

Access All Areas CPT's coach priorities for the next government

The contribution of coach

Coaches are the nation's hidden transport network. Few people think about coaches as a major mode of transport like buses or trains or trams. Yet coaches connect thousands of places which can't be served by any other form of public transport and take 6 million peopleⁱ on 500 million journeys each yearⁱⁱ driving the economic, environmental and social benefits of:

- great value inter-city travel, with over 20 million journeys on the scheduled coach network in 2022 and rapid growth sinceⁱⁱⁱ
- getting 600,000 children to school every day^{iv}
- adding £14 billion to the UK's tourist industry through trips to leisure attractions, towns and cities^v
- offering door-to-door travel to tens of thousands of passengers who would otherwise struggle to enjoy days out and short breaks
- stepping in when rail and other transport services are unavailable, often with little or no notice

The coach sector directly employs some 42,000 people, mostly in family or individually owned businesses which account for 80% of the nation's stock of coach businesses.^{vi} It's a sector which thrives on the flexibility of the people who run it and one which operates without a penny of operating subsidy from government.

The future of the sector's huge contribution to British life depends on maintaining easy and fair access to all the places passengers want to get to and a fair deal for the sector when it is called on to deliver wider policy aims.

That's why the next government needs to:



Work with industry on a net zero strategy for coaches giving operators the confidence to plan investment in future fleets

Issue clear guidance to councils to include coach services in their local transport plans (LTPs) giving an economic and environmental boost to communities across the country

Simplify the legislation on accessible travel giving disabled passengers a clear and consistent service and operators clarity over vehicle requirements

View coaches as part of the solution to local air pollution making it easier for coaches to serve passengers in cities with clean air zones

Support an industry-led workforce strategy training the drivers and engineers needed to grow the industry and transition to zero emission operation





Getting coach travel in local transport plans

Too many LTPs fail to recognise the importance of coaches and their potential role in alleviating congestion, improving air quality, and supporting economic activity. At best, many simply consider access for long-distance scheduled services to bus and coach stations. Coaches provide a sustainable means of access and mobility in exactly the same way that other forms of mass transit do.

Coaches can deliver high-spend visitors in a way which minimises congestion and minimises emissions. They provide a good value alternative to trains, cars and air, reducing social exclusion and opening up opportunities for leisure and tourism across the income spectrum.

The next Government should impose a statutory duty on local transport authorities to collect data on the current and potential coach market and require authorities to consider in their LTPs appropriate drop-off/pick-up and parking facilities for the scale and range of coach operations, scheduled and non-scheduled, serving their area. Local authorities should be guided to ensure that bus priority measures are available to coaches unless there is a specific reason to exclude them and to provide clear information about coach facilities.



Fair access to clean air zones

Carbon emissions of modern coaches are 6 times lower per passenger than private car travel, yet coaches are always the first mode of transport to be charged to operate in a clean air zone and operators seeking support to upgrade their engines to modern standards face a postcode lottery of local funding schemes.

A better approach would be to recognise the air pollution benefits that coach travel can bring and maximise the role of coaches.

The next government should create a new class of clean air zone which enables councils to charge vehicles with a heavier pollution footprint while **exempting coaches**. It should also establish **a national fund to support operators with upgrading their engines** – the estimated cost of £75m to update 5,000 coaches will be reduced still further if councils are enabled to exempt coaches from charges.

NET
ZERO

A national strategy for net zero coach travel

Coach is already the greenest way of travelling across the country with lower greenhouse gas emissions per passenger than any other mode, including electric cars.^{vi} The industry would like to go further though, and has started the long journey to a zero emission fleet. As the work of CPT's zero emission coach taskforce^{viii} has shown there are significant barriers which need to be addressed before substantial change can be achieved.

The next government should therefore publish a net zero strategy for coaches, including key dates and measures. This strategy should include:

- Government **investment in zero emission refuelling and recharging infrastructure suitable for coaches** across the Strategic Road Network
- Government investment in **research and development to develop vehicles with longer ranges**, including as part of the UK's Hydrogen Strategy and Industrial Strategy
- An **interim fuel duty incentive for low carbon fuels** so that coach operators can run the cleanest fleet possible while waiting for zero emission operation to become viable



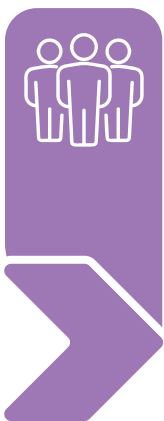


A straightforward approach to accessibility

Coach services lead the way in accessibility, offering the only realistic longer-distance travel option for many older and disabled people. But the so-called PSVAR legislation governing access to vehicles for disabled people is too complex. Disabled schoolchildren's entitlement to travel with a wheelchair, for example, is dependent on the happenstance of whether or not the school or council procuring the service charges any parents for travel.

We need a clearer definition of PSVAR, which gives disabled people confidence in travelling inclusively whatever their journey, and gives operators absolute clarity over the need to invest in suitably-adapted vehicles.

The next government should simplify the PSVAR legislation to ensure that all 'open door' coach services (those where passengers are not known in advance) are operated by fully-accessible vehicles and that operators provide a fully-accessible vehicle for any 'closed door' (those where all passengers are known in advance) service where a passenger requests it.



A workforce strategy led by industry, supported by government

Despite record levels of recruitment and record investment in training and apprenticeships, staff shortages remain persistent across the industry with almost 14% of driver roles currently vacant.^{ix} Shortages of drivers and engineers are already a brake on growth and are holding the industry back from further growth.

The industry will continue to focus on recruiting and retaining a skilled, diverse workforce fit for the opportunities of growth and the transition to zero emission operation. Government can help in a variety of ways, for example by: removing red tape, endorsing and amplifying our campaigns, working with us to reform apprenticeships, ensuring Jobcentres across the country work with local operators.

The next government should put its full support behind an industry-led strategy to develop the workforce the sector needs to grow and to prepare for the zero emission future.



The coach industry is proud to stand on its own feet and will continue to do so. A little engagement and investment from the next government though would go a long way to help the industry fulfil its full potential and connect more people to more destinations, boosting economies and minimising the environmental impact of travel.



ⁱ YouGov research for CPT, 2020
ⁱⁱ CPT analysis of DfT statistics and National Travel Survey data
ⁱⁱⁱ Press statements from Flixbus, Megabus, Mobico.
^{iv} CPT Research 2020
^v CPT Research 2020
^{vi} CPT Research 2020
^{vii} Department for Transport, *Transport and Environment Statistics 2023*
^{viii} CPT, Coach route map to destination zero
^{ix} CPT Operator Survey, September 2023

Pictures courtesy of: Sharpes of Nottingham, National Express, West Coast Motors, Skills Holidays, Bibby's of Ingleton



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