

# Vehicle Purchasing Guide for Community Transport

Guidance on minibuses,  
wheelchair accessible vehicles,  
and accessible transport fleets



**MINIBUS  
OPTIONS**

**MELLOR**

**cta**

**community transport  
association**

Produced by the Community Transport Association  
in collaboration with Mellor Bus, Minibus Options  
and CTA members.

## About us

The **Community Transport Association (CTA)** is a UK member-led charity providing leadership, training, advice, and operational support to transport related charities, community groups and social enterprises in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. We support and advocate on behalf of our members so they can deliver innovative and flexible transport solutions to achieve social change and remove transport barriers facing their communities.

Our mission is to lead a thriving and sustainable community transport movement in the UK, and our vision is one where everyone in their communities can access transport that meets their needs.

CTA promotes community transport sector excellence through training, resources, publications, advice, events, consultancy, and project support on voluntary, community, and accessible transport. We amplify the voice of community transport providers in building stronger, more inclusive, and sustainable communities through transportation, across the UK.

In 2024 CTA launched a Commercial Affiliate programme which enables commercial organisations to connect with the Community Transport sector in the UK, build their understanding and facilitate a deeper understanding of the sector's unique challenges. In putting this guide together, we welcomed support from two of our Commercial Affiliates introduced below.

### MINIBUS OPTIONS



## About Minibus Options

'Since 1986, we've specialised in crafting vehicles tailored to your needs. With thousands of minibuses delivered and 40 years of expertise, we're proud to serve customers throughout the UK.

As a family business, we put people first. Our tight-knit team, with decades of hands-on experience, shares a passion for creating top-quality minibuses with care. Every project gets our undivided attention, and we collaborate closely with you at each step to ensure nothing is missed'

- Fred James, Sales Director,  
Minibus Options

### MELLOR



## About Mellor Bus

'Mellor Bus offers a complete range of accessible buses designed for community transport, local authorities, and specialist passenger services. Ease of access, configurable seating, and thoughtful design ensure comfort, inclusivity, and ease of use for all passengers.

Mellor buses are engineered for operational efficiency, safety, and reliability, delivering cost-effective transport solutions across urban, rural, and restricted-route environments. Our UK-based manufacturing facilities, combined with dedicated aftersales support and extensive engineering expertise, allow us to offer both standard and highly bespoke vehicles without compromising on quality or accessibility.

By focusing on innovation, durability, and passenger comfort, Mellor Bus continues to set the standard for accessible, dependable, and adaptable transport solutions, providing value for operators and an inclusive travel experience for every passenger'

- Richard Matthews, Head of Sales, Mellor Bus

# CONTENTS

Funding your vehicle purchase.....	5
Driver licensing and training requirements .....	6
Do we need a permit to operate the vehicle? .....	7
Choosing a vehicle manufacturer.....	7
Determining the right vehicle size.....	8
Choosing a vehicle converter .....	9
Should we choose diesel or electric? .....	10
What colour should the vehicle be? .....	11
Should we choose manual or automatic transmission?.....	12
Should we choose an electric or manual sidestep? .....	13
What sort of passenger lift or ramp do we need?.....	14
What internal height do we need in the vehicle? .....	16
How many wheelchair spaces do we need?.....	17
Other accessibility considerations.....	19
Safety and comfort considerations .....	20
Vehicle maintenance requirements .....	22
What sort of insurance do we need? .....	24
Do we need to tax the vehicle? .....	25
How do we fuel the vehicle?.....	26
Where will we store the vehicle? .....	27
Costing example .....	28
How do we ensure the purchase goes as smoothly as possible? .....	29
In summary .....	30
Quick operational checklist.....	31

# INTRODUCTION

Buying a vehicle is an exciting milestone for any organisation or community group. It also comes with significant responsibility. Whether you're investing funds from hard-won grants, contracts, or fundraising efforts, making the right choice is crucial. At CTA, we are dedicated to supporting our members throughout this process by offering clear, practical guidance to help you make informed decisions and select the best vehicle to meet your needs.

## About this guide

With funding at a premium, it's more important than ever to ensure you get the best value for your investment. This guide has been created by CTA as a comprehensive framework to help you navigate the vehicle purchasing process confidently.

Drawing on our collective expertise and the insights of trusted commercial affiliates and members, this guide offers practical advice, hints, and tips tailored to a variety of needs. Whether you're buying your first vehicle, replacing an existing one, or expanding your fleet, this resource is designed to support you every step of the way.

