

Driving a minibus

a reference manual for minibus drivers



Dear Colleague,

Welcome, and thank you for your interest in the Staffordshire County Council Minibus Driver Assessment Scheme.

The Scheme was introduced several years ago by Staffordshire County Council, in response to public concern arising from media coverage of some serious and fatal crashes involving minibuses. Staffordshire has been fortunate in having had extremely few such incidents. Nevertheless, we aim to maintain this good record as well as boosting confidence amongst passengers, parents, teachers, group leaders and the drivers themselves that the minibus fleet is being driven as safely as possible.

The challenge we have is bridging the vast gap between the professional coach driver and the volunteer driver who has not had the advantage of formal driving instruction in a passenger-carrying vehicle. The Minibus Driver Assessment Scheme aims to direct your professionalism and enthusiasm to minimise the inherent risks. We want to work with you to improve your driving skills and identify the responsibilities in what we recognise as valuable work within your community.

This Manual is provided to you because you are applying to obtain, or regain, your Minibus Driver Permit, and this is the essential preparation material. It replaces the original additional theory course and provides a current reference and update for you about standards and good practice. You need to study it thoroughly, along with any relevant information at your establishment, before you apply for your assessment.

The Assessment now lasts 2½ hours during which you will be assessed on your ability to drive a minibus safely, as well as being asked a range of questions based on this Manual and the Highway Code.

If you are successful, and have the appropriate medical and licence requirements, you will be included in the database of approved drivers and be issued with an ID permit – that will normally be valid for five years.

Thank you again for taking part in this very valuable Road Safety training initiative.



Nick Lloyd
Head of Road Safety & Sustainable Travel Unit



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1.1 Are you qualified to drive a minibus?

You could answer this in a variety of ways, e.g. "Do you have the skills to drive a minibus safely?", but here we are looking at the legal requirements, including some additional conditions added by Staffordshire County Council.

We define a minibus as: a motor vehicle constructed or adapted to carry more than eight, but no more than sixteen, seated passengers and a Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM) not exceeding 3500kg (3.5 tonne), unless it has been adapted for carrying disabled passengers (3.2) Vehicles that carry specialist equipment have the weight restriction raised from 3500kg to 4250kg



The minibus's maximum authorised mass (MAM) will be indicated on a plate on the vehicle, found usually in the driver foot well, on the door frame or under the bonnet. It is this weight, the MAM, that denotes what category of licence is required in order to drive the vehicle.

The following information will indicate if you can drive a minibus within the Staffordshire Minibus Scheme:

If you passed a car driving test before 1st January 1997.....

you can drive a minibus providing the purpose of the journey is 'not for hire or reward'. This basically means that irrespective of the Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM), as plated on the vehicle, the minibus can be driven by someone with a car licence and they do not need to pass an additional PCV D1 test. However, the following criteria also apply:

- You must be over 21 and have held a full licence for not less than 2 years
Drivers over 65 years will normally be restricted to a one-year permit renewable on annual medical clearance
- The vehicle is used by non-commercial body for social purposes
- As the driver, you receive no payment other than out of pocket expenses
- The minibus does not have more than 16 passenger seats
- You do not have any endorsements or pending prosecutions that are unacceptable to the County Council's Insurance Company
If you have endorsements or pending prosecutions, you can check if this affects you by contacting the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit
- You must be a non-vocational driver
A non-vocational driver is someone who is not required by a contract of employment or a contract of services to drive a minibus as part of their duties. For instance, a teacher who drives a minibus, during or outside school hours, is regarded as a non-vocational driver, not driving for 'hire or reward' or required to drive by a contract of employment.



If you meet this criteria and you are nominated by your Head-teacher/Line Manager as being someone who is deemed suitable to drive a minibus, then after reading this manual, you can

- apply to the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit to join/re-join the scheme
- undertake appropriate practice in a minibus (7.1)
- assess (perhaps with a colleague) when you are ready (7.2)
- book your assessment date (7.3)

However, when your driving licence is renewed at age 70, you will **automatically** lose the D1 and D1E entitlements unless you make a special application to retain it. Details will be enclosed in documents you receive at the time from DVLA, but it will involve meeting a higher medical standard (2.2)

If you passed a car driving test after 1st January 1997.....

the law is a little more complex. The criteria are as follows:

- As the driver, you must be over 21 and held a full driving licence for not less than 2 years
- The vehicle is used by a non-commercial body for social purposes
- You receive no payment other than out of pocket expenses
- The minibus does not have more than 16 passenger seats (17 including the driver)
- You do not have any endorsements or pending prosecutions that are unacceptable to the County Council's Insurance Company
If you have endorsements or pending prosecutions, you can check if this affects you by contacting the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit
- You must be a non-vocational driver
A non-vocational driver is someone who is not required by a contract of employment or a contract of services to drive a minibus as part of their duties. For instance, a teacher who drives a minibus, during or outside school hours, is regarded as a non-vocational driver, not driving for 'hire or reward', nor required to drive by a contract of employment.
- No trailer is attached
- The minibus is not driven abroad
- The vehicles Maximum Authorised Mass does not exceed 3.5 tonnes (3500kg)

If the Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM) of the vehicle exceeds 3.5 tonnes a PCV D1 licence is required, please contact the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit for advice

Note: Permit holders must be re-assessed within the terms of the Scheme at least every five years



Useful Information:

for matters concerning driving licence entitlements and other motoring information.
<http://www.direct.gov.uk/Motoring/fs/en>

for information on the County Council Minibus scheme including information on how to gain category PCV D1
<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/transport/roadsafety/drivertraining/minibustrainingscheme/>

Teachers may also wish to refer to DfES specific guidance 'Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits' available at:
<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthandsafety/visits/>

1.2 Eyesight requirement

It would be difficult to over-estimate the value of good eyesight for any driver when we know that more than 75% of the information a driver receives comes from eyesight, yet it is widely accepted that around 10% of drivers cannot meet even the basic legal eyesight requirement.

We feel justified in insisting on the standard prescribed by the DVLA for PCV Minibus drivers, requiring the legal basic standard for eyesight to be met with each eye rather than both together. If you consider that you are unable to achieve this standard, one course of action (prior to attending the minibus scheme's qualifying medical) would be to consult an optometrist to see if prescription lenses will help you meet the standard.

The minimum legal eyesight requirement for driving a car is to be able to read a vehicle number plate in daylight at a distance of 20.5 metres (67 ft) or 20 metres for a new-style number plate.

The Staffordshire Minibus Permit Scheme requires you to be able to meet the DVLA's group 2 medical standard for eyesight, meaning that you will need to have a minimum acuity in each eye, both with corrected and uncorrected eyesight. This will be verified when attending for your medical.
Any optician is qualified to assess you against this standard if you have any concerns.

If you need further information about the eyesight standard, please contact the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit



2.1 Safety and welfare of your passengers

See also section 3: Passenger Safety.

Driving a minibus is a demanding and responsible task, and we expect you to be both knowledgeable in the task and professional in your actions.

A minibus driver is legally responsible for the safety and welfare of their passengers, and everyone will expect you to take the greatest care.

This responsibility must take priority at all times, and it starts from the time you first plan the drive.

- Ensure that you (2.2) and the vehicle (2.4) are fit for the task, that your passengers understand what's expected of them, and that they can appreciate your concern for safety in everything you do.
- You should always assess the risks for every journey, using whatever guidance is approved by your establishment (2.8). In addition to considering the route(s), journey times, contact numbers, etc, this should also include relevant information about your passengers, eg medical (5.3), behaviour, etc.
*Be able to answer the "What if ... ?" questions.
What if a passenger is unwell? What if a passenger is injured?
What if the vehicle breaks down? What if you are involved in an accident? What if you are delayed? What if ... ?*
- Make sure you know the location of emergency equipment – fire extinguisher and first aid box (possibly with additional specific medical items) – and know how you would use each.
- Ensure that all doors are unlocked when carrying passengers – it's a legal requirement.

A suitable first aid kit is a legal requirement on all passenger carrying vehicles.

If used, it must be replenished immediately. The minimum contents are:

- 10 antiseptic wipes, foil packed
- 1 conforming disposable bandage (not less than 7.5 cm wide)
- 2 triangular bandages
- 1 packet of 24 assorted adhesive dressings
- 3 large sterile unmedicated ambulance dressings (not less than 15x20 cm)
- 2 sterile eye pads with attachments
- 12 assorted safety pins
- 1 pair of rustproof blunt-ended scissors



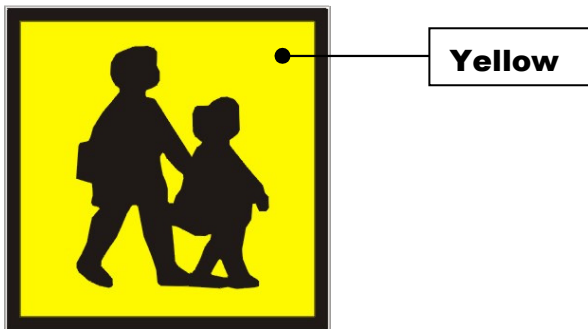
A suitable fire extinguisher is also a legal requirement in a minibus. This must comply with BS EN3 or BS 7863, and contain either foam or dry powder, but not Halon. Minibuses carrying wheelchair passengers must have a second fire extinguisher close to the rear door.





You should also be aware that it is a legal requirement (Section 17a of the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989) that when you are carrying children (under 16 years of age) to or from a school, during normal school term time, a regulation 'yellow school children' sign must be clearly visible from the front and rear of the minibus. Ideally these should be removed when not carrying children.

It is also important to remember that the sign must not be affixed to the front windscreen, this can seriously reduce the drivers visibility.





2.2 Fitness to drive

There are two aspects here: your overall medical fitness, and your day-to-day fitness.

Professional drivers of passenger carrying vehicles (PCVs) are already required to undergo regular medical checks. DVLA has been introducing similar medical standards for minibus drivers since 1998, and Staffordshire has decided to adopt these requirements as a positive development to safeguard everyone's interest.

This will apply to all drivers applying for their first minibus Permit.

Existing permit holders will be included as a condition for re-assessment.

For County Council staff, all medicals will be conducted in the normal way by the County's Occupational Health Unit.

