

Edited by Tony Hagon, Director, Acc+Ess Limited

*It is with a heavy heart that I am writing with news that we never would have wanted to say and that you probably never wanted to read or hear.*

## The Final Straw?...

With a great deal of anguish, we are having to announce that we are withdrawing Acc+Ess Protocab from the market with immediate effect.

As you will know from previous Newsletters, or if you have visited the *protocab.com* website, we have been beset with difficulties in obtaining supplies of some key items. This has mainly affected the **0201 Direct Controller** and the **0502 Locomotive Control Unit**. We have absorbed the increases in costs in the last two years, but last December we were forced to increase prices as and when we could receive further batches. The issue is a worldwide shortage of raw materials for the production of semiconductors, and this has forced prices up in every product that uses them, from mobile phones, through televisions, car management modules and even the medical devices that are vital to life.

We have now been hit with the news that further supplies of the 0502 LCU are being affected by a dramatic increase in the costs of the main microprocessors and other specialised components. The cost that we would now be charged is *four times* the previous price and this puts it beyond our ability to absorb or to pass on in the retail price. There is no sign of any possible future return to normal prices. Thus with no immediate or even reasonably short term prospect of being able to supply complete Starter Sets and Locomotive Control Sets, and thus income to support the operation, we have no alternative but to announce the decision we have sadly taken.

This decision has not been reached lightly. We know that it will affect many modellers who have committed to the Protocab system of control. We are so very grateful for the efforts of Owners who promote Protocab to fellow modellers, but we have recently been at pains to ensure that they are not setting false expectations. Those of you who have visited us at the many exhibitions we have attended, or have contacted us on the telephone, it was a joy to speak with you and we thank you for taking the time to call.

## Is there no other way?

We have looked for alternatives. After all, the electronics industry develops constantly and the 0201 and 0502 designs are now 8 years old. But we would then have to redesign the layout of the printed circuit boards on which these and the other components are located. This would require a retest to provide evidence of compliance with the EMC, Radio Emissions and Safety Directives, and a consequent revision of our Declaration of Conformity. Without them, we could not put a CE mark on our products, which is a legal requirement for any manufacturer placing goods on the UK or EU markets. We have taken our responsibilities to our legal compliance very seriously, but the cost of adherence has been a major inhibitor to growing our business and, at present levels of take-up, are beyond our financial means. For example, the cheapest estimate we have received for a compliance test exceeds £20,000, plus the cost of certification.

In any case, were the situation to be *status quo*, these standards evolve frequently and our Pilot Series designs are due for a retest to prove compliance with the latest standards.

Given the advances that we have incorporated into the New Products announced in 2017, we then looked to completing their development, rather than revising the Pilot Series products. However, as we have stated in these Newsletters on several occasions, we could not go ahead with this development without a much higher commitment from Owners and prospective Owners that they would take up the system in the volumes needed for us to be profitable. We have also said that we are not prepared to burden Acc+Ess Limited with debt without a high degree of confidence that it could be serviced through increased take-up.

## Outstanding issues

A decision on the future of Acc+Ess Limited is yet to be made. This includes disposal of currently-held stock. We will honour our guarantees provided to our Owners through a separate trading vehicle, if necessary, but, with immediate effect, we will not be accepting further orders. We are holding deposits from modellers for the pre-order of the New Products we announced in 2017. If you sent a deposit, would you please contact me to let me know to which account we should refund your deposit?

We are also holding a number of Owners' locomotives for installation of the New Products when available, and these will be returned to those Owners as soon as possible.

I will, myself, be available on a personal basis for any technical or installation advice Owners may have, and I always welcome discussions on general model railway matters.

However...

In the last 13 years we have learned much about Protocab, how our Owners use it, the challenges of shoehorning the components into limited space in locomotives, and we have listened to the views of modellers on how they want to enjoy their modelling experience. Since the announcement of the New Products in 2017, we have carried out further research and development beyond the demonstration of the early prototypes, including developments into support for sound and other functions that significantly enhance the Protocab experience.

I am a modeller with a large fleet of, as yet, unfitted locomotives and three layouts (O, P4 and HO, plus an N gauge layout that I originally built for Alex and Dan, but didn't complete because the wiring was so unreliable!).

I plan to use that experience to develop and produce Protocab-architected components for my *own use*.

It may be that some components are surplus to my needs. There is nothing, so far as I can tell, that legally prevents me from offering them to friends.

I do hope that we will keep in contact.

Tony Hagon

If you have any questions or observations about the content of this Newsletter, please email me [tony@protocab.com](mailto:tony@protocab.com) or telephone 07831 231164

## Is it the end for a battery power?

You can imagine that, with an estimated UK railway modelling population of 2million, and maybe ten times that number world-wide, we are puzzled that the obvious benefits of battery powered wireless control have not been as widely embraced as we thought and expected it to be when Acc+Ess Protocab was first announced. Since our launch in 2015, we have provided Protocab Starter Sets and Locomotive Sets to around 300 Owners and we believe that satisfaction with Protocab is high, from the comments we frequently receive from the few Owners with whom we are in regular contact. Indeed, we only know of two previous Owners who have relinquished their Protocab installations.

I join with our Owners as being someone who has committed himself to building layouts without wiring, and with locomotives powered by Protocab. We in Acc+Ess are deeply sorry to similar modellers who will now have to look for alternatives. There are other systems on the market, and more will probably emerge as and when modellers (and manufacturers) realise the real benefits of battery power. We genuinely wish them well.