

To:

Mr Chris Heaton-Harris MP
Minister of State
Department for Transport

26 August 2020

Dear Chris,

Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000 (PSVAR) and its application to Rail Replacement Services (RRS) – Progress Report August 2020

Please find enclosed the first progress report detailing the use of PSVAR vehicles during the period of May- July of this year. We committed to providing these updates following your correspondence of 21 April, granting a strictly time limited special authorisation to coach and bus operators who provide RRS, pursuant to s. 178 of the Equality Act 2010 until 31 December of this year.

When I wrote to you at the end of March with the industry's '*Pathway to Compliance*', I acknowledged that the timelines we proposed within that document were longer than you or the industry would like, but the timescales of 4 years for planned and a minimum of 8 years for unplanned remained ambitious given the very limited ability of RRS demand to affect long term change in the coach market. The realities of the pandemic mean that these are ever more ambitious.

The long-term impact of COVID on the coach market is likely to be significant and the data enclosed represents an artificially positive representation of the RRS market. Currently the competition for the limited supply of PSVAR compliant vehicles has been significantly diluted, particularly as a result of the suspension of Home to School (H2S) services and coach tours during this reporting period, making more coaches available than would normally be the case.

Within the '*Pathway to Compliance*' we set out that in order to generate the market confidence to incentivise the coach industry to invest in new, or retrofit existing, fleet it is necessary to inextricably link the application of PSVAR between the H2S market and the RRS market. We tested this proposition with individual coach operators and the Confederation of Passenger Transport who agreed that collectively that would create enough of a market lever to effect change. We maintain that in order to achieve compliance as quickly as possible the application of PSVAR to these markets and subsequent exemptions must be aligned.

I understand that since our last correspondence you have issued a further special authorisation of 12 months to operators in the H2S market. While we absolutely understand the need to bolster transport provision to support the reopening of schools, the increased demand for coach services and the lack of an immediate time pressure to address the issue of PSVAR in that market, will have a material impact on the level of compliance in the RRS market going forward. It will also affect the ability to be more ambitious on the stretching timescales we set out.

Operators, through RDG, are continuing their dialogue with RRS providers and disability and equality campaigners to see what, within the industry's gift, we can do to further improve the experiences of RRS on our network for those with disabilities. While PSVAR compliance is a very important part of delivering an accessible rail network, it is one of a number of issues which underpin customer confidence and positive experiences on the network.

As such, we have delivered against the specific commitments we made regarding the provision of customer information online and staff training. National Rail Enquiries includes greater detail as to RRS services on the Journey planner and there is an updated page on RRS specifically. The development of new training materials for frontline staff has also been completed. It has been distributed to and briefed out by all of our members. We have also put in place plans to refresh and enhance this information and training on a rolling basis.

You challenged the industry to be more ambitious, while acknowledging it is not an issue we alone can address. Energies have rightly been focussed on the current crisis, but as we enter recovery and approach the end of the year and the end of the time limited authorisation, we must collectively refocus our efforts. We would welcome further engagement from your officials on this matter and will support the Department where appropriate in cross mode discussions, but we are yet to see progress or timescales for such engagement. I would also welcome an update as to where exploration of statutory solutions has got to, as if we are to tackle PSVAR compliance for all types of RRS, including unplanned disruption, it is necessary to drive change across the whole coach sector.

If you would like to discuss this matter further or require any additional information, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Plummer
Chief Executive