- The normal scheme for medical checks will be
- a pre-condition for the first driving assessment
 - a routine check at age 45
 - then a check every five years until age 65
 - an annual check after age 65

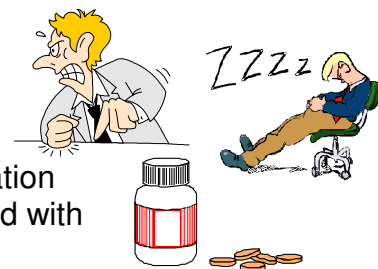


Even though you may be medically very fit, you can sometimes have a off-day, or perhaps be 'under the weather' for a longer time.

If you feel unfit to drive a minibus, then you **MUST NOT** do so
 There are no circumstances which justify having an accident. Adults can unexpectedly feel unwell, just like children. Trying to be a hero is not acting responsibly.
 No-one is saying that feeling unwell will lead to an accident, but it certainly increases the risk.

Any of the following will affect your fitness to drive:

- | | |
|------------------|----------|
| Illness | Emotions |
| Alcohol | Fatigue |
| Drugs/Medication | Stress |



Make sure you understand the effects of any medication you are taking (usually explained in a leaflet enclosed with the medicine). Even simple pain-killers can slow our reactions.

We all know we shouldn't drink and drive but may forget how drinking one day can still affect our concentration and judgement the next. Airline pilots are not allowed alcohol within 24hr of flying, and their job is far less risky than driving. We should follow the same rule.





For most of us, minibus driving is secondary to the job we normally do. By Law the professional driver is restricted to a maximum number of hours worked, together with statutory breaks to be taken during the working day. The volunteer minibus driver is not restricted, therefore the risk of fatigue during an extended working day is very real.

Don't under-estimate the effect of any of these on your driving. And don't feel guilty about taking a break before you drive. You owe it to your passengers.

2.3 Highway Code and basic driving law

You need to read the latest edition of the Highway Code especially if it's been some time since you last saw a copy. You can now view this online at:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/Highwaycode/DG_070202

Remember, though, that items in the Highway Code such as road signs are not intended to be comprehensive, and you need to keep up-to-date with all road signs and markings that are in current use. Be alert, too, for new legislation (eg use of mobile phones) that can take a year or more to be included in the Highway Code.

As an experienced driver you should already be familiar with the basic driving laws and common practice. Any matter that is unclear can usually be resolved by a call to the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit.

- During your assessment, you will be asked questions about the Highway Code and general driving issues, including the contents of this manual. You must demonstrate a satisfactory level of knowledge.
- You will be asked to identify, or describe, a range of road signs and markings.

Know your speed limits. Read the Highway Code Rules 124 - 125. Remember that all roads with street lighting carry a 30mph maximum speed limit unless signed otherwise. An absence of street lighting generally indicates national speed limit unless otherwise marked.

Maximum speeds for a minibus where the National speed limit applies	
Single carriageway	50mph
Dual carriageway	60mph
Motorway	70mph



Under certain circumstances your vehicle may have been fitted with a 'Speed Limiter Device` this would limit your speed to a maximum 62mph (100kph) and you would not be allowed to use the third lane on a motorway. A sticker is usually fixed to the inside of the vehicle warning drivers that a limiter device is fitted.

Understand the road markings! They give valuable information about the road you are driving on, and the road ahead. Know about the different types of centre line markings, the hatched areas that are sometimes in the centre of the road, including box junctions, and the way in which junctions and the severity of bends



is indicated. Do you, for example, know the current rules about crossing double white lines? (Highway Code Rules 128/129)

Most of the rules that apply to cars also apply to minibuses. The National speed limit above was one exception. Another is that the minimum tyre tread depth for a minibus is 1mm, not the 1.6mm as it is for a car. However, the ability of a tyre to displace water reduces dramatically for a depth of less than 3mm and you should consider changing tyres when their depth reaches 2mm.

While driving a minibus, we advise you not to use bus lanes nor take advantage of other bus priority areas. These areas are designed to be used by Local Service buses on scheduled service routes.

Bus lanes are often one-way, and near to pedestrian areas and the associated hazards. They sometimes also lead into contra-flow lanes that can be confusing.

2.4 Vehicle roadworthiness

As with any vehicle, the driver of a minibus is legally responsible for the vehicle being roadworthy. This is a particular problem with any shared-use vehicle and so you should always allow time for a pre-journey check (2.5).

Unless you are a qualified mechanic, you should not attempt any repairs. Know the limit of your ability, and seek help when necessary.



Someone within your organisation should have overall responsibility for the minibus. This person should ensure that the vehicle receives its routine servicing and keep a watchful eye on the condition of the vehicle.

Even when someone else has overall responsibility the vehicle, **you** must still carry out the pre-journey checks, and report any problems to that person.

Do not drive the vehicle unless you are satisfied about its roadworthiness.

- A minibus requires a current MOT certificate every year after the first year of registration.
- You should know and use the system at your establishment for reporting faults (2.8).
- If the minibus has breakdown cover (5.2), check that you have the telephone number and membership details.
- In the event of mechanical failure, remember you have a primary responsibility for your passengers (2.1). The vehicle comes second.

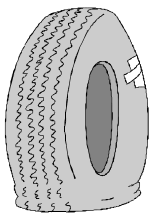


2.5 Pre-journey check

On each occasion that you drive the minibus you should carry out a pre-journey check. With a bit of practice, it should only take a few minutes, but you might prefer to do this before your passengers arrive at the minibus.

At the start of your assessment you will be asked to show how you do the check. Practice beforehand so you know how to operate the vehicle, and where to locate everything. It's usually best to establish a simple routine, eg

- 1 Look when you are approaching the minibus for anything unusual, eg external damage, or fluids under the vehicle.
- 2 Unlock and open the driver's door. Check that the handbrake is on, and holding normally. Check for the fire extinguisher and first aid kit. Release the bonnet catch. Switch on the side-lights and hazard warning lights.
- 3 Move around the vehicle, checking the first tyre, the mirror, lights and windscreen. Check also that the road fund licence (tax) disc is valid.
- 4 Lift and secure the bonnet. Check the fluid levels and general state of the engine.
- 5 Continue checking the next tyre, the mirror and lights.
- 6 Unlock and open the front and side passenger door. Check seats and seatbelts are secure, and that the gangways are clear.
- 7 Continue checking the next tyre, and lights. Also that the spare wheel, exhaust pipe, rear step, any roof rack, etc, are secure.
- 8 Unlock the rear door. Check the gangway is clear.
- 9 Check the remaining lights and tyre.



Tyres are particularly important, damaged or poorly maintained tyres is a common reason for terminating an assessment. Do you know the correct pressures, and the minimum tread depth?

It's worth having a note of the correct pressures somewhere on, or in, the vehicle. **Note** – any value on the tyre will be the maximum for which the tyre is constructed, not the normal running pressure!

For the pre-journey check, see that the tyres appear properly inflated, that the tread is not excessively worn, and that there are no cuts or bulges on the sidewall. None of the wheel nuts should be missing, or obviously loose.

You did fill the windscreen washer bottle when you checked the under-bonnet fluids, didn't you?



Obviously all windows and mirrors must be clean – but would you know the point at which damage to the windscreen makes the vehicle unfit to drive?

Damage to the windscreen must not obstruct the driver's view. Check that any damage is no larger than 40mm in the whole of the swept area (the area covered by the wipers) of the screen and that in the central view of the driver, called 'Zone A' (which is 290mm wide within the swept area and centred on the steering wheel), any damage is no larger than 10mm wide

Once inside the minibus:

- 10 Switch off the hazard lights. Adjust your seat, and all the mirrors.
- 11 Satisfy yourself that the footbrake feels 'normal'.
- 12 Select neutral, and switch on the ignition system. Check the warnings lights are working normally, especially oil pressure, battery charge, handbrake, and fuel. In a diesel vehicle there is usually a glowplug indicator that should extinguish within a second or two.
- 13 Preferably press the clutch down to ensure neutral and to reduce the starter motor load. Start the engine. Check that all warning lights are normal.
- 14 Check the operation of the headlights, brake lights, fog light, reversing light, wipers/washer, horn.
- 15 Switch off any unnecessary items. Consider when would be the best time to carry out a rolling brake test (a simple test on the footbrake system while moving)
 - i. Ideally, do this check before you load your passengers and before you join the main roads. Check your seatbelt is fitted and operating correctly.
 - ii. Choose an area without a camber, alert anyone aboard the minibus, and check carefully that there's no following vehicle.
 - iii. Then, from a fairly low speed, brake firmly to bring the vehicle to a stop. A light hold on the steering wheel will show any effect/pull on the steering.
- 16 Turn off the ignition, and remove the keys.



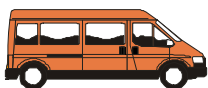
2.6 Vehicle insurance

- The County Council's insurance is valid for their employees using the minibus on official business and with the approval of their line manager.
- If, in addition, you hold a valid Staffordshire Minibus Permit you are also covered for carrying passengers; without the Permit you must not carry passengers, though you may have another adult with you when preparing for your assessment.

Important - your Permit will cease to be valid for any time that you have more than six points on your licence. In such cases, or if you have any other query about the validity of your Permit, or the level of insurance cover, contact the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit.

If you are not a direct employee of the County Council, eg City Council, Scouts, etc, you may still enjoy the same level of cover, but you should check with your line manager or ring the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit

Other organisations will normally have their own insurance and if you are an employee in this situation you will need to take advice directly from your employer as to the level and conditions of cover provided.



2.7 Driver's hours

Recent crashes involving minibuses have highlighted fatigue as a common element. In Staffordshire, most of the minibuses are driven by staff on a voluntary basis, and often outside their normal working hours.

We assume that the total working day will be one of the significant factors in determining the duration/distance of any planned journey, and therefore the County Council strongly recommends the following restrictions.

	LIMIT	NOTES
Daily driving	<u>Maximum</u> of 9 hours	This relates to a 24 hour period from midnight to midnight and concerns the driving of the minibus only. Driving your own vehicle to and from your place of work is not counted.
Daily duty	<u>Maximum</u> of 11 hours	Daily duty is the sum total of all time spent working. A teacher, for example, needs to include the teaching time, plus the marking, preparation, driving the minibus, etc. These 11 hours can be spread out over a 15-hour period. At least 4 hours must be off-duty, ie 'a period where one is free to dispose of one's own time'.
Continuous driving	<u>Maximum</u> of 2 hours	If it is not possible to stop immediately, open a window for fresh air and stop as soon as it is safe and legal. Your concentration will be much improved if you plan your journey with regular breaks for rest and refreshments.
Break period	Minimum of 20 minutes	
Daily rest period	Minimum of 11 hours	This must be between two working days but can be reduced to 8½ hours only once within any given working week.

