



AVRO President's Communication (28th May 2020)

COVID-19 Coronavirus

In writing today I so wish my words could start with "I am glad that is over, I am glad to see we are through it or can you believe what we have all just been through," but the reality is we are still in the midst of this terrible pandemic. Asking a serious question can we at this stage even say where we are in it and in asking that question a quote from Winston Churchill springs to mind, when in 1942 he said *"this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."* I have to say not being able to either answer that question myself or indeed have someone in power answer that question is not a comfortable position to find ourselves in.

I last wrote to all AVRO members directly on 9th April 2020 and I thought it worthwhile doing so again to bring you up to speed with what AVRO has been doing in its representation of its members and the wider industry.

Reacting

At the start of this crisis myself as AVRO President and Mick Puleston as AVRO Vice President took the decision that AVRO needs to be in the best position possible to tackle head on the challenges that were facing us with the oncoming COVID-19 pandemic. The decision was taken to form a Management Committee within AVRO National Council. This Management Committee would be tasked with responsibility for quickly reacting to any matter or situation and taking heed of the topics of the day to ensure that AVRO was best positioned to represent its members, but also support and assist any industry stakeholder to which we work closely with and who rely on AVRO for support, guidance and draw on the professional representation of its members. The Management Committee is made up of six members of AVRO National Council (who are myself, Mick Puleston, Graham Steedman, Gary Grieve, Craig Alexander and James Weedon) and we meet weekly via Zoom, with many phone calls, e-mails and additional video calls in between. This is working very well, and I believe it has been fundamental to AVRO being able to react quickly and ensure we are dealing with those important matters. On that point I would just like to express my thanks to the members of the Management Committee who have once again given excessive amounts of their time freely, both day and night all while having their own business to run and facing the same issues we all are in this crisis.

Continuing

AVRO National Council continues to be operational throughout this crisis and again is meeting via Zoom monthly, with the Management Committee reporting into it and the Council continuing the work of representing its members and working hard on members behalf. Like many organisations AVRO has had to adapt, but we have done it well and I have to say seamlessly. Our Council meetings

continue to discuss, debate and action the topics of the day and attend to the needs and demands of our members as well as those of industry stakeholders who we work so closely with. In addition to monthly Council meetings, the work of Council continues in respect of our contact and dialogue with other parties. One such project ongoing is in depth discussions between AVRO and DfT in respect of electric vehicles. Several remote meetings have taken place on this subject as well as conference calls with the Fire Service and their associates. As many of you will know electric vehicles are an issue for our industry and AVRO is working with DfT and the Fire Service to form joint working practices to safely attend and deal with such vehicles. Again, my thanks go out to the AVRO National Council for their work and support, all volunteering their time freely and doing so while running their own business.

Police Management Fees

I very much hope that you have all seen the AVRO Member Communication of the 19th May 2020 regarding Police Management Fees in the UK. I have to say I think this is a great success for AVRO and we are seeing direct results of our actions. AVRO works closely with the National Police Chief Council (NPCC) and as well as writing to NPCC, AVRO wrote to all UK wide Chief Constables and Police & Crime Commissioners to highlight the pressures faced by the roadside recovery industry and in this case those operators who serve on Police vehicle recovery schemes. We requested a review of a number of items, with one being Police management fees payable by the operator and I was really pleased to see NPCC react and not only support our position but act upon it making a recommendation to all UK wide Police forces to review and look to suspend their management fees. Although this decision ultimately lays with each individual force to decide, we have already seen several UK Police forces reacting to this and suspending management fees with others going further in their support of their operators. A good result for not only AVRO members, but the industry. Our statement is on our website and can be downloaded. If your Police force has yet to react, I strongly suggest you take our statement and forward to both your force and management agent, if applicable, as an AVRO member.