By carefully considering the factors outlined here, we hope to make your purchasing journey clearer, easier, and far less daunting. While we haven't produced a detailed checklist, by considering each part of the guide as detailed in the contents page, you will have covered the main areas of importance when purchasing a vehicle.



### TOP TIP:

"Start with an 'ideal minibus' wish list'. We are currently purchasing a minibus and it's giving us the usual challenge of coming close to our ideal specifications. It remains a compromise between delivery time, cost and availability."

– Colin Whitton, Business Development Manager, Badenoch and Strathspey Community Connections



# CTA'S GUIDE TO PURCHASING A VEHICLE

## Funding your vehicle purchase

Securing the right funding is a crucial step when planning to purchase a vehicle. Consider the following points to help manage expectations and ensure a smooth process:

- **Sources of funding**

Funding may come from various sources, such as grants, reserves, or fundraising efforts. If you're applying for grants from organisations like The National Lottery Community Fund or The Motability Foundation, keep in mind that the application process can take up to six months. Additionally, successful grants often require the funds to be spent within a specific timeframe. You can find a guide on raising funds for a vehicle here: [Raising Funds for a vehicle - A CTA Guide](#)

- **Timing and planning**

It's advisable to engage with vehicle suppliers during the grant application process to confirm the total costs and expected delivery times—especially if you need a customised vehicle. This will help ensure your funding request is accurate and realistic.

- **New vs second-hand vehicles**

Consider whether the vehicle must be brand new or if a second-hand vehicle is acceptable. Some funders may only support new vehicle purchases, while others may be open to used vehicles, especially if you have staff or volunteers experienced in vehicle maintenance.

- **Leasing options**

While outright purchase is the most common funding approach, leasing or hire purchase agreements are increasingly popular. Leasing can ease upfront costs but means the organisation may not own the vehicle at the end of the contract. Discuss these options early with funders to understand what is permissible.

For more detailed guidance on leasing, see our [separate leasing guide \(coming soon!\)](#) or visit our [commercial directory: www.ctauk.org/commercial-directory](http://www.ctauk.org/commercial-directory)



### TOP TIP:

“While charities and community transport organisations traditionally bought vehicles outright, leasing and hire purchase options are now common, especially as vehicle prices have risen sharply. Leasing can reduce financial risk, provide predictable costs (especially with maintenance included), and transfer residual value risk to the leasing company. Just remember, leasing means you're hiring the vehicle and won't own it at the end of the contract.”

- Minibus Options

# Driver licensing and training requirements

Ensuring your drivers have the appropriate licences and training is essential for legal compliance and passenger safety. Consider the following when planning your transport service:

## Driving licence requirements

Determine whether the vehicle you're operating requires a D1 licence. A number of factors influence what licence is required to drive a minibus - these include when the licence was obtained and whether the driver is being paid or is a volunteer.

- A driver with a standard Category B licence (car licence) who passed their test after 1997, can volunteer to drive a minibus without a D1, provided that the following conditions are met:
  - they are aged over 21
  - they have held a full B licence for 2 years
  - the vehicle weight is under 3.5 tonnes or up to 4.25 tonnes if adapted with specialist equipment
  - they are not carrying a trailer
  - they are receiving no payment for driving
- However, if the driver is paid (not including expenses) a D1 licence is required.
- Drivers who passed their driving test before 1997 hold D1(101) on their licence. This is known as 'grandfather rights' and it allows you to drive minibuses either in a paid role or as a volunteer
- Always refer to the official guidance: [www.gov.uk/driving-licence-categories](http://www.gov.uk/driving-licence-categories)

## D1 Driver Training

If you need paid drivers, ensure you budget for D1 training and testing. Costs typically range from **£800–£1,500 per driver** (as of 2025). Consider including this in your funding application or procurement plan.

## MiDAS Training

The Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDAS), provided by the Community Transport Association, is a nationally recognised standard for minibus drivers and includes accessible vehicle training. Find more details at: [www.ctauk.org/our-courses](http://www.ctauk.org/our-courses)

## Enhanced DBS checks

All drivers transporting vulnerable adults or children should undergo an Enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check before driving.

## Routine licence checks

Driver licences should be checked every six months to ensure they remain valid and free from any new restrictions or penalties.

By planning ahead for these requirements, you can ensure both compliance and safety in your transport operations.