Significant and unavoidable delays, eg motorway hold-ups and/or diversions need not restrict the completion of the journey as long as the driver considers it safe to do so.

If your journey is a long one, or if it includes either motorway or particularly remote areas, you should

- include a second adult/driver
- plan a route and driver schedule, and agree it with senior staff



2.8 Local practices

In addition to the legal and County requirements, your own establishment may have its own rules. They are certainly likely to have developed working practices which ideally will be set out in a minibus handbook.

A copy should be kept in the vehicle, and the handbook should at least provide the following information.

- The format and requirements for assessing the risk (2.1) for each journey
- The data that must be recorded for each journey, and where it should be logged (usually a log book, also kept in the vehicle)
- A proforma for the pre-journey check (2.5)
- A checklist of what to do if you are involved in a crash (5.1)
- Insurance details: insurer, policy number, telephone number
- Action you should take if a passenger is taken ill (5.3)
- Emergency contact numbers
- Vehicle breakdown information: service provider, membership number, and telephone number
- Copy of the current MOT certificate
- Information about regular (weekly) maintenance checks, and how to report vehicle defects
- How to plan for longer journeys
- Essential details of the vehicle: height, tyre pressures
- Fuel purchase: type of fuel, credit account, and petty cash

You should ensure that you have received adequate training in the safe use of any equipment provided. Discuss any concerns you may have with your Head teacher/line manager.

Some establishments provide a 'minibus pack' that you pick up when collecting the keys. Contents might typically be: mobile phone, high visibility jacket, pen & paper, torch, etc (5.2).

You would be wise to also include a small amount of emergency cash, and/or a credit card.

Your assessor will normally ask you about these points.



3.1 Loading & unloading passengers

Reminder: the driver is responsible for the safety and welfare of the passengers.

You need to make sure that your passengers know the behaviour expected of them and anything that causes a distraction to the driver is potentially dangerous.

- Before loading or unloading passengers ensure that the vehicle is stationary and the handbrake is fully applied. If the vehicle has an automatic gearbox, make sure you have selected 'park'. If it has a manual gearbox and the engine is running, ensure you have selected neutral. Hazard warning lights should be considered if their use would make the vehicle more visible.
- If you leave the driving seat, eg to supervise the loading, remove the keys from the ignition.
- Irrespective of age, there must only be one passenger per seat and seat belts must be worn (3.3).
- Passengers should normally enter or exit by the nearside door, onto the footway, and should be supervised. Always ensure that the door safety catch is in position. At night, make sure the sidelights (not headlights) are on, and if possible park the vehicle facing the direction of traffic flow.
- When parking, take care to select a suitable location. If you have to stop on the main carriageway, the minibus must be clearly visible to other road users. Consider wearing a high visibility jacket, particularly in the dark.
- In specific cases, such as with elderly or disabled passengers, the exact position in which you park may be particularly important, eg closeness to the kerb, distance to walk, space at the rear to operate a wheelchair ramp, etc.
- If there is no alternative except unloading passengers from the side door onto the road, there must be a responsible adult by the door, facing on-coming traffic, and supervising the unloading.
- Normally, use the rear doors as an emergency exit only. Opening these doors can put your passengers on the road instead of on the footway, and at night can mask the rear lights.
- If you have to use the rear doors there must be a responsible adult by the door, facing on-coming traffic, and supervising the unloading. You have a legal requirement to always allow for access to the rear doors.
- Passengers must remain seated whilst the vehicle is in motion. They should not remove their seat belts until instructed. The most common accident when parked is a rear-end shunt and the passengers most at risk are those at the rear of the vehicle.
- You must distribute the load evenly across the vehicle (front/back and left/right). Apart from being a legal requirement, not doing so will definitely affect the handling of the vehicle (particularly the braking and steering).
- Luggage must be stored so that it will not block any of the exits. It would be illegal to do so, and it's one of the first things that the police would look for if you were stopped.



3.2 Maximum permitted load

You, the driver, are legally responsible for ensuring that the total weight of the minibus and its passengers does not exceed the design maximum for the vehicle – referred to as Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM) You'll find this, and other information, on the weight plate that's on all vehicles (it may be by the driver's door pillar but there's no standard place) (1.1).

For a minibus, the maximum MAM is 3500kg (3.5 tonne) (1.1) unless fitted with specialist equipment for carrying disabled passengers when a maximum of up to 4250kg (4.25 tonne) may be allowed.

Ensure you don't overload either front or rear axles – distribute the passenger load between the front and rear of the vehicle.

- The MAM should never be exceeded.
- Carrying the maximum permitted number of passengers is unlikely to overload your minibus, although with older teenagers or adults you may be close to the limit. However, the carriage of luggage either internally or on a roof rack, or the towing of a trailer, may do so.

A typical 17-seat minibus might have a gross vehicle weight of 3500kg, and an unladen weight of 2200kg. The difference in these figures, 1300kg, is the capacity to carry you, your passengers and any luggage.

You should allow for the average weight of an older teenager or adult to be about 75kg (that's 12 stone). Sixteen passengers like this would have a total weight of 1200kg – just within the limit in the example above of 1300kg.

Weigh Bridges

A list of weigh bridges can be obtained by contacting the Road safety & Sustainable Travel Unit



3.3 Seatbelts

All minibuses are now required to have seat belts fitted and wearing them is a legal requirement. No standing passengers are allowed.

Front Seats in Minibuses

- The law requires children, and adults, travelling in the front of all vehicles, including vans, buses, coaches, minibuses and goods vehicles to use an appropriate child restraint or adult seat belts

Rear Seats in Minibuses

Passengers sitting in the rear of minibuses must wear the seat belts that are provided. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that:

- children under 3 years of age use an appropriate child restraint if available.
- children aged between 3 and 11 years, under 1.35 metres tall use an appropriate child restraint if available, or if not available, wear the seat belt.
- children aged 12 and 13 years (and younger children who are 1.35 metres or taller) use the seat belt.
- passengers over the age of 14 years wear a seat belt.

- In Staffordshire, we require the driver to take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate restraints/seat belts are used/worn by all passengers at all times. **No exceptions.**

If you think you have a difficult case, take advice from a senior member of staff, or contact the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit

- Very young or small children may require an approved child restraint system.

Your line manager or the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit will be able to advise on this.



3.4 Journey planning

It is essential that all journeys are properly planned. You need to consider:

- Drivers' hours and rest/comfort stops at least every two hours
This is the maximum time before a break (2.7). Don't be surprised if one of your passengers needs to stop after an hour!
- Journey details
Risk assessment (2.8), distance, duration, type of roads, loading (3.2), condition of the vehicle (2.4) and weather.
- Fitness to drive
You (2.2), your passengers (2.1), and the vehicle (2.4).
- Emergency contact
*Someone not travelling with you, and available at all times (2.8).
Provide details of your destination, planned route and times.*
- Anticipate problems
*Be aware of any individual passenger needs and the operation of all safety equipment carried (2.1 and 2.8).
Know what you will do in any emergency (2.8 and 5.1 – 5.3).
Check Roadwatch, teletext, internet, radio or similar in advance. Some RDS radios can be set to zero volume but will still interrupt for traffic problems.
Carry a map for journeys into less familiar areas. Have alternative routes in mind, and useful phone numbers to hand – and a phone.
Satellite Navigation equipment can be a useful route planning tool (3.5)*
- Second driver and/or escort
*Essential if your circumstances require it (2.8).
Recommended for an extended journey (3.6)*



3.5 Satellite Navigation Systems

'Sat Nav' equipment is becoming increasingly more popular and we are aware that some minibus drivers use them, particularly for longer, or unfamiliar journeys. There are advantages to having the security of not getting lost, but they should never be a complete replacement for a comprehensive route plan.

Be aware that some systems:

- do not identify one-way systems, and may advise drivers to enter a road against the flow
- do not identify roads with a no entry sign
- often identify sharp bends as left or right turns
- can crash or through a 'wobble', especially near mobile phone masts
- may select a route that is unsuitable for larger vehicles
- may not identify in good time which lane to be in when exiting or merging with other motorways

**Do not place equipment where it will restrict the drivers' view
or become a distraction (Highway Code Rule 150)**

Be mindful that each system is different and some are regarded as being better than others. As a general rule, they` can assist the driver with getting from A to B, but you need to be aware of their limitations and individual characteristics.



3.6 Special Needs/Passengers with wheelchairs

If you carry elderly passengers, very young children, or people with recognised physical or behavioural disorders, your establishment will be able to arrange specific additional training and/or support that is appropriate. They are the experts and they are all extremely professional in this kind of work.

In most cases it will be essential to have another adult acting as an escort, and you may be required to carry and/or use additional items of equipment.

Where a vehicle is fitted with a tail -lift to facilitate the boarding and alighting of passengers who use wheelchairs, then for health & safety reasons it is essential that such equipment is used appropriately and that wheelchairs are properly secured within the vehicle. If such equipment is installed, drivers must liaise with their line manager to ensure County Council Policy is followed correctly and to gain access to the available appropriate training.

You should be aware of the County Councils policy which is available in the intranet or your line manager.



3.7 Role of an escort

Escorts are recommended where passengers' needs require it (eg disabled, young children, long journeys), and are essential where establishment guidelines deem them necessary. In the latter case, you will be given specific guidelines about responsibilities and actions required.

In general, the escort's role is to assist in the supervision and safety needs of passengers at all times. You will need to be aware of risk assessment, especially in relation to particular passengers.

- The driver still has the normal responsibilities for the vehicle and passengers (2.1, 2.4, 2.8 and 3.1 – 3.4) but the escort will provide much of the “eyes” and “hands” and it is essential to understand how the duties are best shared.
- An escort can provide valuable supervision during the journey that is beyond the ability of the driver, and can often identify behaviour issues before they become a problem.
- An escort can also be able to assist the driver when manoeuvring the vehicle.



4.1 C.O.A.S.T (Concentration, Observation, Anticipation, Space and Time)

You do not have to be an “advanced” driver, but we do require you to be a responsible driver – always safe, alert and in control, making smooth and efficient progress, and courteous to other road users. These should be apparent in your every-day driving anyway.