Communication

Many of you may be at the stage of tiring of seeing AVRO popping up in your inbox, well I make no apology for that. We have worked extremely hard to ensure that you, our members, are kept as fully up to date as possible and we took the decision early on that we were going to ensure this was done. I hope that the information you have been getting through is of use to you and has been of benefit. We have been working closely with our business partners to ensure they are also supporting our members with information and advice, and this too has all been forwarded out to our members. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic plans were afoot for a new AVRO website to be launched later this year. Again we took the quick decision to bring that forward and at the end of last month the new AVRO website was launched and included within it is all the important and relevant information that we have shared with our members through this time as well as much more. There is still some work to do on the website, but we believe it key that not only was it important to get information out, but have somewhere, where our members can refer. So please take a few moments to visit and look over the new website www.avrouk.com Please let us know what you think and if there is anything we can add for your benefit.

Lobbying

We continue to lobby hard for our members. We have been in contact with the relevant Government departments regarding the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) for furloughed staff, making

clear the point that although it is very much appreciated, we feel that the scheme needs to be more flexible in order to be able to support our industry. We are encouraged to see that the Chancellor has firstly extended the JRS to 31st October 2020 but is now looking to introduce a 'flexible' element to the scheme. We await further details. Once they are released, we will study them closely and, if need be, will be pushing for further changes to the scheme to assist our bespoke industry. In addition to this, we are in the process of lobbying the UK Government in relation to business rates relief and grants. We are aware of certain industry sectors that are receiving such financial support through these reliefs and grants, but we strongly believe that our industry should benefit from these and are justly entitled. Our members business is no different to those who are eligible and have seen similar downturn in revenue.

Challenges

You will note the member communication released on 27th May 2020 regarding the carriage of passengers with passengers remaining in a casualty vehicle whilst being transported on the rear of a flatbed recovery vehicle. This was the result of serious legal questions being raised by several UK Police forces on the legality of the practice. As you will know the industry has followed SURVIVE best practice for several years. SURVIVE best practice does not cover individuals with a risk of COVID-19 or transmission and, let's face it, who in any industry planned for this? However even this has been brought into question which has resulted in a fundamental practice of the industry effectively being withdrawn. With that, AVRO has taken a lead on this and members of National Council have been working proactively with representatives from DfT, DVSA, HSE and NPCC to find a resolution. We have stated the case hard that the industry is more than capable of undertaking the safe removal of passengers, if the situation dictates and is the final option, to the nearest place of safety, it is fundamental to our operation and we need to be able to continue to do it. The issue being at present is that legislation has not caught up with current practices. Our statement of the 27th May 2020 was not particularly one I or anyone wanted to put out, but we have a responsibility to our members and AVRO guidance of 30th March 2020 was also subject to the same questioning. We are confident that we can resolve this matter and we have the determination to do it. I would strongly encourage you all to familiarise yourself with the AVRO statement of 27th May 2020 regarding the carriage of passengers as inadvertently and if you are not aware, you may risk finding yourself being prosecuted. As I have said, we are working hard on a resolution to this and we will ensure you are fully up to date with any developments.

Adapting

There is no doubt that we as an industry will need to adapt and change because of this ongoing crisis. One item for debate and consideration is the installation of protective screens in roadside recovery vehicles to provide a divide between any potential passengers and your technicians. On this it is for individual operators to assess the benefit and merit to their business but AVRO strongly recommends that any fitting of protective screens is done in compliance with government guidance and please ensure that you consult with your business insurers to ensure you are fully compliant with the terms of your insurance policy. This is a fine example of a situation where operators can very quickly, and inadvertently, find themselves in breach of their insurance terms, so please do ensure you consult with your insurance company.

Keep Going

So I bring my communication to a close today with the simple words, keep going, because right now that is all we can do - we all must keep going and do what we can to ride this crisis out and that is

exactly what AVRO will be doing. There are many challenges still ahead, many of which I have detailed here today, but we have the will and enthusiasm to see it through as, I am sure, you do too.

I do very much hope you have been pleased with the work and response AVRO has given to this crisis and equally I hope as members of this association you feel represented and have the support and recognition you deserve. May I take the opportunity to thank you all for the personal sacrifice and effort you are all putting in to keeping not only our industry going, but playing your part, yourselves as key works, supporting the UK and Ireland and ensuring that we all keep going.

I finish once again on a personal note and I do very much hope you, your families and those closest to you continue to remain safe and healthy during this very trying and testing time.

Wishing you all the very best.

Stephen Smith
AVRO President