



AVRO President's Communication

COVID-19 Coronavirus

I am sure, like me, you have probably received plenty of communications from various parties, all sent in good faith and stating, "it is business as usual".

I do not think anything can be further from the truth. In the best of times the roadside recovery industry struggles to survive for a whole range of reasons, such as low rates of pay, cost of training and compliance costs not to mention, vehicles, equipment, insurance and overheads. Even so, we operate as an emergency service, indeed many have said we are the 4th emergency service, often supporting Ambulance, Fire and Police services; however, we do not receive the recognition that the other emergency services receive.

COVID-19 has exacerbated our woes, but the AVRO National Council has jumped into action; we have been listening and communicating with our regional members to understand the issues we are all experiencing first-hand, from these first-hand conversations we have identified a clear action plan to best support our members and AVRO continues to lead the conversation.

Furlough (COVID-19 Job Retention Scheme)

Credit must be given for the support Government has offered to businesses, but what they will be judged on is the delivery. Employee furlough works for many business and industry models, but not ours. We need employees on standby, not paid to be at home. We need to be supported to keep our business open, not closed. We are in talks with Government on this and are hitting the point home that bespoke support is needed.

Guidance

We have produced specific roadside recovery guidance, so our members know what to do with roadside recovery operations, such as carrying passengers. The guidance we have produced has drawn from the advice and guidance given through our communications with the public health bodies of England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and ROI. What was clear that before we asked the questions, no one in these bodies had given any thought to the roadside recovery industry but working with these bodies we were able to achieve clear and concise guidance for our members.

Communication

AVRO has been communicating with our stakeholders daily, whether it is via video link, conference calls or e-mail. We are lobbying hard for work providers to support our members and the industry with the simple message, support the industry now so it can continue to support you, without us you have nothing.

We have written directly to every UK and ROI MP / TD's as well as all devolved Government representation and argued for key worker status in which we were successful in achieving. With this we created template letters and e-mails that our members can re-send on to their MP / TD or representative to support the message getting to those in power.

Representation

We are representing our members with the full weight and vigour expected of us. We are hitting home the fact that the roadside recovery industry is crucial to the operational economy of both the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland where we represent our members and it has to be said we are making progress and we are successful in opening lines of communications and dialogue at the highest levels of Governments, Departments and authorities.

Yesterday we wrote to all UK wide Police Chief Constables, Police and Crime Commissioners and the NPCCC (National Police Chief Constable Council). Again, hitting the point home that our industry has supported these organisations for so long and now we need their support in order that this industry can do what it does best and support them. We have called for a reduction in management fees and additional assistance in reducing elements of police schemes where the industry is contractually pressured to provide for free. I have to say in just 24hrs the responses we have received from this has been phenomenal and we are now actively discussing with Police forces and other parties what they can do to assist.

Support

We have been applying pressure to local authorities and city representatives regarding clean air zones, we were already clear in our position on clean air zones in that the roadside recovery industry should be exempt, but through our additional pressure we are seeing authorities and cities suspending their actual or proposed clear air zones. Coventry have abandoned theirs all together, Birmingham suspended and today we have seen TfL announce that they will be suspending new LEZ rules due to come into force in October 2020 – this is a real achievement for our members.

Financial Support

We are in constant discussions with industry work providers on many levels and we are again pressuring work providers to ensure they are providing Financial Support to our members and the wider industry. It cannot be denied that work providers rely on our members and our members want to continue to provide that critical service, they want to do nothing else, but in order to do that they must be supported financially. These are unprecedented times and it needs thinking outside of the box and a joined-up approach. We have written to all work providers, and encouraged our members to do the same, imploring upon them to act and many we have been consulting with and continue to be happy to work with all industry parties to achieve this.

Credit must be given to those work providers who have stepped up to the plate and acknowledged this call and offered financial support to the industry. To date Call Assist, Britannia Rescue, Green Flag, Hadleigh Breakdown and AXA Assistance have all done something in the way of financial support and we thank them for that as I am sure our members do also.

I am sure there will be a case to say it is not enough, but we must give credit that some have at least acted and done what they can. AVRO will continue to work closely with all industry parties and will do its level best to achieve the best financial support possible but I would strongly implore on you all individually, if you need financial support to continue providing services to individual work providers then make a strong and detailed business case to them, do not be afraid to ask but ensure you present clearly what you need and why you need it.

In addition to that I cannot recommend strongly enough that you take up the financial support offered by your respected Governments. Agree or disagree I do feel that our Governments have stepped up to the challenges this situation presents, and they have gone the extra mile. Again, it could be said it is not enough, but still I recommend to you in the strongest terms, take full advantage of what is there to support you.

At the coal face

I more than anyone am keen to ensure we are representing our members and taking forward their views, professional experience and needs and this is why we have put in place the vital communication links to ensure we can hear from our members and hear from the coal face. Many of you will know Graham Steedman, our Business Consultant. Not only does Graham represent region one (Scotland) at National Council but Graham travels the length and breadth of all AVRO regions meeting members and assisting them throughout. Graham is currently making contact with all of our members to hear from you the true situation on the ground and Graham is reporting directly back to me and the team at National Council so we are fully abreast and have to hand the critical information to ensure our members are represented.

Additionally, we have launched an all industry survey; this was launched yesterday and already we have had over one hundred replies in the first few hours. The data we collect is vital to strengthening AVRO's hand when we represent you, our members, in any discussions. If you have not already, please visit AVRO website and social media pages for the link to the survey and complete.

With that I would like to remind everyone that AVRO remains fully operational throughout and we are running on full steam. Although the AVRO office is closed, our employees are working from home seamlessly and we are continuing to represent our members and lead the conversation.

On the subject of the AVRO office, I cannot let the opportunity pass to express my thanks for the work and support from Sara, Mandy and Jazzy during this time and further to that I must give special recognition to Sara. Many of you will know Sara well and she has been with AVRO for over twenty six years and I am sure my colleagues on National Council, past and present, will agree that without Sara AVRO simply would not be able to do what it does so my true thanks and appreciation go out to Sara and her team and I am sure our members will join me in that.

Please keep your reports and suggestions coming in, it is your input that is driving our focus and we are committed to doing the best we can, we have got more to do and a long way to go. We have aimed to get as much information out to you as possible and as much as possible within AVRO News that is of use and relevant to the current situation all of which I hope is of assistance and support to you.

May I finish on a personal note on behalf of myself and my colleagues in AVRO National Council, these are unprecedented times and we are presented with so many challenges on so many levels. I

do very much hope that you, your families and those closest to you can remain safe and healthy and I very much hope that we can all overcome this terrible situation.

We wish you all the very best.

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

Stephen Smith
AVRO President