industry leaders including Claire Haigh and Tim Griffin from Zemo, focusing their presentation on the road to zero emission and alternative fuels. James Backhouse and Ian Jones gave us an insightful look into the world of automation while Josef Gisslow from our hosts Volvo examined future developments in coach manufacturing. James Howells from Don't Travel Empty gave what proved to be a prophetic presentation on consolidation within the Coach industry.

We look forward to our next conference in March 2025.

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## Engagement with Parliament

In 2024, the UKCOA significantly increased its engagement with Members of Parliament, ensuring that the concerns and priorities of the coach industry are firmly on the political agenda. Initiatives included a comprehensive letter to MPs ahead of the Autumn Budget, outlining the critical issues facing the sector and proposing actionable solutions. This effort resulted in positive responses from several MPs, acknowledging the importance of our industry and committing to further dialogue.

Notably, we held a productive meeting with Alex Mayer MP, a member of the Transport Select Committee. These discussions provided an opportunity to address key challenges, and our growing engagement with policymakers has been instrumental in raising the profile of the coach sector and securing its representation in ongoing legislative and policy discussions. We look forward to building on this momentum in 2025.

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## Accessible Information Regulations and PSVAR

While the government's response to the Call for Evidence remains overdue, the UKCOA's determined lobbying has already delivered tangible results. Our work highlighting the impracticalities of applying the Accessible Information Regulations to rail replacement services led to the introduction of an exemption for coaches until 2026, providing operators with crucial breathing space.

At the same time, we continue to advocate for further consideration of the broader impact of the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) on the coach industry. We have emphasized to government the unique operational challenges coaches face, arguing against a one-size-fits-all approach.

By providing a practical demonstration of the challenges faced by operators in deploying accessibility lifts to DfT officials, we were able to highlight the real-world issues these requirements pose. This hands-on experience underscored the complexities involved, including the operational, safety, and financial implications for coach operators.

This effort has strengthened our case for tailored solutions that account for the diverse roles coaches play, rather than imposing blanket requirements.

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## Entry/Exit System (EES)

The UKCOA has been at the forefront of addressing the impact of EES on the coach industry. Meetings with the Port of Dover and government officials highlighted challenges such as infrastructure needs, processing times for large groups and driver change-over locations. We continue to advocate for solutions that ensure smooth border crossings while minimizing delays for coach operators.

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# Driver Recruitment and Training

The UKCOA Driver Academy has continued to make remarkable strides in addressing the industry's driver shortage, thanks to our partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Building on the success of our pilot program in Croydon, where eight new drivers were successfully recruited and trained, the initiative has now been expanded nationwide.

This expansion enables all UKCOA members to benefit from the funding and support available through the program, including assistance with training costs, licensing fees, and recruitment. The program has proven to be a game-changer, not only by bringing new talent into the industry but also by offering individuals on benefits a pathway into stable and rewarding employment.

The Driver Academy represents a significant step forward in tackling one of the industry's most pressing challenges. By fostering collaboration between coach operators and local DWP offices, we are creating a sustainable model that delivers tangible benefits for both employers and new recruits. As the program grows, we remain committed to refining and enhancing the support available, ensuring it continues to meet the needs of our members and contributes to the long-term resilience of the coach industry.

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## Bonded Coach Holidays

Significant strides have been made in launching our Coach Holiday Protection scheme, making bonding accessible to all UKCOA membership. This initiative, led by our board member David Blake, and Andy Day from Wrightsure, was formally launched at the Euro Bus Expo and provides secure holiday protection for our members and their customers.

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## Zero Emission Vehicles and Infrastructure

The UKCOA submitted a robust response to the government's consultations on Zero Emission technology and infrastructure. We emphasized the urgent need for an accessible network of charging and fuelling facilities, alongside advocating for support for biofuels as a viable alternative. Our commitment remains firm: to ensure the coach industry leads in sustainable practices without compromising operational flexibility.

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## Media and Social Media Presence

2024 has seen a strengthened media presence for the UKCOA, with regular contributions to *RouteOne* and *Bus and Coach Buyer*. Our revamped newsletter provides members with timely updates and industry

insights, while our enhanced social media activity has broadened our reach and engagement.

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## Coach Parking and Infrastructure

This year, the UKCOA has actively responded to several local authority consultations regarding changes to coach parking and access restrictions. We have submitted strong objections to proposals that would limit the availability of parking or impose unworkable regulations on operators.

Our focus remains on ensuring that local policies recognise the essential role coaches play in supporting tourism, education, and community mobility. Through continued dialogue with councils and other stakeholders, we aim to protect and enhance coach access across the UK.

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## Membership Growth

The UKCOA has grown significantly this year, now representing over 100 Operator Members and 25 Industry Partners. This milestone reflects the value of our collective voice and the benefits of collaboration. Thank you to all who have supported our growth through referrals and engagement.

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## Strengthening Our Team

2024 marked a significant milestone for the UKCOA with the appointment of Margaret O'Kane as Membership and Administration Manager and Stephen Spendley as Director of Operations. These additions have greatly enhanced our capacity to represent the coach industry, enabling us to take on more initiatives and provide greater support to our members. Their expertise and dedication have increased our visibility within both government and the industry, ensuring that the voice of the coach sector is heard more effectively than ever before.

At the heart of everything we do is our Managing Director, Peter Bradley, who continues to be the backbone of the association. Peter's leadership, knowledge, and tireless efforts underpin all our activities, from high-level lobbying and stakeholder engagement to providing direct support to our members. We deeply value his guidance and look forward to building on this year's achievements under his continued leadership.

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## Looking Ahead

As we step into 2025, our priorities include:

- Expanding on the success of the Driver Academy to assist more members.
  - Continuing advocacy on EES, ZEV, and coach infrastructure.
  - Strengthening ties with government and industry stakeholders.
  - Enhancing member engagement through new initiatives and events.
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May I take this opportunity to wish you and your families a peaceful and restful Christmas,  
and a very Happy New Year.

*Stephen Telling*

**President**

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