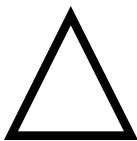
Key skills for every driver are **concentration, effective observation and anticipation**. Many drivers rely on little more than a fixed view ahead, reacting to situations rather than being pro-active and responding to developing situations ahead in good time allowing themselves plenty of **space and time**. You’ll need to constantly plan and scan all around you – checking the middle ground, the far distance, the sides, and the rear. Make sure you are using both door mirrors effectively and frequently, and checking blind spot areas, especially before signalling or moving to left or right. “not seeing it” is the first stage in “not missing it”!

It is a frequent comment from assessors that drivers do not effectively use their mirrors enough. Check yourself when you’re driving your car. Nothing should overtake you by surprise. Smaller and vulnerable road users are at particular risk because your vision is more limited in a minibus.

Check, too, that you’re seeing all the road signs and markings. Do you understand them all? Change of speed signs are frequently missed, perhaps because they are often at roundabouts or road junctions where your attention can be distracted.

An all around awareness is essential too, especially in a vehicle with quite limited visibility. It’s not much good seeing if you’re not putting it all together so as to be aware of exactly what is happening all you. This is critical at busy roundabouts, on motorways, in urban areas where other road users are near, etc.

You are an experienced car driver which means you should be good at anticipation – the ability to draw on your experience and, from your observation and awareness, know what is likely, or might, or could happen next. The trouble is we can get lazy in our driving and these skills demand a high level of concentration.



A hazard warning sign may require a reduction in speed, or a change in direction, so always check your mirrors in good time. If your anticipation is correct you will have the information to deal more safely with following traffic as well as the hazard itself.

Good anticipation is a hallmark of the good driver, and we will be looking for clear signs of this in your driving. Anticipation means you are much more likely to be in the the right position, at the right speed, and in the right gear to handle hazards safely. Good anticipation is the way you will avoid any sudden change of speed or direction, the way you will have an exit from any potentially dangerous situation, the way you will instil confidence in your passengers, and the way you will always have an uneventful journey.

You may be asked for a commentary for a short time during the driving assessment. This is when you can explain what you are seeing, what it means to you as a driver (eg a hazard), and what you are anticipating. Try to explain how you are dealing with each situation, eg “There is a bus ahead that has



stopped at a bus stop and there may be people crossing the road, or the bus may move off without much warning, so I am checking my mirrors, slowing down, changing gear, signalling to overtake, but prepared to brake if necessary". This will help with maintaining your concentration and focus on the driving task.

4.2 Control: braking, steering, speed, etc

The way you operate the controls of the vehicle is important for the safety and comfort of your passengers. You may need to practise in the minibus because the controls may be quite different in a number of ways from your own car.

Don't be offended by any advice provided by your assessor. It's not intended to be a catalogue of errors, but just a series of prompts against which you can check your own driving, and to indicate the standards the assessor will want to see.

You will obviously be familiar with the clutch and gears so that you always move off smoothly but do you always follow the Highway Code advice in Rule 159 especially the last part? Many minibus collisions, and near misses, happen at low speed in places like car parks (4.3) either because of inadequate observation (4.1) or poor control.

You can tell a lot about a driver's observation and anticipation by watching their braking. Aim to use your brakes only when necessary. Most braking can be avoided by looking further ahead and anticipating. Think about releasing the accelerator in good time and, if appropriate, changing gear. You should, though, consider the value of a light touch on the brakes if it would help to warn following traffic that you are slowing. The most common type of accident is a rear-end shunt!

Good braking aims to balance the suspension as the vehicle stops, and requires three stages. First, a very gentle application to avoid an initial snatch. Then, once the brakes are working, an increasingly firm pressure, sufficient to stop a few metres short of the final stopping point. Finally, just as the vehicle is stopping (literally the last metre or two), gently relax some of the pressure on the brakes. It's this last step that vastly improves the quality of your braking, plus giving you a margin of safety should you have misjudged your braking or the grip on the road.

Steering is another key area of control and probably one of the most important. You need to demonstrate accuracy in a deliberate and unhurried manner, and understand that pulling rather than pushing is the better option when steering around a hazard. Of course, if a lot of steering is needed, you will both pull and push. Crossing your hands may be appropriate in some manoeuvring situations but is best avoided, and especially at speed.

Since steering often involves steering one way followed by steering the opposite way, you really need both hands on the steering wheel for smooth and accurate steering. In a multiple hazard situation such as a busy high street you won't always know which way you'll need to steer first so, again, both hands available is best. Try not to get too involved with gear changes or signalling at the same time as steering – they should normally have been done earlier if they were required.



Remember, too, the length of the vehicle and the additional problems this creates when turning sharp left corners. Practise sufficiently to ensure you don't catch the rear wheel against the kerb, using the left mirror appropriately.

Driving smoothly is not only more comfortable but it reduces the wear to the transmission system. Remember, the vehicle rides on a suspension system and any sudden change in acceleration or braking will pitch the vehicle forwards and backwards, and up and down.

This is particularly evident in a minibus. Under acceleration, for example, the front of the vehicle tends to lift, so before changing up a gear relax the accelerator for a moment allowing the vehicle to 'settle'. This levels the vehicle and helps to achieve a smoother gear change.

The control of speed is obviously very important for safety reasons and you must demonstrate a clear understanding of a safe and responsible speed for any situation you meet. Not only does a higher speed mean you have less time in which to react, but any crash damage will be more severe.

Know the speed limits for a minibus (2.3). Pay particular attention to keeping within the 30mph limit. This is the one that gives most drivers a problem.

Many drivers use the accelerator just to increase speed. It can and should be much more than that. As soon as you see any hazard ahead, including brake or indicator lights, stop accelerating! Only resume when the hazard is under control. If possible, use gentle acceleration around bends – don't approach too fast, and select the right gear well beforehand.

Most of your driving involves moving out of one hazard and towards the next, and sometimes having to deal with several hazards at the same time. A general guide, then, on approach to each hazard is

- look well ahead, anticipate events and plan for each (signal if necessary)
- get into the best position – this confirms your intention, and maximises your view without comprising your safety
- reduce speed if appropriate – by releasing the accelerator and, if necessary, braking (as gently as possible)
- select the gear you need for the hazard (preferably no more than one gear change so as to keep both hands on the steering wheel as much as possible)

Try not to do anything suddenly, the more other road users are aware of your intended action, the safer you will be.

Finally in this section, do you use the handbrake when the vehicle comes to rest? Or do you wait, perhaps in gear, and foot on the footbrake? You could be waiting for pedestrians to cross, or at traffic lights. What if a vehicle approaching from behind runs into you? It's the most common accident. As your minibus is pushed suddenly forwards, you will be thrown backwards – possibly with considerable force. The result is that your foot will lift off the brake allowing the minibus to move into the pedestrians or dangerously into a road junction. Use the handbrake instead. You can always use the footbrake as well if you want, for instance if you want to warn traffic approaching behind that you're stationary.



4.3 Manoeuvring

Most of our minibus insurance claims in Staffordshire are for incidents when manoeuvring, so it's important that you can reverse safely and smoothly, and demonstrate a high level of competence.

There may be natural opportunities at the start of your assessment such as manoeuvring in a confined space, or around buildings or vehicles in a car park. You may also be asked, for example, to "show how you would turn the vehicle around at this point". This gives you the opportunity to select the manoeuvre but you should be able to explain the choice you make, the local circumstances that you are considering, and the safety aspects involved.

A minibus presents particular problems:

- its length
- restricted rearward vision

Some manoeuvres that you might consider in a car will not be practical with the extra length and longer turning circle of a minibus.

Your level of observation is every bit as important as your accuracy, and a constant watch in all directions is expected throughout any manoeuvre. Anticipation and consideration for other road users is always characteristic of a good driver.

Effective use of both door mirrors is essential but not a substitute for frequently looking in all directions. The door mirrors are usually very useful in a minibus, especially if you have set the left one to be able to see the rear wheel or wheel arch. In fact, you should find some aspects of reversing easier than in a car.

When you can, manoeuvre without passengers – the vision through the side and rear windows will be improved, and you'll feel there are less eyes watching you.

Ideally, have a reliable adult to assist you, making sure they understand that they need to keep within your vision. Don't rely on them totally – you are still responsible for the vehicle. Sometimes you may have to get out of the minibus and look for yourself before reversing further.

Try to always be moving when you turn the steering wheel – it's less damaging to the tyres and steering system.

The manoeuvres you should be familiar with are:

- turning at a sharp corner
understand how much the rear wheel cuts the corner
- reversing within a confined space, or into a narrow width
confident to drive within 30cm (1 foot) of any obstruction
- reversing around a corner
reasonably close to the kerb without scuffing it
- turning the vehicle around (three-point turn)
know how much road width you need



4.4 Junctions, including roundabouts

If we define a junction as the place where two or more roads meet, we can include roundabouts as being a particular type of junction.

Junctions are relatively dangerous sections of road, probably because they require not only the major controls of brakes, gears, steering and acceleration but all the higher driving skill levels of observation, judgement and anticipation. Even when these skills are well-developed, they are often applied in a haphazard way.

In addition, all these skills are always affected by a lack of concentration so even a skillful driver can 'lose it' when distracted.

Assuming then a high level of concentration, your first priority should be the initial observation (4.1). Are there particular hazards at this junction? Are there warning or mandatory road signs? How many roads? Who has priority? How good is the vision? Any problems with the road surface? How much traffic? What is your speed? What is following, and how close? As you continue to approach, you may acquire further information to update decisions and actions you are taking.

Do you know which route you intend to take? Do you need to change lane? Is a signal necessary? Could other drivers be misled by your timing of steering or signalling?

As an example, if you need to move to the lane on your right and another vehicle is close to overtaking you, signalling early may cause the other driver to brake, unsure if you're going to change lane in front of them. Would it be better to let them get level with you before signalling?

Early positioning is important but may be influenced by the volume of traffic, the position of parked vehicles, and any other hazards around or developing. If you are approaching a junction on your left, and it is safe to do so, consider moving towards the crown of the road. It creates additional space, and therefore time, in which to react if a vehicle emerges, and it creates a much better angle to see into the junction, and for waiting cars to see you. You don't want to be too close to the vehicle ahead, either. It can severely restrict your view, especially if it's a 'solid' vehicle like a transit van.

