

Operators pledge to donate buses to Tsunami aid efforts

A GROUP OF UK bus operators and local authorities has been formed to offer practical assistance to the Asian countries affected by the Boxing Day Tsunami, primarily through the donation of redundant buses to help rebuild devastated communities.

So far, the 'Asia Bus Response' group comprises operators Blaze-field, Go Ahead, National Express Group, Nottingham City Transport, Thamesdown and Trent Barton, as well as Lancashire and Essex county councils and Bus Industry Awards organisers The Event Makers. They have teamed up with development agency Islamic Relief, who will co-ordinate the shipping of the vehicles and spare parts to the affected region, arrange local taxation and licencing, and follow up visits to ensure the buses are being utilised.

"This is a collective bus industry response to the transport needs of a region where mobility is desperately needed to help people re-establish their lives and rebuild their communities," said Trent Barton managing director Brian King. "I commend this initiative and I am very pleased to pledge Trent Barton vehicles to it."

The group is keen to point out that the initiative is not about palming off elderly buses on to the countries concerned. They must be fit for purpose and able to withstand several years' intensive use. Donor organisations will be required to deliver buses to a central co-ordinating point before mechanical checks and shipping.

"Robust, high floor, low tech vehicles are required, from double deckers to minibuses," the group said. "Many UK fleets have re-



Brian King: 'Response needed to help people rebuild their lives'

equipped with low floor vehicles and so have decent mid-life buses that are now difficult to find homes for in the UK. These buses could provide a lifeline."

Direct donations to the Disaster Emergency Committee overseeing the UK's response to the disaster have also been made from within the passenger transport industry. Stagecoach has donated £100,000 to the appeal and has also pledged to match the fundraising efforts of its 30,000 employees worldwide. First has donated £65,000, £1 for each of its employees, the same calculation used by National Express Group with its £40,000 pledge. London Underground is also to hand over £230,000 after setting up collections at 71 Tube stations.

● Visit www.asiabusresponse.co.uk. For information on donating buses to Asia Bus Response telephone Mitch de Faria on 01664 561711, or email asiabusresponse@theeventmakers.com. For information on how local authorities can help, contact Andrew Varley at Lancashire County Council on 01772 533336 or email him at andrew.varley@env.lancscc.gov.uk