### CTA NOTE:



In recent years, smaller minibuses (sometimes referred to as minibus 'lites') have become more popular as they were introduced so they could be driven on a standard car licence. CTA's guidance is that if a driver is being paid, they always need to have a D1 on their licence, irrespective of the size of the minibus.

### TOP TIP:



"Before selecting a vehicle, check which licence categories are required for driving it. B and D1 licence holders can drive vehicles up to specific seating capacities and weight limits, which may influence your vehicle choice. For the most accurate and up-to-date guidance, visit the official government site: [www.gov.uk/driving-licence-categories](http://www.gov.uk/driving-licence-categories)"

- Mellor Bus

### TOP TIP:



"Make sure you know what your drivers are willing to drive. What are their capabilities? If you have a wheelchair accessible vehicle with a winch, are they able to push wheelchairs safely onto the vehicle?"

- Caroline Wilson MBE, General Manager, Green Dragon Community Transport

## Do we need a permit to operate the vehicle?

If you're a charity and/or voluntary organisation planning to operate a vehicle, you'll likely need a permit to do so legally and in compliance with transport regulations.

- **Section 19 and 10B permits**

These permits are typically used by schools, community groups, and charities that operate vehicles not for profit and provide transport for specific user groups (e.g. members or service users). They allow organisations to carry passengers without holding a full PSV (Public Service Vehicle) operator's licence.

Learn more: [www.ctauk.org/permits](http://www.ctauk.org/permits)

- **Section 22 permits**

If you're offering a community bus service that is open to the public (but still operating on a not-for-profit basis), a Section 22 permit is required. These are issued by the Traffic Commissioner and allow you to run a scheduled service.

Application form and details: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-for-a-community-bus-permit-psv368](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-for-a-community-bus-permit-psv368)

Obtaining the correct permit is essential for legal operation and ensures you remain compliant with national transport regulations. Be sure to review the requirements carefully based on the type of service you plan to deliver.

## Choosing a vehicle manufacturer

Selecting the right vehicle manufacturer is a critical decision that can impact maintenance, operating costs, and vehicle downtime. When evaluating manufacturers, consider the following factors:

- **Manufacturer and support network:**

Choose a base vehicle from a reputable manufacturer with a nearby repair centre. Easy access to servicing can significantly reduce downtime.

- **Availability of replacement parts:**

Ensure that replacement parts are readily available from local suppliers. Relying on parts imported from overseas may result in extended vehicle downtime.

- **Cost of parts:**

Keep in mind that parts pricing can vary significantly between manufacturers. Factor in ongoing maintenance costs when comparing options.

- **Warranty coverage:**

Compare warranty lengths and coverage details. A longer or more comprehensive warranty can offer better value and peace of mind over the vehicle's lifespan.

Careful consideration of these aspects will help ensure your vehicle choice supports long-term reliability and cost-effectiveness.



### TOP TIP:

"Careful consideration should be given to the manufacturer of the base vehicle and nearest repair centre i.e. Mercedes Commercial – where the nearest dealer is a 100-mile round trip, this is costly both for the vehicle and staff time and could mean the vehicle is off the road for a considerable time."

– Susan Dever, Executive Manager, Coalfield Community Transport

# Determining the right vehicle size

Choosing the appropriate vehicle size is essential to ensuring that it meets both the operational requirements and the needs of your passengers. Before settling on a vehicle, consider the following:

- **Service type and daily routes**

Start by identifying the services you provide and the types of roads you typically travel. The vehicle should be chosen based on passenger needs, not the other way around. When purchasing a second-hand vehicle, your options may be limited, and the vehicle's existing specification might dictate how it can be used, rather than aligning with your ideal service delivery.

- **Minibus or Smaller WAV?**

Evaluate whether a full-size minibus is necessary or if a smaller Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (WAV) would suffice. Smaller vehicles are generally easier to drive and manoeuvre but may not be suitable for passengers with limited mobility due to higher step heights, lack of grab rails, and limited space for shopping bags or mobility aids when fully seated.

- **Storage and accessibility**

Think about where the vehicle will be parked or garaged? Will it physically fit in the space available? The overall dimensions of the vehicle, including height, length, and turning radius, are important considerations, especially in tight or residential areas.

By carefully assessing both operational needs and passenger accessibility, you'll be better equipped to choose a vehicle size that supports safe, comfortable, and efficient transport.



## TOP TIP:

"Always start with your passengers' needs, how many people are you transporting, and what kind of access do they require? The "right size" vehicle should be based on these requirements, not forced to fit around a predetermined vehicle model. Be aware that some manufacturers offer limited model options, which could shape your specification around the vehicle's features or limitations, rather than what your operation truly needs."

