



STAGECOACH CREATES THE SCALE AND AGILITY TO MEET FUTURE TRANSPORT CHALLENGES

STAGECOACH GROUP

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CUSTOMER

STAGECOACH GROUP

WEB SITE

WWW.STAGECOACHBUS.COM

INDUSTRY

LOGISTICS & TRANSPORTATION

LOCATION

STOCKPORT, UK

KEY CHALLENGES

- Inflexible IT environment failing to support business agility
- Inefficient use of IT resource, with too great an emphasis on reactive maintenance
- Commit to a cloud platform for critical depot-management, vehicle tracking and payment applications

SOLUTION

Deploy critical depot-management application to VMware Cloud on AWS. This will be the first project in a broader shift to a cloud-first approach to IT

IMPACT

- Ensures the scale, performance and agility to support business critical applications
- Reduces strain on in-house IT, freeing time to focus on new projects that will create value for the business
- Provides template for future cloud-first projects, and supports digital transformation

As the UK's largest bus and coach operator, Stagecoach is uniquely placed to meet future transport challenges. To do so, the business wants to transform its approach to IT, moving away from the ownership and management of hardware to create a more flexible, digital foundation. VMware Cloud™ on AWS now hosts some of Stagecoach's most business-critical applications. It delivers scale, performance and agility – and allows the IT team to focus on creating new value for the business.

Stagecoach Group is a leading international public transport provider, with bus and rail operations in the UK and North America. The UK bus business accounts for around 40% of group revenue. It has 24,000 employees, 8,300 buses and coaches, and fulfills around 920 million journeys each year, with around three million customers daily. The company has invested more than £1 billion in new buses since 2006.

Challenge

Public transport in the UK faces a number of seismic challenges and opportunities. It can help tackle congestion on roads and improve local air quality. However, it must also deliver affordable transport options and become flexible enough to reflect changing social demographics, with more people shopping online and working from home.

Not all of these challenges will be met by incumbent operators or current services. A host of 'disruptors' and new products promise to change the way commuters request, pay for, and rate public transport.

As one of the UK's largest transport providers, and with more than 30 years' experience in the sector, Stagecoach Group is in a prime position to create and deliver solutions. It must do so while maintaining the benefits of scale and transforming to be as agile as a disruptor. The group's main revenue generator, Stagecoach Bus, had evolved a traditional IT environment, managing its own storage, servers and network. While this delivered stability, it became increasingly clear this approach was unable to support agility and scale. The business wanted to be faster to onboard new bus franchises and more efficient in the way IT was managed.

"We recognized that we were not experts in running data centers," says Sam Akroyd, Technical Services Manager at Stagecoach Bus. "Five years ago we might have been nervous about trusting critical infrastructure to an outside provider, we certainly wouldn't have considered Software-as-a-Service. The market has matured since. A cloud-first approach will give us an enterprise-class backbone."

With a critical depot and bus-management application due for a major upgrade, Stagecoach saw an opportunity to start its cloud journey.

“Since moving to VMware Cloud I’m worrying less about operational uptime. There is a certainty, an assurance that everything works. Also, we feel we’re at the forefront of technology. There are additional features coming online every month.”

SAM AKROYD
TECHNICAL SERVICES MANAGER
STAGECOACH BUS

VMWARE FOOTPRINT

- VMware Cloud™ on AWS
- VMware vSphere®
- VMware vSAN®
- VMware NSX®
- VMware Cloud Foundation® Unified SDDC Platform

“We need scale, performance and resiliency,” explains Akroyd. “This app covers every bus journey out of 200 depots. It cannot fail.”

Action

Stagecoach has worked with VMware for ten years. Akroyd says it was natural to explore VMware’s cloud capabilities. VMware Cloud on AWS is the only hybrid cloud solution that allows companies to modernize, protect and scale mission-critical vSphere-based applications leveraging AWS, the world’s leading public cloud. The upgraded depot-management app was tested in an on-premise environment, before going into production on VMware Cloud on AWS.

“We had a tight timeframe,” says Akroyd. “We’d committed to upgrading the app by a certain date. The familiarity of the VMware system was a major factor in the decision. Plus, in testing the VMware Cloud™ performed better than anything we’ve ever had on-premise.”

Also, he continues, it was clear VMware Cloud on AWS would enable Stagecoach to scale up, or shrink back, across peaks and troughs: “We need to be dynamic, and the VMware stretched-cluster feature is not only great for resiliency but also allows us to add hosts as required.”

It also fits as the building block of the broader, cloud-first strategy, and provides a digital foundation for the business. Akroyd presented the VMware Cloud solution to the new Stagecoach CIO (appointed in January 2018), as a solution that would apply beyond the depot-management app upgrade.

“The big idea is to develop a ‘Stagecoach-in-a-box’ service, where we can bring consistency to our bid projects and onboarding of new franchises. VMware Cloud delivers this and frees up time for the central IT team.”

Impact

The bus- and depot-management application went into production on VMware Cloud on AWS in August 2018, within three weeks of confirming the order. “Previously, whether on-premise or hosted, it would have taken six weeks to order the hardware and four weeks to configure,” says Akroyd.

He says plans are already in place to migrate further applications – the first tracks every Stagecoach vehicle, the second consolidates all smartcard payments. They could not be more critical to the success of the business.

As expected, moving to a cloud service has reduced the strain on the inhouse IT team. “There’s now less firefighting, more time to spend serving the business, and I sleep better at night,” says Akroyd. “Also, we’re a lot closer to VMware. We’ve met with its product specialist and feel we have a better understanding of technology coming down the track.”

The solution ensures Stagecoach has the flexibility to scale as the business requires, allowing it to move quickly on threats or opportunities. The business is constantly exploring new franchise opportunities; VMware Cloud on AWS means new operations can be integrated quickly. From a regulator and senior management perspective, there is the assurance that Stagecoach is now partnering with leaders in cloud services.

It also opens the possibility of Stagecoach exploring its route and passenger data more thoroughly, and in near real-time. This will enable the business to be more dynamic in its pricing and scheduling. Better, more relevant services will help protect the brand and strengthen consumer trust.

“We’ve worked with VMware for almost ten years. As we adopt a cloud-first strategy, moving to VMware Cloud on AWS is a natural evolution. It is a company we trust. The familiarity with VMware breeds confidence.”

SAM AKROYD
TECHNICAL SERVICES MANAGER
STAGECOACH BUS

“Since its inception, Stagecoach has always been an innovative and entrepreneurial business,” says Paul Bunting, Commercial and New Business Director, Stagecoach Bus. “It’s clear that technology is fundamentally affecting the way we operate as a business, and the needs of our customers. Our investment in VMware Cloud on AWS enables us to be more agile and faster to market with the changes we need to encourage more people to use the bus in towns and cities across the country.”

Looking Ahead

The engagement with VMware Cloud on AWS is helping to demonstrate the effectiveness of a cloud-first approach, says Akroyd: “Being able to add resource at a moment’s notice, with no long-term capex sign-off, that’s something that the business has never had. IT is now aligned with what the business needs.”

Amazon Web Services, Akroyd says, offers long-term possibilities, and VMware is adding new cloud features on a monthly basis: “We’re looking at the S3 mass storage to pool backups, and the RDS managed database service. That’s of particular interest as most of our applications run on common database platforms.

“We see ourselves as early adopters of VMware Cloud, and have an opportunity to be involved in its development. We feel like we’re being listened to and can influence new features.”