Your next priority should be your approach speed (4.2), probably too high at present. Think about how you are going to slow down. One option is to use the lower gears, and this may be the way you were taught to drive. All professional instructors now teach that you should use the footbrake as the primary way to slow the vehicle, for the following reasons:

- it immediately warns following drivers

Following vehicles can sometimes be slow to react. By using the gears you are relying on the following vehicles noticing that they are catching up with you, and this always takes longer than if they see brake lights.



- it allows you to keep your hands on the steering wheel as you approach a hazard

A fully loaded minibus is not the most stable vehicle and steering must be a very high priority, especially approaching a hazard that will require precise steering. Why steer one-handed when you don't have to?

- it balances the vehicle better by applying a decelerating force to all the wheels

The footbrake acts on the wheels on both axles, not just the driving axle.

However, use of the lower gears is still valuable when descending steep hills, and when driving on particularly slippery roads.

Don't be over-concerned if you find this use of the brakes difficult to accept. If you still use the gears excessively, we may ask you about it, but the over-riding concern is always safety and you should be able to drive safely using either method.

By now, you may have further information, eg approaching traffic at the junction, their distance, speed, and likely course, and there may be developments behind you or to the side.

Don't forget that this is a minibus! It doesn't accelerate like a sports car, especially when fully loaded – you need a larger space to move into. And if you did push the accelerator hard as you steer, the vehicle will roll and lose stability, and your passengers will be uncomfortable and start to lose confidence in you. Take your time!

You may have decided you will be stopping anyway, you may be planning to emerge into a gap in the traffic, or you may be approaching cautiously keeping both options open. Whichever, you should be deciding on your final approach speed and therefore the gear you will need for the junction. Ideally, it should be just one gear change, and selected whilst not turning the steering wheel so that you maintain the steering input.

With a final observation to left and right, and confirmation that it is safe to emerge, you plan to accelerate away from the hazard. Gear changes whilst not steering, of course!



4.5 Higher speed roads

You need to be comfortable driving on faster roads, up to the posted speed limit if the conditions are appropriate, the vehicle is capable and it's safe to do so. This includes motorways and high speed dual carriageways where you will need to demonstrate:

- a knowledge of basic motorway regulations
Highway Code rules 253 - 273
A minibus is not restricted in the lanes that can be used on a motorway (unless it has a speed limiter fitted see 2.3)
- safe use of the slip roads for entry and exit
Know your vehicle and its limitations in accelerating
- good lane discipline
It can be reasonable to stay in lane two if you'd need to move out again within, say, ten seconds to reduce lane switching, but dependent on your effect on following traffic.
- a safe following distance
Two-second rule (Highway Code, Rule 126)
Increase the distance if the road is wet
- effective observation of all traffic
Look even further ahead than normal
Use your mirrors frequently, and be aware of the blind-spot areas
- anticipation of all other traffic
Judging speed and distance, and identifying vehicles likely to change lane
- correct signalling
Understand the value of signalling in good time (several seconds before acting)
- safe overtaking if appropriate
Blind-spot check (Highway Code, Rule 163)
- a knowledge of safety issues
Preparation (2.5), vehicle breakdown (5.2) and passenger safety (2.1)
Effect of crosswinds, and turbulence from large vehicles

In the section giving advice if your vehicle breaks down (5.2) there are some specific points about higher speed roads, including motorways. The effects of speed are to give everyone less time to see and react, and more severe damage or injury in the event of a collision.



4.6 Overtaking

Most drivers will recognise two levels of overtaking:

- passing an obstruction in the road, or some kind of slow-moving road user
- overtaking a vehicle travelling at a moderate speed, or more

In each case you will have to move closer to, and possibly onto, the opposite side of the road and this risk needs assessing. Observation is always the first stage, and the earlier you can see the problem the better you should be able to react.

If your observation is limited, say by poor weather or night driving, you will have to take extra care, eg proceed more slowly.

The issue with any obstruction is whether or not it poses hidden risks, eg the car door that may be opened unexpectedly, or the pedestrian who walks around the front of a bus to cross the road. And what about the vehicle following you? Have they seen the risk ahead? Might they overtake you thinking you're just moving rather slowly? It's often a good idea to use a signal before starting to overtake, especially in a larger vehicle like a minibus which can block views, and then to make a further mirror check before steering out.

Use your experience to decide when it is safe to pass and how much extra room you need to allow, and travel at a speed where you can stop if necessary.

Slow moving road users are often either vulnerable people (4.8) or very large vehicles. If you need to follow for a while, perhaps because your view ahead is obscured, keep a good distance behind. If it's a vehicle with mirrors, position yourself so you can be seen. If it's farm traffic be aware that the indicators may not exist, may not work, may be hidden, etc. Beware of vehicles turning right!

Overtaking a vehicle travelling at speed is probably the most dangerous manoeuvre on the road, particularly on a single carriageway, and crashes that result are often fatal because the impact speeds are so high.

Clear vision and good judgement are obviously essential, but so is knowing the capability of your vehicle. Also essential, though we don't always think about it, is having the need to overtake. Why do you want to overtake the vehicle ahead? There is always a risk. What is the gain? Is the gain worth the risk?

Recognising that a minibus will take a long time to build any useful speed, especially when loaded, it's unlikely that you should be considering overtaking any fast vehicle in a minibus. At least, not on a single carriageway road.

It's different on a dual carriageway or motorway where vision is usually better and you don't have on-coming traffic. Both these factors reduce the risk considerably and mean you can take your time building speed.

- All vehicles have blindspots (areas not fully covered by your mirrors). When you plan to overtake, take a moment to check your right-hand mirror, signal in good time (if necessary), then check your mirror again and your blindspot by looking over your right shoulder. Do ALL this BEFORE you start turning the steering wheel. It reduces risk substantially.



4.7 Adverse weather

Adverse weather can range from rain through to severe ice and snow. We all tend to take extra care when the weather is extreme but can often disregard lesser conditions such as rain. Driving without regard for the conditions is dangerous.

You may not always be able to avoid driving in less than good weather. You should avoid driving a minibus in snow, and be especially cautious when the road could be icy. In cold weather, watch for areas that are in shade or exposed to wind – they reduce the temperature which can produce black ice, and a slope that makes water run across the road – often at a bend on a hill.

Poor weather can:

- reduce your vision (and make your vehicle less visible)
- reduce your grip on the road
- make your vehicle harder to control

Seeing less well means slowing down, and using lights that are appropriate for the circumstances (Highway Code, Rule 226). You will probably also have to use the ventilation/heating systems in the vehicle, and perhaps the wipers. If spray from other vehicles is a problem, keep well back.

Less grip on the road means your braking distance is increased yet you must always be able to stop well within the distance you can see to be clear (Highway Code, Rule 126). In rain you need to allow up to twice the normal distance. If the steering is lighter than normal, you are probably losing traction with the road. Slow down.

Any sudden action that affects your speed or direction can cause a loss of control. Vehicles don't skid on their own – it's the driver that causes it by braking, accelerating or steering too harshly for the road conditions. Retain control by very gentle use of all the controls. In severe conditions, use a lower gear to slow down rather than braking, and a high gear in normal driving to reduce acceleration. That reduces two of the three problems! Then steer as gently as you can, and do it without either brakes or accelerator.

Think about the effect of crosswinds so that you are not caught out when you emerge from behind a large vehicle or structure that has been providing shelter.

Accidents in fog are common. It's not the fog, of course. It's the drivers who don't adapt enough to the conditions. Keep a good space ahead of you. In thick fog, don't just follow the lights of the car ahead. If you do, you're probably already too close.

No journey is so urgent that it justifies risking an accident.

Take your time! – it's better 'late' than 'never'



4.8 Vulnerable road users

They are everywhere! And many of them do not realise how vulnerable they are. They may be young or inexperienced. Or they may be much older and suffering a deterioration in the key senses of sight or hearing. Who knows ... they may be just like us but for some reason inattentive or distracted for the moment.

They may not be looking around, and they usually don't have rear mirrors! In fact, this is usually the first problem – they may not be not aware of your approach.

They may be in a busy town area where there is a lot of traffic movement and obstructions to vision. They may be in rural areas, on the road, around the next bend or over the next hill.

Often they have little or no protection against a motor vehicle. And in the case of a horse rider, or a farm worker with cattle, they have limited control.

All drivers have an obligation towards slower and more vulnerable road users. You must do more than see them – you must anticipate where they might be and what they might do.

Use of the horn can be appropriate on some occasions but it can also startle and cause a further problem, so it needs to be used with care.

The only safe action when vulnerable road users are ahead is to

- slow down
- be patient
- wait until you have their attention
- pass with extra space, low speed, and minimum noise



5.1 Involvement in a collision

The legal requirement is that in the event of a collision which causes damage or injury to any other person, vehicle, animal or property you must:-

- Stop – give your vehicle registration number, your name and address (and the vehicle owner's name and address if different) to anyone with reasonable grounds for requiring them (Highway Code, Rule 286).

If any person is injured (other than yourself) you must provide your insurance details and report the incident to the police at the time or as soon as possible afterwards (and in any case within 24 hours).

You may have other obligations which will have been made clear to you. Make sure you have read and understood any operating manual or policy documents provided by your establishment (2.8), and know what is expected of you.

Do you know your establishment contact number for an emergency? Will you have a phone with you? Do you know the breakdown service telephone number?

Typically, do this:

- **STOP** at the scene of the incident
*You need to park safely – consider injured people, vehicle damage, and traffic.
Apply the handbrake, switch off the ignition, and switch on the hazard lights.
If it's dark or poor visibility, switch off the headlights, but leave the sidelights on.
Your first concern is the safety and welfare of the passengers – stay with them.*
- If people are injured get someone to call the emergency services
*Or if there is a particular danger such as fire.
If no-one is injured, report the incident to the police as soon as you can.*
- If it is safe to do so, move your passengers away from the immediate area.
*Watch for approaching traffic. Wear a high visibility jacket if you have one.
Do not move injured people unless there is an immediate danger to them.
If you do move your passengers, put them clear of any further danger.
If they remain in the vehicle, make sure they continue to wear their seatbelts.
Reassure your passengers.*
- Give emergency first aid if you are able
Know your own limitations, and your establishment policy.



- Exchange details including name and address (you plus other driver), vehicle owners and their addresses, both registration numbers, and both insurers

Have this prepared and in the glove box. It saves a lot of worry at the time.