- Minibus Options



## TOP TIP:

"It's important to think ahead as a group may expand the services that they offer in the future. Is the vehicle going to be available for other community groups to use? If the groups are available to everyone, then a wheelchair accessible vehicle is a must."

- Ian Harrison, Operations Manager, Transport for Tongue Ltd



"Write yourself an 'ideal vehicle specification'. This will help you to identify key features from the base and conversion spec to safety features, heating and much more including internal accessories such as carpets and even leaflet holders."

- Kelvin Cochrane, Chief Executive, HCL

# Choosing a vehicle converter

Most vehicles need to be converted to your specifications, so as well as thinking about the vehicle make and model, you will need to consider your supplier in achieving the vehicle that best meets your needs.

- **Who to use?**

When deciding which converter you want to work with, you may be considering factors like location, lead time, supply chain, and experience with the kinds of vehicles you are specifying. Some are more experienced with larger minibuses for example and might not have the expertise you need in converting an accessible MPV - or vice versa.

We've highlighted some of CTA's commercial affiliates who offer this service throughout this leaflet. Alternatives can be found in our Commercial Directory:

[www.ctauk.org/commercial-directory](http://www.ctauk.org/commercial-directory)

- **Ask questions**

If you are looking for an accessible vehicle that fits your very specific passenger needs, don't be afraid to ask them about their experience in this type of conversion.

- **Feedback from your peers**

Don't be afraid to ask for references, to visit their site to look over their work, or to test drive vehicles, as a good converter will be only too happy to support you with this and more.

We can also help to connect you with other CTA members who've made vehicle purchases through these suppliers to get an honest view of what to expect.

## CTA NOTE:

Converters would rather work with you at the beginning to make sure you are all on the same page, than find you've ended up with a vehicle that some of your passengers can't access. Clear communication is key!



# Should we choose diesel or electric?

Choosing between a diesel or electric vehicle is an important decision that can affect your budget, operational capacity, and long-term sustainability goals. Each option comes with its own set of considerations:

- **Cost and availability**

Diesel vehicles are generally cheaper upfront and more readily available, especially on the second-hand market. They may also offer more flexibility in rural or remote areas where electric charging infrastructure is limited.

- **Charging infrastructure and range**

If you're considering an electric vehicle, map out the charging infrastructure in your local area. Will you have convenient access to charging points? Also, check that the vehicle's daily range is sufficient for your planned routes and usage patterns. If you're looking at installing your own chargers at your base or a community hub, explore the cost and flexibility of different chargers to see what will work best for you.

- **Electric WAV limitations**

In electric Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs), the battery is often located at the rear, which can reduce interior space and limit the size or number of wheelchairs you can accommodate. This may impact accessibility for some passengers.

- **Funding eligibility**

Some funding bodies in the UK now only support electric vehicle purchases, as part of environmental and sustainability commitments. Check funding criteria early in the decision-making process.

- **Emerging trends**

Hydrogen vehicles, particularly buses, are an emerging and practical solution for transport decarbonisation, offering zero emissions, quick refuelling, and long range. Several cities and regions in the UK and globally are actively trialling and deploying hydrogen-powered fleets.

For further information, including a comparison of running costs and environmental impact, see CTA's Electric Vehicle Purchasing Guide: [Electric Minibus Purchasing Guide - A CTA Guide](#)



## TOP TIPS:

“If you are considering an EV, you should geographically search for garages/mechanics that can actually repair and service EVs. It seems obvious but not all mechanics have the means to test these vehicles or the know-how.”

– Alison Harley, Programme Manager, Climate Action Strathaven



“The range of an EV is very important to ensure you can get there and back without having to charge on route. The range claimed by manufacturers does not include the use of heaters, lights and windscreen wipers which can greatly reduce mileage available. We operate in the Highland of Scotland, so during the winter months our EVs only cover more local routes.”

– Ian Harrison, Operations Manager, Transport for Tongue Ltd



“The range for EVs will require close management of resources. Don't let your battery go below 20% charge, don't charge if above 80% and don't use a fast charge where not required. Someone needs to manage this!”

– Susan Dever, Executive Manager, Coalfield Community Transport

# What colour should the vehicle be?

This may seem inconsequential, but if you are buying a brand new vehicle colour coding of a vehicle is costly. While vehicle colour may seem like a minor detail, it can have practical and financial implications both on purchase and if there are any subsequent accidents.

