

REDUCING VAN DOWNTIME

Nine key tips

1. DAILY VEHICLE CHECKS

Each driver should do a daily 'walk-round' before using it and any reported defects need to be acted upon immediately.



2. FREQUENT VEHICLE INSPECTIONS

Make checks more often for vehicles that work off road, do a very high mileage or are subject to extreme conditions.

3. PROCURE NEW VEHICLES

Switching to a newer fleet could mean reducing both maintenance and downtime.

4. TRAIN YOUR DRIVERS

Driver training schemes make smarter and safer drivers, reducing accidents and ultimately reducing downtime.

5. MONTHLY TYRE WEAR CHECKS



Tyre treads should be inspected for wear and damage. Bald tyres increase the likelihood of an accident and could take the vehicle off the road until a spare is sourced.

6. KEEP TYRES INFLATED TO THE RIGHT PRESSURE

Under-inflated tyres generate more heat from friction, which in turn causes more wear and tear on the tyres, impacting fuel consumption. Over-inflated tyres cause premature wear.



7. INSTALL SPEED LIMITERS

Lower speeds mean less friction on the vehicle's moving parts. This should ensure less downtime for maintenance.



8. DON'T OVERLOAD VEHICLES

Loading an LCV above its weight limit causes excessive wear and tear on the van and undue strain on tyres. This increases the risk of tyre failure and subsequent downtime for repair.

9. SET LOCAL SERVICING MAINTENANCE AGREEMENTS

Choose a vehicle supplier with local servicing options and 24/7 capabilities to keep vehicles out of action to a minimum.



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Taking one of your light commercial vehicles (LCVs) off the road for repairs can be expensive, especially when replacement hire costs, decreased productivity and the potential loss of earnings from reduced operations are all taken into account. When off the road for longer, fees for replacement hire vehicles can add up alarmingly quickly, and then there's the impact on customers, whose service or delivery may be delayed while the LCV is fixed.

Lex Autolease engineers have shared nine tips to help you minimise vehicle downtime and push down maintenance costs.

1. DAILY VEHICLE CHECKS

Your driver policy should require each driver to do a daily 'walk-round' check on their vehicle before using it. The acronym 'FLOWER' – for fluid, lights, oil, water, electrics and rubber – could be used as an easy way for them to remember the things they need to inspect.

If the driver spots any defects, they must be encouraged to act on the problem immediately, and there should be an efficient process in place to deal with repairs. Safety-related defects must be prioritised and dealt with as a matter of urgency.

2. FREQUENT VEHICLE INSPECTIONS

If you regularly service your vehicles and maintain them to a high standard, they should break down less often. But if you have vehicles that work off road, do a very high mileage or are subject to extreme conditions, you might want to introduce additional safety inspections every two to three months. This could match requirements covered under the annual MOT inspections. Additionally you may wish to inspect vehicle parts that are likely to be put under stress, because the specific demands your organisation puts them under goes beyond what would normally be expected. Your third party fleet provider, such as Lex Autolease, or regular service engineers can advise on this.

For example, emergency vehicles tend to have higher brake wear – more frequent inspections could mean that brake pads can be replaced before they become worn down enough to damage the brake discs, which would require a more expensive and longer fix. Safety inspections simply involve checking over the vehicle to see whether any parts may need replacing before the next full service.

3. PROCURE NEW VEHICLES

The older the vehicle, the more likely it is to break down. And the newer the vehicle, the more environmentally friendly it's likely to be, which usually means it has lower fuel consumption. So switching to a newer fleet could mean reducing both maintenance and fuel costs, as well as reducing downtime for MOT – new vehicles are not subject to MOT for the first three years.

In addition, as governments introduce low-emission zones, older, more-polluting vehicles may be prohibited from entering or subject to fines: for example, from 2019 the London ultra-low emission zone will charge £12 a day for polluting vehicles.

4. TRAIN YOUR DRIVERS

Driver training schemes aim to make people drive smarter and safer – and safer driving will ultimately reduce downtime, as better trained drivers are less likely to have accidents. But the benefits don't end there: there's also the possibility of reducing fuel costs, as drivers learn not to waste energy by accelerating quickly and braking sharply. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents provides a range of courses that cover topics such as defensive driving and eco-driving (<https://www.rospa.com/safety-training/on-road/driver-training/>).

5. MONTHLY TYRE WEAR CHECKS

Tyre treads should be inspected thoroughly at least once a month to check for wear and damage. You may want to consider maintaining a policy whereby treads are never allowed to go below 2 millimetres. If you wait until the tyre is bald, there's a chance that a replacement tyre may not be in stock, and the vehicle will have to be taken off the road until a spare can be found.

6. KEEP TYRES INFLATED TO THE RIGHT PRESSURE

Under-inflated tyres generate more heat from friction, which in turn causes more wear and tear on the tyres, meaning they have to be replaced sooner. Greater friction also means greater fuel consumption. Over-inflated tyres, on the other hand, will cause premature wear on the centre of the tyre, as the weight of the vehicle is being borne by just the part that is touching the road, rather than spread across the whole width of the tyre.

7. INSTALL SPEED LIMITERS

Lower speeds mean less friction on the vehicle's moving parts, and so can result in less downtime for maintenance. But the main reason for installing limiters is the stark effect it can have on fuel consumption, lowering fuel costs across the fleet.

8. DON'T OVERLOAD VEHICLES

In 2014, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency stopped more than 10,800 vans in the United Kingdom and found that 89% of them were overloaded. Not only is loading an LCV above its weight limit illegal, it also causes excessive wear and tear on the van and undue strain on tyres, increasing the risk of tyre failure and subsequent downtime for repair.

9. SET LOCAL SERVICING MAINTENANCE AGREEMENTS

When choosing a lease company which provides a full servicing and maintenance agreement, or procuring vehicles which come with similar agreements for a set number of years or miles, it's important to check the available servicing options. Are the servicing depots located near to your business? If it takes several hours to drive to the nearest depot, this will unnecessarily extend the period for which the LCV is out of action. Likewise, does the LCV manufacturer offer servicing and repairs 24 hours a day, seven days a week? If not, your vehicle could be left unusable over a weekend while you wait for the repair garage to open.

It's also worth checking that the manufacturer's warranty options fit with your intended vehicle use. If your vehicles drive long distances, it might make sense to opt for a manufacturer that offers unlimited mileage as part of their three-year warranty, rather than one that offers a three-year warranty with a cap of, for example, 100,000 miles. Unlimited mileage warranties may also indicate that the vehicle is more robust and more capable of achieving high mileage without the need for repairs.

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