

HOW COVID-19 HAS ACCELERATED CHANGE

As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, **Kim Challis**, Regional Managing Director for APCOA UK & Ireland, takes stock to reflect on the challenges of the last year and on how the pandemic has accelerated change in the parking industry



The coronavirus pandemic has been tough on us all in one way or another. At APCOA, parking volumes in some sectors have been hit hard, but other parts of our operation have grown, albeit with some adaptations to the services we provide to clients.

As COVID-19 started to take hold across Europe, we had a detailed look at the way in which we delivered our core business and made conscious decisions about certain changes we would need to make. In this article, I want to reflect on some of those and how they accelerated the innovations we were already working on that are now beginning to change the face of the parking world.

HOW APCOA ADAPTED

As the scale of the pandemic became clearer, much of Europe was a couple of weeks ahead of us and we were able to use the experience of other APCOA businesses to make plans to leverage our strengths.

We already had a robust business model in place across UK & Ireland, but we had to adapt that fast. From the start we prepared for an extended lockdown and focused on supporting our clients, either by maintaining services or by taking on new and different tasks wherever they were required. We also worked closely with clients to find solutions that provided mutual benefit both in the short-term but would allow us to continue delivery in the recovery phase.

As a result of the early planning, and despite a significant decrease in business in many sectors, APCOA has continued to support the supply chain and our communities, paid our rents and honoured our contractual commitments.

We've invested in our West London head office to make it more productive by creating an open plan work environment with 24-7 access, and adopting more use of remote technology. This has enabled us to deliver a structural shift in the mode of operation where we can support a combination of home and office working around some core hours, which will deliver

more flexibility whilst harnessing the productivity we have seen from our workforce.

Looking further north, we've also invested in our new combined customer service and control centre in Wigan, Greater Manchester. APCOA now has a fully integrated facility for the entire on- and off-street operations across the UK, with further investment into our telephony service, digital services including web chat and customer service platform.



Stephen Rickett

Director of Innovation & Technology, **Stephen Rickett**, explains: "We focused on how we could become even more efficient through the further utilisation of digital technology, cloud services and automation. As a result, APCOA has continued to roll out new solutions, such as our flexible reporting suite APCOA Analytics and our fully comprehensive ANPR-based parking management system, Parkway, which enhance our digital capability."

SUSTAINABILITY

We can't talk about APCOA and the future without referencing our focus on sustainability; we clearly understand the impact our business has on the environment and on society. We set ourselves stretching objectives to grow and develop as a company in innovative, responsible, and sustainable ways.

The lines between parking, mobility and urban life have begun to connect. Electric cars and EV charging, ANPR systems, micro-mobility solutions and Smart City digital solutions are just some of the innovations we have seen. With autonomous cars, artificial intelligence (AI), the role of big data and viable sustainable energy

sources on the horizon, the industry is likely to change even more.

Sustainable developments are already impacting on urban life, with schemes like ULEZ, clean air zones, and increased pedestrianisation encouraging people to look for smarter and more energy-efficient ways to park and travel. We already had car park concepts to help reduce CO₂, smog and noise emissions in inner city areas through innovative technological solutions and careful planning. However, COVID has accelerated the demand for our digital options which provide some new e-commerce solutions as well as virtual permits, season tickets and contact-free payments using APCOA Connect.



Tracey Munford

As a sustainable employer, we're proud of APCOA's record as an inclusive organisation and are committed to fair working practices and pay across the country. Looking at the COVID impacts on employees, **Tracey Munford**, Director of APCOA Services, highlights: "Throughout the pandemic many of our colleagues have continued to work at the front line and their health and safety has been paramount to us. They've been incredibly flexible and supportive of our clients' changing needs and we're really proud of them all. However, we recognised that the challenges of the last year have affected the mental health of some of our colleagues, whether working or on furlough. APCOA's training team developed a comprehensive package, expanding our 'Passport to Success' programme to help identify early warning signs so we can provide support to individuals who may be struggling."

