

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing St  
London  
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22 May 2023

Dear Prime Minister

During National Coach Week this year, MPs and officials of all parties across the country showed their support for the coach industry. We are now writing to you, alongside the RHA, to impress upon you the importance of the coach industry to a wide range of economic sectors, to articulate to you the challenges our industry faces, and to propose to you measures that could help improve the business climate for coach drivers and operators across the nation.

The coach industry employs approximately 45,000 people nationwide, and coach travel plays an irreplaceable role in domestic and international tourism, school transport, out-of-town workplace access, professional and amateur sports, and rail replacement, to name but a few areas.

We implore you to Think C.O.A.C.H.E.S.:

**Co (Costs & Regulation)** – We missed out on most of the Government financial support offered to businesses in the pandemic, and now we're being hammered by the price of fuel, spare and replacement parts, and the cost of essential maintenance. When it comes to regulation, we want to ensure there are accessible journeys for all without overburdening the industry with regulations that significantly increase costs, amid an already challenging economic environment. We also need drivers' hours regulations to better reflect the working patterns of coach drivers.

**A (Abroad)** – More stringent passport checks and a lack of capacity and infrastructure in the face of impending border changes are damaging the prospects of international coach travel. Reduced capacity on Eurotunnel services, and a lack of infrastructure at ports led to significant delays in April this year. With the impending EU Entry/Exit system, European Travel Information and Authorisation System and UK Border Target Operating Model the risk of further damaging delays only increases. Pre-registration and online documentation to help speed up border crossings would help keep coach travel a viable option for international travel.

**C (Conditions)** – Good working conditions are vital to recruitment and retention. At all levels of government planning there is a lack of consideration of the needs of coach travel. A lack of coach parking and rest stops, particularly in high travel areas like Kent, make it difficult for drivers to comply with the strict time regulations they must follow to keep their passengers and other road users safe. Inadequate urban infrastructure and parking, most acute in tourism hotspots, leads to increased emissions and a higher risk of accidents, as coaches are forced to consistently circulate without a place to stop.

**H (Highways)** – The Government must work with industry partners and local authorities to invest in our road infrastructure across the country. This includes improved port and border facilities, roadside facilities and secure parking, and forward-thinking technologies which support the

transition to a low-carbon economy. Nationwide, potholes and poor roads create dangers for drivers, passengers, pedestrians, and other road users.

**E (Environment)** - Per passenger, coach travel is one of the lowest-emission forms of long-distance and international travel. However, current environmental policies, like Clean Air Zones and Ultra Low Emission Zones, unfairly discriminate against coach drivers. The market for low emission coaches is still too immature to support current policy intentions, and retrofitting is not cost-effective for most operators. We need Government to work with industry to develop a clear roadmap for zero emission coaches, while lowering the cost and increasing the availability of low carbon alternative fuels.

**S (Skills)** - Finally, the most serious issue we face is the chronic skills shortage. Changing work patterns post-pandemic and a long-term struggle to recruit young people into the industry is creating a perfect storm for driver recruitment. The coach and bus industry has an estimated shortage of 5,000-10,000 drivers. As older drivers retire and others leave the industry, recruitment is not keeping up - and that shortage will only grow. We need more flexible training options including a Skills Bootcamp for Category D licences. The current restrictions on 18-year-old drivers must be lifted to allow them to undertake non-scheduled or occasional journeys, increasing their employability and making coach driving a career choice for school and college leavers.

A thriving coach industry is essential to so many parts of the economy, and performs a vital role in so many communities. We implore you to recognise the seriousness of the challenges facing us at present, and engage with us to support our vital work.

Yours sincerely,

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Grindles Coaches Limited

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