Make a note, too, of other vehicles involved or close by, their registration numbers, witnesses, and the accident details. A sketch is valuable.

- Phone your contact number
Always have this number to hand. Let them make any other calls that are needed.
- If needed, call the breakdown service
You may be in shock yourself. Do not drive unless you are sure of your ability, your passengers are relaxed, and the vehicle is undamaged.

For the purposes of a road traffic collision, the law defines an animal as being one of: horse, goat, sheep, dog, cattle, ass, mule, pig. Sorry, this doesn't include cats or other cute furry critters!



5.2 Vehicle breakdown

Prevention is better than cure, as they say. You as the driver and your establishment, have a duty to see that the vehicle is properly maintained, and you should be diligent in reporting any fault, with the exact intention of avoiding a breakdown.

Breakdowns do happen, though, so be prepared. Read the advice below and make sure you and the minibus are suitably equipped for any reasonable eventuality.

Useful items to have with you on any journey: pen and paper, mobile phone and contact numbers, maps, tissues, insurance and breakdown details, some cash including change and/or credit card, high visibility jacket, torch, and warning triangle.

- Ensure you are parked safely
 - Off the road if possible. You may be able to 'limp' the vehicle a short distance.*
 - Apply the handbrake, switch off the ignition, and switch on the hazard lights.*
 - If it's dark or poor visibility, switch off the headlights, but leave the sidelights on.*
 - Consider using a warning triangle, but not if you're on a motorway.*
 - Your first concern must be the safety and welfare of the passengers – stay with them.*
- Wear or carry something bright/fluorescent/reflective, especially if you have to walk in the dark
 - Is this an item carried in the minibus?*
- Consider moving your passengers out of the vehicle
 - Not an automatic decision, but it's safer when you're parked on a high speed road.*
 - If you do this, put the passengers where they will be clear of any potential collision.*
 - If passengers remain in the vehicle, make sure they continue to wear seatbelts.*
 - Reassure your passengers.*
- Identify your location, and ring the breakdown service
 - The telephone number and membership details need to be readily to hand.*
 - Don't try to repair it yourself – unless you are qualified and have prior approval from your line manager.*
- Don't stand in the road
 - Behind the vehicle risks obscuring the vehicle lights.*
 - In front risks injury from a shunt accident.*
 - Stay with your passengers.*
- Phone your contact number



Additionally, if you are on motorway

- It's generally better to leave at the next exit or at a service station rather than stop on the hard shoulder, if that's possible
- If you do have to stop on the hard shoulder, try to get close to one of the emergency telephones and use it in preference to a mobile phone

Explain that the vehicle is a minibus with children aboard.

- The risk of a high-speed rear end shunt is greater, so there's more of a reason to move the passengers away from the vehicle

Use the side door, and put passengers up the embankment and/or

behind barriers.

If some passengers are in wheelchairs, seriously consider avoiding motorways.



5.3 Passenger illness

Part of any journey risk assessment (2.1) should be to know about any of your passengers that have a serious medical problem, the symptoms to watch for, and the action that you may need to take.

Your establishment will have policies about how you must deal with a range of these situations (2.8) and you should therefore know what you are expected to do, including any less serious problems such as headaches, minor cuts or bruises, etc. This should include information about using the first aid kit which must be in the vehicle, and whether sterile gloves and mouth masks must be used (they are not part of the standard first aid kit).

There may be specific guidance, for instance, about when to call the emergency services, and procedures to follow.

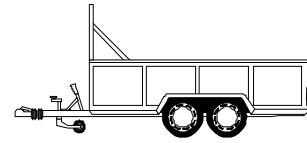
In some cases, you may have to plan your route with additional care. At other times you may be required to have another adult in the minibus as an escort.

You should always keep the appropriate people fully informed by using your contact number.



6.1 Towing a trailer

You need to know that you are not insured under the County Council's policy when towing a trailer unless you hold the Minibus Trailer permit. To get this involves passing a further driving assessment using a trailer, and can either be included with the normal minibus assessment if we know in advance, or can be taken separately at a later date. You are expected to provide both the minibus and a suitable trailer.



Unless you intend to tow a trailer, you can skip the rest of this section.

The licensing regulations for towing changed significantly from 1st January 1997 and affects anyone who took their car driving test after this date. If you passed your test before 1997, you are not affected.

The main changes are that post-1997 drivers:

- are not licenced to draw a trailer of 750kg or more without taking a further specific DSA (Driving Standards Agency) driving test (category B+E)
- must ensure that the laden weight of the trailer does not exceed the kerbweight of the towing vehicle

The vehicle weight plate (1.1) shows both the Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM) and the Gross Train Weight (GTW). GVW is the maximum laden weight of the towing vehicle whilst GTW is the maximum laden weight of the towing vehicle plus its trailer. You must be able to assess the weight of the passengers and any luggage carried, using a public weight bridge if necessary.

Overloading a vehicle is an offence for which the driver is responsible.

You are expected to know the specific figures for your vehicle but here is an example based on a typical LDV 400 minibus:

Gross Train Weight = 5000kg
Kerbside weight (ie vehicle + driver) = 2145kg
so, maximum weight of the trailer (loaded) = 2855kg

This, though, is an unsafe (and in some cases illegal) combination because the trailer weight massively exceeds the kerbside weight of the towing vehicle. If the brakes are applied when the vehicle and its trailer are not in a straight line, a 'jack-knife' is likely. You must ensure that the laden trailer weight is less than the kerbweight of the towing vehicle, preferably no more than 85% of it.

As the minibus is loaded, it's weight increases and this will then decrease the maximum towing weight. As an example, for an older Transit minibus:

Gross Train Weight = 4400kg
Minibus loaded to capacity = 3500kg
so, maximum weight of the trailer (loaded) = 900kg

This is a safer situation but expect much poorer vehicle performance than normal.



Staffordshire County Council requires the following to be observed by all drivers at all times:

- Maximum Trailer Weight (MTW) marked on the front nearside of the trailer in letters not less than 25mm high
- MTW not to exceed 1500kg with trailer brakes, or 750kg without
- MTW not to exceed the Kerbside Weight of the minibus (preferably < 85%)
- Gross Train Weight (GTW) not to be exceeded

A trailer increases the load on the back axle and correspondingly reduces the load on the front axle. This changes the vehicle handling characteristics and, to minimise this effect, the loading in the trailer must be adjusted to ensure the weight it exerts on the towing vehicle does not exceed 100kg. The heaviest items in the trailer should be close to the trailer axle, and as low in the trailer as possible to increase stability.

The trailer test will test your knowledge and ability to hitch and unhitch the trailer safely, to correctly attach the safety brake cable where fitted, and to check the lighting circuits carefully. Remember to check that the trailer number plate matches that on the towing vehicle.

You should routinely stop after the first few miles to check the trailer security and brakes.

You will need to show that you can safely manage the additional length and weight in normal driving, and you will be asked to reverse the trailer in a straight line and around or between obstacles to park it in a specific location. Be aware of the problems of access and parking when towing a trailer.

Remember that

- on a motorway the addition of the trailer reduces your maximum speed limit to 60mph and you must not use the right-most lane when there are three or more lanes.
- snaking is a loss of directional control resulting from driving too fast for the conditions – the correct action is to ease off the accelerator and slow gently. If you're travelling downhill, use the lower gears to slow you down. Only use the brakes if absolutely necessary, and then only as little as possible.
- loads should not overhang the trailer; if they do they may need to be marked in daylight and carry lights at night.



6.2 Using a roof rack

A roof rack is not recommended but we recognise that some organisations do use them. Most of the time they'll probably run empty but it is essential that the security of the rack itself is confirmed at each pre-journey check (2.5).

Their use is to increase the carrying capacity of the vehicle, but therein lies the problem. In fact, there are two problems: the load itself (it's weight, shape and size), and its attachment to the roof rack.

Fixing a load of even a modest weight will affect the handling of the vehicle because you are raising the overall centre of gravity. The heavier the load, the greater the effect on the steering and the braking.

Do not use a roof rack to carry normal luggage. It's far too heavy. Taking a group on a residential course means you need less passengers than normal to be able to accommodate their luggage, or a separate vehicle to carry their luggage, or perhaps the use of a trailer (6.1).

Even if the load is not heavy, it may present a significant surface area when fitted to a roof rack and become unstable at speed. And its size could increase your vehicle height or width.

Of course, securing any load to the roof rack requires some thought and experience. You may be surprised at the forces generated when braking, steering, or even just driving over a pothole in the road.

Having set off with a load which you believe to be secure, check it after a few miles. Is it still secure? Has it moved at all?

6.3 Taking a minibus abroad

Taking a minibus abroad is complicated and involves a considerable amount of preparation since different regulations apply. The driver may have to take a further DSA driving test for passenger carrying vehicles, the vehicle may need modifications, and additional insurance will probably be required.

There are unlikely to be any cost savings overall, and little if any advantage. We strongly advise you to consider hiring a bus and driver from a reputable coach hire company.

6.4 Child seats in minibuses

Following recent changes to seatbelt legislation, relating to the use of booster seats and child restraints, Staffordshire County Council has issued the following guidance:

- Taxis and small minibuses (8 passenger seats or less) – if the passenger in the front seat of the vehicle is 12 years of age or under, or less than 135cm (4'5") tall, the operator must provide and use the appropriate child seat and restraint. The new legislation relates to the front seat only, there is no requirement for the operator to provide additional seating in the rear of the vehicle.



- For minibuses and contracted coaches and buses (above 8 passenger seats), the only requirement on the operator regarding the use of childseats, relates to the front seat only, whereby if a child under the age of 3 is being carried in the front seat the operator must provide and use the appropriate child seat and restraint. However, every seat in the vehicle must have a notice displayed near by to remind the passenger that the seat belt provided should be worn on every journey. Alternatively, the driver must make an announcement at the beginning of every journey, to remind passengers they must wear their seat belt.

6.5 People Carriers

Some establishments operate people carriers rather than minibuses. The County Council does not have a specific policy relating to the use of people carriers, however, drivers can be referred to the Minibus Driver Training and Assessment scheme as a matter of 'good practice'.

Where a driver takes their assessment in a people carrier, the following will apply:

- Driver will be issued with a permit restricting driving to a people carrier (not a minibus)
- Medical clearance is not required (you should check with your establishment to determine whether they have any in-house requirements)

To apply to take an assessment in a people carrier, the normal Minibus Driver Training and Assessment scheme booking form should be duly completed and the box ticked indicating that you are applying for a people carrier permit.



