

Ukrainian Refugee Convoy Report



Following the decision by Russia to invade Ukraine, we quickly realised that we may need to start the process of appealing to our contacts within the CWU, wider labour movement for what would be required to assist with the relief of the many refugees.

We were also in contact with our friends at Royal Mail regarding the use of vehicles to transport the aid to where it would be needed most. With the support of Alan Tate PEC member and our General Secretary Dave Ward we secured the use of two Royal Mail vehicles, a motor unit and trailer and a sprinter van. Our thanks also to Simon Thompson, RM CEO for responding positively to our appeal.



The CWU Branches answered the call as they always do with overwhelming generosity and the money to purchase aid was soon rolling in. On top of this we had individual members and their families collecting aid items in their workplaces and soon had more than enough aid to fill the sprinter van.

While we were in the process of locating the best place for the aid to be delivered we were contacted by Gary Williams, Branch Secretary of South West Wales Amal Branch regarding an organisation in Neath (NMCC Neath Community Group) who had a warehouse full aid and were looking for a way of getting to a Centre in Poland they were working with. So after a conversation with the NMCC lead organiser the inspirational John Williams it was decided to drive the Motor unit and trailer to Neath and load it with the aid they had collected from the local community.



When the drivers arrived at the NMCC warehouse in Neath to say they were impressed would be an understatement. They had enough aid to fill close to three Artic and Trailers. All items were boxed and manifested and our drivers didn't have to lift a finger as an army of

volunteers, including Dai a postie from the Neath DO, loaded the artic full of nappies, dental aid, sanitary products, toiletries, wipes, medicines, beds, bedding, sleeping bags, shoes, clothing, PPE and baby food.

A project worker from the CWUHA charity had been putting plans in place for the vehicles to travel to a massive aid station in Poznan, Poland. The drivers were selected from a list of volunteers and a date of April 4th chosen as the day to start the journey to Poland.

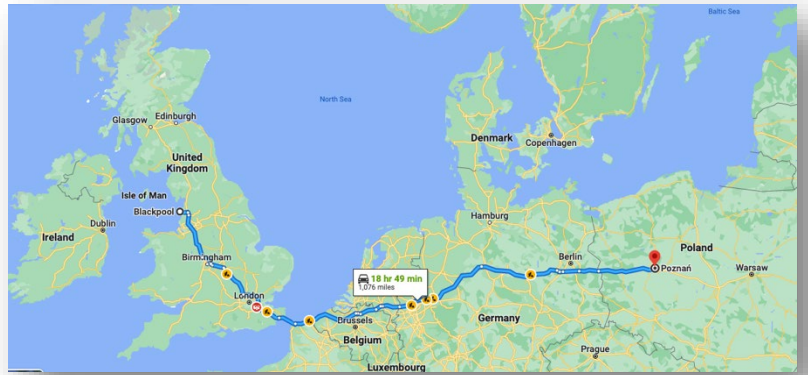


Paul Moffat, convoy leader, Chris Webb, Sonya Michael and Keith Archbold were the drivers selected by the charity, and set off on April 4th 2022.

Journey to Poznań

Monday 4th April

CWUHA Trustee, Chris Webb left Blackpool at 5am and headed to Bedford to pick up his co-driver, Paul Moffat. Sonya Michaels met up with Keith Archbold on the outskirts of London at 8am and they made their way to the coast.



Delays across the country slowed the convoy down and they all finally met up at Maidstone services just before 13:00.

The queue for the Eurotunnel started 22miles back so we diverted the Artic Lorry (Sonya & Keith) to Dover and the Van (Paul and Chris) was directed down the car lane to the tunnel, with the plan to meet the others just outside Calais in the afternoon.

Paul and Chris finally got to the front of the queue at the Eurotunnel and we were told because they had Humanitarian Aid they had to wait in the Freight queue, which was a 12hour + wait.

They then made the decision to join the others and depart via Dover with DFDS Ferries.



Paul and Chris finally managed to board the 19:30 ferry, but unfortunately, Sonya and Keith were refused passage on this ferry and had to catch the delayed 21:30, which departed at 22:30.

When they finally arrived in France, the convoy drove just over an hour into Belgium and found a hotel just outside Bruges in Jabbeke.

We hoped the travel through Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany was going to be better than their first day, with an aim to stop just outside Hannover, Germany in the evening.

Tuesday 5th April

After a bit of R&R in Jabbeke Bruges, the convoy set off from their hotel at 10am and were back on the road.

The route took them from Belgium, through the bottom of the Netherlands and into Germany.

Roads were busy at times but they managed to make good time and were only 1 hour behind their planned schedule, after Monday's delays.



They arrived at their hotel a bit further on than planned in Barleben, Germany at 9pm

The very friendly receptionist helped the drivers order pizza from a local takeout and the team enjoyed some food and well-earned beer before heading for bed.

Poland was the next stop.

Wednesday 6th April

It was an early start for the drivers on Wednesday to make up for the last bit of time they lost on Monday.

The convoy stopped just outside Berlin to re-fuel before heading for Poland.

The motorways in Germany we're smooth sailing and even more so once they arrived in Poland.



Caritas Hub, Poznań

The convoy arrived at the World Trade Centre in Poznań just before 5pm and we're greeted by Caritas International volunteers and the Polish Army to unload all 20 tonnes of aid. With the help of the volunteers and a much-needed forklift all the aid was unpacked really quickly and was all done by 6:30pm.

The convoy then headed to their hotel 10 minutes away and enjoyed a well-deserved meal.



Thursday 7th April

Late morning Sonya and Keith set off in the artic to cover as much ground as possible and Paul and Chris went back to the Caritas center and collect a shopping list of essential items for those refugees living in the hub.

They then went to a local supermarket and left with trollies full of fresh food and fruit.



The Journey Home

The convoy pushed on to Hannover Germany on the Thursday covering 325 miles. On the next day they decided to aim for the port of Calais in an attempt to cross the channel that day and stay the night down on the south coast.

After making excellent time, they sailed through the 401 miles to Calais and both crossed the channel around 7pm local time and made it up to Ashford for their final stopover. The channel tunnel on the French side was a breeze compared to the UK side.

At 7 am on the Saturday morning the drivers said farewell with Sonya and Keith heading for North London and then Birmingham. And Paul and Chris heading for Bedford and then Blackpool.

The convoy was a huge success and will hopefully be the start of many more to come.

Our special thanks goes to:

- John Williams and NMCC Neath for donating twenty tons of aid.
- Royal Mail for loaning us the vehicles and supplying the fuel.
- CWU Members who donated aid and funds via workplace collections and our JustGiving site.
- CWU Branches and regions who funded the trip with their donations

We couldn't have done it without you!

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