There are also many great examples of activities that help the communities in which we work, from charitable fundraising to talks about road safety at local schools. One initiative has been our support of StreetLink, the national referral service for the homeless. APCOA's 1,000+ colleagues who patrol streets and car parks as part of their jobs, become aware of people who are sleeping rough. Using an app on their handheld devices, many of our parking officers have been able to alert StreetLink to connect homeless people with the local services available to help them off the streets. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, this interaction has also enabled local authorities and street outreach services to help people to access emergency accommodation, and APCOA is working with other clients across the UK to widen the support our colleagues can provide.

NOW AND NEXT?

Despite the impact of the pandemic, over the last year APCOA has actually increased growth by 25%, clear evidence of our operational excellence and ability to use technology and innovation to deliver tangible client benefits. Commercial Director, **John Goodwin**, explains:



John Goodwin

"APCOA has been incredibly successful in retaining business, with more than 99% of clients choosing to renew contracts with us last year. We know from their feedback that our proactive approach to technology, innovation and customer service has underpinned that success. We have also won significant amounts of new business and mobilised many contracts during the pandemic, including parking and security services at Hull University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, on-street services for Forest of Dean/Cotswolds District Councils, and a major car park for Manchester City Council Aquatics Centre, to name just a few.

"In December APCOA took over the management of 152 car parks across London and the South East for Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR). As a result of the positive relationship that has already developed between our two companies, we're now working together on some exciting new plans to create a series of commercial partnerships to drive additional revenue from their estates."

URBAN HUBS

This innovative approach reflects APCOA's recently-launched Urban Hubs, which is leading the way for the re-purposing and re-using of car parks as mobility hubs. Urban Hubs will create an integrated ecosystem for the future-ready and sustainable use of parking spaces.

A SEAMLESS SERVICE

David Gornall, Commercial Director at Govia Thameslink Railway, describes the support APCOA has provided as a new supplier to GTR:

"On 23 December 2020, APCOA took over the management of the car parks at 152 of our stations across the Great Northern, Southern and Thameslink network. They delivered on an impressive mobilisation plan, which included the provision of an integrated technology platform which provides a range of digital products including season ticket, pre-book, Blue Badge, taxi permit, staff permits and a customer-centric app which not only caters for parking but also delivers electric vehicle charging and various e-commerce solutions.

"Despite the challenges of the Covid-19



To develop and implement their own business models, strategic partners get access to APCOA's physical and digital infrastructure and customers will benefit from an expanded range of innovative services and products.

We're engaged in promising talks with a large number of potential partners, who appreciate our high location density and the fact that over 20 million customers are reachable around our properties. See more on our Urban Hubs website: www.urban-hubs.co.uk.

As well as leading on exciting new business opportunities, APCOA continues to work on raising standards in the parking industry. We take an active role within the British Parking Association and hold multiple accreditations for quality standards, but we're always looking at what more we can do. One such opportunity is the National Parking Platform, which aims to improve the customer journey across the full range of on-street and off street parking (both public and private). We're excited about the scheme and will be running some mini-pilots to assess the viability, commercial and data security impacts and the potential challenges and benefits for consumers and operators.

IN SUMMARY...

Looking back at 2020, it's certainly been a year of change, but we're pleased with how we've performed – APCOA is still here, growing and investing in the future. We had already been planning for the future, anticipating that the way society travels and parks would change. However, undoubtedly, the COVID pandemic accelerated those plans. I am really proud of all my colleagues who have adapted so well to the challenges they have faced. APCOA remains a strong and sustainable organisation and we are all very excited about the new opportunities ahead for further growth.



Kim Challis

With 50 years of industry experience and operations in 13 countries, **APCOA PARKING Group** is Europe's leading parking services business.

APCOA is the trusted partner who uses its consistent "asset light" business model to maximize value for private and public real estate owners. In the UK & Ireland APCOA provides a wide range of parking and infrastructure solutions, with more than 2,200 employees.

Client sectors include airports and railways, local government, healthcare, hospitality and leisure, education, and retail environments.

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