



The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP  
Minister of State for School Standards  
Department for Education  
Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

6 January 2021

Dear Minister

I am writing to seek your support for coach operators who provide valuable home to school transport for hundreds of thousands of students across the country.

The coach industry is already suffering from a complete loss of leisure and tourism work which, in normal times, heavily subsidises home to school transport. If the recent Government announcement on school closures leads to a cessation of payment of home to school transport contracts it will have a devastating impact on coach operators, which are predominantly small family businesses. Without a guarantee of the critical source of income that home to school transport provides across this latest lockdown period, many operators will struggle to pay staff and keep their businesses running. Many family businesses, sustaining tens of thousands of jobs across the country, will simply go under and it will be impossible to resume services when schools return meaning many families will be forced to find, at short notice, other ways to transport their children to school.

Schools continue to be open on a reduced capacity for vulnerable students, including those with special educational needs, on free school meals or children of front line key workers. This means that local authorities will still be required to provide transport for these students and those students that travel by coaches operated under private contract (to the school or to parents) will still need to find a way to get to school. In addition, at this time of crisis, it is essential that local authorities retain access to as much emergency transport capacity as possible; coach operators stand ready to provide transport to help local authorities support the most vulnerable residents in our society, in the same way that they did during previous lockdowns, for example:

- Picking up patients that have been discharged from hospital to take them to a care home
- Collecting medication in a local community for delivery
- Dropping off emergency food parcels to vulnerable families as identified by the local authority

Coach operators can only support local authorities with these essential services if they are able to pay their staff and keep their business running. For this they need the reassurance that home to school contracts will be paid despite the forthcoming school closures.

Whilst we have heard of some local authorities and schools who are taking this holistic and forward thinking approach to payments, there are likely to be many across the country who are first and foremost seeking to reduce pressure on their budgets by not making home to school transport payments. This

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includes ceasing payments made using funds specifically allocated to local authorities from the Department for Education to supplement home to school transport budgets during the pandemic. We urge you to strongly encourage local authorities and schools to do the right thing and continue making home to school transport payments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Vidler', written in a cursive style.

**GRAHAM VIDLER**

Chief Executive

Cc. Baroness Vere, Department for Transport