7.1 Step by step

Please do not under-estimate the need for adequate preparation.

Some of you may already be familiar with driving a minibus, or with driving a similar type of vehicle, but this assessment is likely to be quite different from any driving test you have taken. Your assessment involves both practical and theory elements.

Step 1 – Read this whole manual carefully, together with a current version of the Highway Code, and any relevant literature at your establishment. If you have any questions, check first with other Minibus Permit holders that you know, or with your line manager. You can also ring the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit.

Step 2 – Do you have access to a vehicle? It must be a minibus, not a people carrier, and should preferably be the one you will use for your assessment. Make sure you are insured to drive it (2.6), and see if you can arrange for an existing Minibus Permit holder to give you some initial guidance.

- Make sure you are familiar with all the controls, you know or can find basic information about the vehicle (eg height, weight, type of fuel, tyre pressures, etc), and you can access the engine bay for basic checks (2.5).
- Practise until you are thoroughly confident about the vehicle and your ability to drive it well. Section 4 on Driving Skills will give you a good idea of the standard of driving we expect. You will need to drive on all types of roads – country lanes to motorways – and in all types of traffic conditions.
- Practise manoeuvring as a way of becoming familiar with the dimensions and limited visibility of the vehicle.
- Develop your positive attitude to safety. Be very alert and aware, allow good safety margins, but make progress when it is appropriate. A good driver is not usually hesitant.

Even an experienced driver who is familiar with a minibus is likely to need several hours with the vehicle. If you have not driven this type of vehicle before you are obviously likely to need longer.

Step 3 – Check the regulations that apply to Minibus Permit holders (this manual), and general driving law / good practice (Highway Code).

- Read and re-read the manual until you are sure you know it all. You will be asked a number of questions about its contents. If the publication date is more than a couple of years ago, check if there have been later revisions.
- Check the Highway Code again – it's surprising how much we can forget and, of course, the Code itself has changed over time.

Step 4 – Get a colleague to check your driving. Test your theory knowledge (7.2).

Step 5 – Book your assessment (7.3).



7.2 Test your knowledge


These questions are the type that you will be asked during your assessment and should be helpful revision for you. The answers are on the following pages.

- 1 When using a minibus, who is responsible for ensuring that child passengers are wearing their seat belts?
- 2 The Highway Code says that you must not cross or straddle a solid white line in the centre of the road. Are there any exceptions?
- 3 When are you legally not allowed to overtake?
- 4 What precautions would you take when making a journey in the fog?
- 5 How would you know if you were in a 30 mph speed limit area, assuming there were no signs to indicate 30mph?
- 6 What are the main factors in deciding what is a safe speed?
- 7 How many standing passengers are you allowed to carry on a minibus?
- 8 When driving a minibus on a National Speed Limit single carriageway road, what is your maximum permitted speed?
- 9 If you are carrying a wheelchair passenger in your minibus, in which direction should they face, and how many fire extinguishers must you carry?
- 10 While driving on the motorway, an overhead sign in your lane has red flashing lights and a red cross. What does it mean?
- 11 If you are driving a minibus with 16 'adult' passenger seats, how many 'small' children are you allowed to carry?
- 12 What is the maximum number of hours you may drive a minibus in any 24-hour period?
- 13 How many hours of continuous minibus driving are you allowed before a break is necessary?
- 14 If you park on the street at night, do you need to have your lights on?
- 15 What does this road-sign mean?



- 16 How might it be possible to overload the rear axle of a minibus?
- 17 How can you improve your observation skills when driving?
- 18 What is meant by Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM)?
- 19 You have to stop a minibus on the carriageway to alight passengers, what precautions would you adopt? Would these be different at night?
- 20 If your minibus were to break down on a motorway, which would be better: using a mobile telephone or a motorway emergency telephone, and why?
- 21 What emergency equipment must be carried on a minibus?
- 22 If seat belts are fitted, is it law that they have to be worn?
- 23 Are you allowed in the third lane of a motorway?
- 24 What is the meaning of a green traffic light?
- 25 Can you drive in a bus lane?
- 26 Is it illegal to park close to a junction?
- 27 If your vehicle breaks down on an automatic half-barrier crossing, what should you do?
- 28 What precautions would you adopt when unloading passengers through the rear doors?
- 29 How many seats does a minibus have?
- 30 How many points can a Minibus Permit holder have on their licence?



- 31 Is a risk assessment necessary for every journey?
- 32 Is the Highway Code the 'law' about driving?
- 33 What is the legal minimum tyre tread depth for a minibus and at what point should tyres be renewed?
- 34 Is it alright to change a wheel on a minibus?
- 35 What shape are the mandatory road signs?
- 36 Our minibus doesn't need an MOT because it's only 2 years old. OK?
- 37 Your journey in the minibus follows on from a colleague who's just returned. Do you need to carry out a pre-journey check?
- 38 What is the difference between a pelican crossing and a puffin crossing?
- 39 Do the doors on the minibus have to be unlocked when it is being driven?
- 40 What precautions are particularly important before a long journey?
- 41 What does it mean when another driver flashes his headlights?
- 42 What action is necessary if you inadvertently put petrol into a diesel-engined vehicle?
- 43 What does this road-sign mean?

- 44 When driving a minibus on a National Speed Limit dual carriageway road, what is your maximum permitted speed?
- 45 Will I fail the assessment if I didn't know what the tyre pressures should be?
- 46 What precautions should you take when leaving the driver's seat?
- 47 Are front fog-lights allowed at night?
- 48 Which doors would you use for loading or unloading passengers?
- 49 Does every minibus have a weight plate, and where would you look for it?
- 50 How often should drivers check their mirrors?
- 51 What's the first action you should take when you see a hazard situation ahead?
- 52 What does the acronym C.O.A.S.T. stand for?
- 53 What are the three stages of normal braking?
- 54 What are the additional problems created by driving a longer vehicle?
- 55 In what ways is driving a minibus different from driving a car?
- 56 Why is it generally wrong to change gear whilst turning the steering wheel?
- 57 What is the two-second rule?
- 58 What kind of poor driving conditions might you expect to meet whilst driving a minibus?
- 59 Must headlights be used when driving at night on a well-lit road?
- 60 What causes a vehicle to skid?



References relate either to the Staffordshire Minibus Training Manual or the Highway Code (HC).

- 1 It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that all passengers under the age of 14 wear seatbelts (HC R99 - 101). However, it is the policy of Staffordshire County Council that the driver is responsible for ensuring that all passengers wear seatbelts (3.3). This also applies to the driver.
- 2 You may only cross a solid white line in the centre of the road (HC R128 - 129) to
 - pass a stationary vehicle
 - enter premises or side roads
 - overtake a pedal cyclists, horse or road maintenance vehicle, if they are travelling at 10 miles per hour or less, BUT, only if it is safe to do so
- 3 You must not overtake (HC R165 - 166)
 - if you would have to cross double white lines (solid line on your side) – unless answer 2 applied
 - if you would enter a hatched area bounded with a solid line
 - the nearest vehicle to a pedestrian crossing
 - if you would enter a reserved lane (buses, bikes, etc)
 - when a 'no overtaking' sign applies

You also shouldn't overtake when approaching a bend or hill, although these are not in fact illegal in themselves. It might be considered careless or dangerous driving, though!
- 4 Use dipped headlights, slow down , keep a safe distance from the vehicle in front and be able to stop within the distance you can see to be clear, use wipers and demisters , consider front and rear fog lamps when visibility drops below 100 metres , lower a window at junctions to listen for other vehicles , allow extra time for the journey. (HC 234 - 236)
- 5 A 30mph limit normally applies on any road with street lighting, unless road signs indicate otherwise (HC R124).
- 6 Specific hazards, road condition and layout, weather condition (4.7) volume of traffic, the area you are driving in, your ability to control the vehicle, comfort of passengers (4.2).
- 7 None (3.3)
- 8 50mph (2.3)
- 9 Forward (3.5) and two (2.1)
- 10 Do not proceed any further in this lane (HC R258)
- 11 None. A minibus is allowed a maximum of 16 passengers (1.1), so where would the 'small' children sit? Every passenger must have their own seat and seatbelt (3.1 and 3.3).
- 12 9 hours (2.7)
- 13 2 hours (2.7)
- 14 Yes. There is an exception for cars under certain conditions (R250) but this does not apply to a minibus. You must use parking lights (side lights) only, and not headlights.
- 15 This sign means that pedestrians are likely to be walking in the road as there is no footway, generally on rural roads.
- 16 By allowing passengers in a partially loaded minibus to sit in the back, rather than distributing the load evenly (3.1 and 3.2).



- 17 Motivation comes first – you have to want to. And concentration is essential. Constantly scanning different areas is the best technique (4.1). Avoid looking at only one point for too long. Use the mirrors (frequently) for looking along the sides and behind, and turn your head to check the blind spot areas. Trying to use the brakes less will encourage you to look further ahead and to anticipate (4.2).
- 18 The weight of the vehicle plus any load it is carrying (3.2).
- 19 Ensure the vehicle is stopped in a safe location; secure the handbrake, switch off the engine and remove the keys from the ignition; use the side sliding door, ensuring the door is secured in its open position; supervise the unloading ensuring passengers do not walk into the road (3.1).
At night, leave the side-lights on and ensure the vehicle can be seen; wear a high visibility jacket; do not obscure the vehicle lights (3.1).
- 20 Using the emergency telephone (5.2). They are connected directly to the police and positively confirm your exact location (HC R275 and R283).
- 21 Fire extinguisher and first aid kit (2.1).
- 22 Yes (3.3)
- 23 Yes, provided you're not towing a trailer. You can also travel at 70mph, where it is safe and appropriate (2.3 and 4.5).
- 24 Green means "go if it is safe to do so". You need to take special care if there is a box junction or if you intend to turn either right or left. Give way to pedestrians already crossing.
- 25 No. You must not use bus lanes nor take advantage of other bus priority areas (2.3).
- 26 No, but it's not good practice (R242 - 243), and you need take care not to be causing an obstruction (which might be illegal).
- 27 Get all passengers out of the vehicle and away from the crossing; contact the signalman by using the emergency telephone (HC R299). To help avoid this happening, approach the crossing with enough momentum and do not change gear whilst on the crossing.
- 28 Supervise the unloading of passengers; ensure that the doors do not swing into oncoming traffic; do not obscure the rear lights if unloading in the dark; ensure passengers do not step into the road; wear a high visibility jacket if unloading at night (3.1).
- 29 Between 9 and 16 passenger seats, plus the driver (1.1)
- 30 Maximum of five points. Beyond this you, your permit is not valid and you are not covered by the County Council's insurance.(2.6).
- 31 Not unless your establishment requires it (2.1) but there should be some level of planning and preparation even if it's not a formal process (2.7, 3.4, 5.3).
- 32 No, but it does contain quite a bit about the legal requirements in driving. Look for the MUST and MUST NOT phrases in red – these are legal requirements, usually simplified for ease of reading but with a footnote to the appropriate Acts. Most of the Code is about good practice when driving.
- 33 The legal minimum is 1mm (across the central three-quarter band and for the full circumference, with visible tread on the outer edges, but you should consider replacing tyres from a depth of 3mm onwards (2.3). Tyres deteriorate in sunlight so, regardless of the tread depth, do not continue to use tyres more than seven years old. This can happen with minibuses when they cover a low annual mileage.



