



House of Commons

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Bob Seely MBE MP

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP

Secretary of State for Transport

Department for Transport

Great Minster House, 33 Horseferry Road

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Dear Grant

Support for the Coach Travel and Tourism Industry

I am writing to seek the Government's support for those businesses operating in the coach travel and tourism industry. This is a sector which plays a distinct and vital role in contributing to the visitor economy – including in my constituency – with the estimated value of £7.4 billion, and 42,000 employees.

The coach travel and tourism industry has not been able to take advantage of most of the support packages put into place by the Government (including that made available to sustain local bus services). For instance, many operators have been ineligible for the business rates holiday and associated grants, because they are not classified as leisure businesses. There is also the issue that coaches are seen as just another form of public transport – and therefore subject to the same rigorous social distancing measures as buses – even though the nature how coach tours operate is significantly different.

The reason for writing to you, in the first instance, is that I consider the best way the coach industry can get back on its wheels is for its particular operational circumstances to be recognised with a tailored approach from the Government. I am aware that the Department for Transport (DfT) has published [guidance for public transport operators](#), and has also published separate [guidance for aviation operators](#). The public transport guidance rightly requires coach operators to undertake a risk assessment ahead of operating a wide range of services: tours, day trips, home to school travel etc. Consequently, various mitigation measures are being introduced to reduce risk – such as those referred to overleaf.

Having regard for the DfT's aforementioned guidance, I would ask you to consider introducing separate guidance for the coach industry. This should – in my view (having regard for the representations I have received) – bring together the relevant parts of these existing pieces of guidance, with adjustments, to allow the coach industry to operate both safely and viably, in a responsible and pragmatic manner.

In particular, I note the aviation guidelines require that social distancing is only applicable where it is possible. This guidance also asks operators to consider measures like passengers not facing each other, ventilation and a range of other preventative measures. From what coach industry representatives tell me, such steps would be fully implementable on coach tours, which from an operational perspective are more akin to aircraft flights than bus journeys:

- 1) Unlike buses, coaches have high-backed seats, similar to that on aircraft.
- 2) The nature of journeys (on coach tours) are that all passengers are generally travelling together from a point of departure to a point of arrival, so the loading of a coach (embarkation and disembarkation) can take place in a structured format – i.e. the same as set out in the aviation guidelines. This is markedly different to buses where passengers get on and off throughout the journey, passing each other (with the resulting heightened risks).

Without going through all the guidance here, it is evident that coach tours could (with some adjustments) operate in a very similar manner to that which the Government has set out for flights. It would therefore be incredibly helpful if the DfT could work swiftly with industry representatives (such as the Coach Tourism Association (CTA) and the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) – as well as individual operators such as IOW Tours in my constituency) to develop a specific set of guidance (drawing on the aviation guidance as a starting point) for use in relation to coach tours.

Such guidance should also include a requirement to implement extensive safety measures which much of the industry is already putting in place, such as: (1) the wearing of masks, (2) daily temperature checks (prior to boarding), (3) use of fogging machines, (4) air purification fitted to the vehicles, (5) availability of hand sanitiser, (6) cleaning of all areas (including touch points) during each rest stop and (7) the wearing of gloves by staff for luggage handling. Coach operators also have the ability to trace all customers, as contact details are received at the point of booking. The industry considers that these measures match, if not exceed, the requirements for aviation – and should be incorporated into any bespoke guidance for coach travel. Bringing such guidance into place in the near future will help ensure the future viability of this industry. Without this – and having to rely solely on the current guidance for public transport provision – many coach operators would struggle to continue.

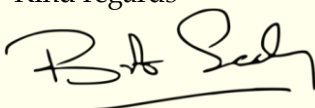
Furthermore, I understand that a further obstacle is the current restriction on gatherings of more than 30 people. It is currently unclear the extent to which this restriction applies to coach trips. If it does apply, this restriction on passenger numbers will make many journeys unviable. The industry is seeking clarity and an exemption from this limit for coach groups, in order that attractions, hotels and the wider hospitality and tourism industry can accept bookings from coach operators far greater than that number. Without it, the return of the coach sector towards normality is under threat, with a knock-on effect on the many tourist attractions and destinations that the coach industry serves.

Whilst writing, it might be helpful if I emphasised the significant contribution which coach tours make to the wider tourism industry. I know from my own constituency that coaches play an important part in bringing guests to many hotels and guest houses, particularly outside of the peak tourism season. With the first part of this period (between March and June) already having been lost, it is now even more vital that we enable this industry to fully reactivate so that coach tours can bring guests to visitor areas – such as the Isle of Wight – for the latter part of the tourism season, and beyond. Such a move would not only help coach tour operators (who are “good to go” now) make up lost ground, but also provide a much-needed boost to those working in the visitor accommodation trade and at the attractions which receive coach tours as part of their trips. As you will be aware, Visit Britain / Visit England are currently promoting domestic tourism, and the role of coaches in facilitating UK-based visits is absolutely vital.

Finally, I should mention the role of the coach tours industry in contributing to the green travel agenda. Many coach operators – such as ones in my constituency – have, in response to encouragement from the Government, invested significantly over recent years in Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) compliant vehicles. (In many instances, these businesses have taken out loans to fund such acquisitions, which is another reason why they need to keep trading and are limited in what other loans they can now take out.) The industry advises me that the coach is one of the most environmentally friendly ways of travelling, with average CO₂ emissions per passenger journey, which is around 1.5 times higher for rail, 5 times higher for air and 6 times higher for car travel. One coach can replace at least 20 cars.

Thank you in advance of your consideration of these matters. I will copy this letter to other MPs who – have a significant presence of coach tour operators and / or have coaches making a meaningful contribution to their local visitor economy. I am also providing a copy of this letter to Baroness Vere, who I understand the CPT are meeting with tomorrow (Wednesday) to discuss this and related matters.

Kind regards



Bob Seely

Member of Parliament, the Isle of Wight