- 34 You are strongly advised not to do so. Your own vehicle is one thing, but a passenger carrying vehicle is another. Everyone in public life these days has to looking over their shoulder all the time. Don't take the risk. Report the fault and call the specialist to do the work (2.4).
- 35 Mostly circular. The exceptions are the STOP and GIVE WAY signs.
- 36 No, a minibuss needs an MOT every year from its date of registration (2.4). We advise that a copy of the current MOT is kept in the vehicle.
- 37 Yes, for everyone's protection – you are responsible for the vehicle once you're driving it, and your passengers depend on you. A brake light could have failed, or the washer bottle may need re-filling. If you can, ask your colleague if there were any problems, otherwise check the fault report book. Remember the mirrors may need resetting.
- 38 A pelican crossing uses a flashing amber light to mean "traffic can go if there are no pedestrians on the crossing". The puffin crossing operates in the same way as ordinary traffic lights.
- 39 Yes, if you are carrying passengers (2.1).
- 40 Ensure adequate rest before starting (2.2), follow the recommendations about drivers' hours and include a second adult if possible (2.7), plan the journey carefully and know your emergency contacts (3.4 and 5.2), check on weather and traffic forecasts (4.7).
- 41 The Highway Code says "it's to let you know that they are there" (R110 - 111). The trouble is it can have several meanings, and the other driving might be flashing at someone else anyway! It may be a signal to go, but never assume it. Use your own judgement and proceed carefully.
- 42 Don't drive the vehicle. Don't even start the engine. Make arrangements for your passengers to be transferred, and call your breakdown service for a tow.
- 43 This sign means 'no motor vehicles allowed' – including school minibusses!
- 44 60mph (2.3)
- 45 No, but we would expect you to either know them, or know where they're written down (2.4, 2.5). The vehicle handbook would be good – if it's in the vehicle. If the pressures are not obvious, see if someone can make a permanent note in the vehicle somewhere. In the pre-journey check you should be able to notice obvious under-inflation. We usually allow for up to 10% error in tyre pressures.
- 46 Handbrake on, and take the ignition keys with you (3.1). In some circumstances you may also want to turn the steering before stopping, and/or leave the vehicle in gear, as additional guards against the vehicle moving.
- 47 Only when visibility is seriously reduced, generally 100 metres or less (R236).
- 48 Normally only the side door, assuming you're facing the direction of traffic flow (3.1).
- 49 Yes (3.2). Look in the driver's door well, or the passenger's, or under the bonnet. It's got to be there somewhere!
- 50 As often as is needed to be sure you always know what is happening at the sides and to the rear. In some situations this will be very often, perhaps every 2 or 3 seconds; at other times it may be less. It's not likely to be more than 10 seconds between checks.



- 51 Check your mirrors and consider the blindspots (4.1) – you may need to brake or change direction.
- 52 C.O.A.S.T. stands for Concentration, Observation, Anticipation, Space and Time – these are key elements of safe, responsible driving and something that you assessor will be looking for during your assessment.
- 53 First, a very gentle pressure. Then an increasingly firm pressure to give the required amount of braking. Finally, an easing of the pressure to balance the vehicle on its suspension (4.2).
- 54 Catching the back wheels against the kerb (or worse) when turning left (4.2 and 4.3). You may sometimes need to keep away from the kerb before turning left – all the more reason to check the left mirror for cycles, etc, who may not have noticed your signal.
- 55 Longer (watch left corners), wider (need more space), taller (less stable, can roll, watch height barriers), heavier (noisier, poorer acceleration and braking, gear changing at higher engine speeds), higher driving position but poorer rearward visibility and larger blindspot areas, lower levels of technology (probably no A/C or ABS), different regulations (speed, tyres, additional responsibilities). See 2.1, 2.3-2.5, 2.7-3.4, and 4.1-4.4
- 56 Have two hands on the steering wheel as much as possible, especially at the more hazardous moments (4.2).
- 57 An easy way to judge a safe following distance (R126 and 4.5). When the vehicle ahead passes a particular object, say “only a fool breaks the two second rule”. If you are not able to say this before reaching the same object, you are too close. Be able to say it TWICE when the roads are wet.
- 58 Night, rain (and spray on a fast road), wind, and fog. In less-than-good visibility make good use of your lights, and always make sure you can stop comfortably within the distance you can see to be safe (R126).
- 59 Yes (R113).
- 60 Did you say “slippery roads”? No, it’s the driver using too much braking, accelerating or steering for the road conditions (4.7).



7.3 Booking the assessment

You should have received a personalised 'Authorisation' letter, this contains a list of the assessors from the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit

When you are ready, ring one of them that is near to where you would like to start your assessment (usually your place of employment) and book a date, time and place that is mutually convenient. This would usually be during normal working hours and it will be helpful to have more than one date/time that you could manage. The assessors are usually booked at least two weeks ahead.

Normal minibus	2½hr
Minibus with trailer	2½hr
Trailer addition	1hr

If you need to cancel at short notice (less than two working days), or if the assessment cannot continue for reasons which are not our fault (eg the vehicle is not available or not roadworthy), your organisation will still be invoiced and you will need to re-book.

If you need to hire a vehicle and your organisation is attached to Staffordshire County Council, you can contact County Fleet Care on 01785-854848. The person collecting the vehicle will need their ID card to confirm they are a Staffordshire County Council Minibus Permit holder. Alternatively, by mutual agreement, your assessor may be able to meet you at the vehicle depot in Stafford.

- You are responsible for providing the vehicle, which must
- be a minibuss, ie a vehicle with 8 to 16 passenger carrying seats (1.1)
 - be legal for driving on the road (2.3-2.5)
 - have fuel for at least 50 miles
 - be available for at least the duration of the assessment

- You will also need to bring your
- authorisation form – issued by the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit
 - driving licence – both parts if it's a photocard type
 - glasses or contact lenses – if you need them (1.2)
 - one passport-type photograph

Your Authorisation letter contains important information and has a handy checklist to help you prepare for your practical assessment.



8.1 Points on your licence

One of the checks we make at every assessment and re-assessment is to see your driving licence (7.3). Apart from verifying your identity, we are checking that you have a proper entitlement for driving a minibus (1.1), and to see that you do not have more than six points on your licence (2.6). This is why the paper part of a photo licence is necessary – it is the proof of whether or not you have a ‘clean’ licence.

Two important facts:

- we don’t know about any driver conviction of yours, or about any points added to your licence, other than if you or your line manager tell us
- the County Council’s insurers will not cover anyone driving a minibus who has more than six points on their licence

The second of these facts means that we have to withdraw your right to a Permit until any points above the six allowed are ‘spent’.

Unfortunately, if you don’t advise us of points on your licence we can’t confirm that you must stop driving the minibus.

This could lead to you driving without insurance – not only an irresponsible thing to do, but also illegal.

And, of course, it would undo at a stroke all the reassurance we give to parents and others who are responsible for your passengers. Remember, any accident involving injury to people will require the police to routinely check your licence (5.1).

If the worst happens, and you have points put onto your licence, you should ring the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit to confirm that you can continue driving the minibus. You will know the number of points on your licence. If it exceeds six, then stop driving the minibus until you can get clarification of your position

Most drivers with points have been caught speeding. There are, though other driving offences that our insurers regard as more serious, eg careless or dangerous driving, or drink driving. For any offence other than speeding or parking offences, you need to take advice from the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit.



8.2 Change of health

As with points on your licence, we have no routine way of knowing whether you remain medically fit to drive. We rely instead on the legal obligation you have to inform the DVLA of any serious condition that affects your driving.

The issue that probably causes most trouble is eyesight (1.2). Since your eyesight usually changes very slowly, unless you have regular checks you may not be aware of the need for corrective action.

You should have your eyes checked at least every two years, whether or not you wear glasses or contact lenses.

Temporary problems that may require medication should be dealt with in the obvious temporary way, especially if the medication affects your driving. Just discontinue minibus driving until you are fit again (2.2).

Other medical matters affecting your driving are likely to involve your doctor who can obviously advise you.

If you would like further advice, or you need to withdraw your minibus driving for more than a temporary period, you should contact the Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit.



8.3 Change of base or home address

Your permit is normally valid for five years (see introduction and 1.1). Shortly before its expiry we will contact you to remind you that a re-assessment is due, and we will write to you at your home address. It is therefore essential that you notify the Road Safety & Sustainable Travel Unit of any changes to your home address.

If your work address changes it will help both of us if you ring to let us know.

Think what might happen: we write to you but at a former address, the letter is not passed on, your permit expires, you haven't realised, and suddenly you're driving without insurance.

9.1 Contacting the Road Safety & Sustainable Travel Unit

By phone: 01785 276617

By fax: 01785 276612

By email: roadsafety@staffordshire.gov.uk

Website:

www.staffordshire.gov.uk/transport/roadsafety/drivertraining/minibustrainingscheme

By Post:

Staffordshire County Council
Development Services Directorate
Road Safety & Sustainable Travel Unit
Riverway
Stafford
ST16 3TJ

10.1 Obtaining an application form for gaining a minibus permit or renewing a permit

You can download an application form from our website or contacting the Road Safety & Sustainable Travel Unit, see 9.1 above.