- **Cost of colour coding**

Choosing a specific colour other than white for a brand new vehicle can add approximately £2,500 (estimated cost in 2025) to the purchase price due to custom paintwork.

- **Alternative branding options**

To manage costs, consider keeping the vehicle **white** and applying **vehicle wraps or vinyl livery** for branding and identification. This approach offers flexibility and can be refreshed or changed more easily than paint.

You can advertise your own services on your minibuses when they are operated using section 19 permits if these services are not operated for profit. Remember that section 19 permits cannot be used 'with a view to profit nor incidentally to an activity which is itself carried on with a view to profit'. There are no restrictions if a vehicle is operating on a Section 22 permit.

There are implications of having sponsorship from other organisations or companies on the vehicle. The operation of the permit vehicle must be independent of the sponsors or advertisers, who can only gain a 'fringe benefit' from the display of their name or advertising message.

An example of 'in kind' support would be the garage maintaining vehicles free or at a reduced cost for the CTO in exchange for some kind of sponsorship on the vehicles - this could fall foul of these rules as the operation of the vehicle would be dependent on the sponsor. However, if the local print shop who print all the CTO's flyers offered a discount in exchange for signage on the vehicle, this would keep the separation between the sponsor and the operation of the vehicle.

- **Wing mirror considerations**

Wing mirrors are often damaged in daily use. Colour-coded and non-fold-in mirrors tend to be more expensive to replace. For durability and cost savings, opting for **simple, fold-in mirrors in a standard/white colour** can reduce repair expenses.

Careful consideration of colour and finishing options can help balance your branding needs with budget constraints and ongoing maintenance costs.



## TOP TIP:

"The colour coding of a minibus will cost approximately £2500 extra! We'd recommend wrapping it or keeping it white. Manual fold-in mirrors are a must too as they get damaged regularly and are costly to repair if they are electronic or fixed in place."

– Susan Dever, Executive Manager, Coalfield Community Transport

# Should we choose manual or automatic transmission?

When deciding between manual and automatic transmissions, consider the following factors:

- **Current popularity and future trends**

As of 2025, manual gearboxes remain more popular, but this is expected to shift significantly over the next decade. The transition to zero-emission vehicles, which predominantly use automatic transmissions, will drive this change.

- **Driver preferences**

Some drivers prefer manual transmissions because they feel it offers better control over the vehicle. However, this is a preference that often comes from our own habits and experience, and many operators find a short training session can help overcome any anxiety around shifting to an automatic transmission

- **Modern automatic transmissions**

Today's automatic gearboxes provide equal or greater control compared to manuals and can make driving easier, especially in stop-start traffic or urban environments.

- **Ease of operation**

Automating gear changes reduces driver fatigue and can simplify vehicle operation, which benefits driver comfort and safety.

- **Maintenance considerations**

In shared vehicle fleets, manual clutches and gearboxes can be costly to repair or replace due to wear and tear from multiple drivers.

Balancing driver comfort, operational ease, and maintenance costs will help determine the best transmission choice for your fleet's needs.



## TOP TIP:

“Consider whether you require auto or manual transmission where drivers will share vehicles. Clutches and gearboxes are expensive.”

– Susan Dever, Executive Manager, Coalfield Community Transport



# Should we choose an electric or manual sidestep?

Selecting the right sidestep is important for passenger accessibility and vehicle maintenance. Consider the following:

- **Passenger access and step height**

Some vehicles (like Ford and Volkswagen) will typically incorporate high first steps with electric operation, which can present challenges for passengers with limited mobility. Consider vehicles (like Citroën and Peugeot) with manually operated lowering step systems featuring lower step heights and wider treads, thereby enhancing accessibility. Some standard models (like the Mercedes Sprinter) also include a relatively high third step, which may further impede ease of entry and exit.

- **Electric sidesteps**

Electric steps are often preferred for their automation, especially when the side door is unattended by the driver or assistant, ensuring safer and easier boarding. However, since they are installed under the floor, they are exposed to weather and debris, requiring regular maintenance to avoid costly repairs.

- **Manual sidesteps**

Manual steps fold out from inside the vehicle and are easier to maintain due to their simpler mechanism. However, they require more manual handling by the driver or assistant, which may impact operational efficiency.

- **Vehicle model dependency**

The type of sidestep available is generally determined by the vehicle make and model chosen.

Balancing passenger accessibility, maintenance requirements, and operational practicality will help you choose the sidestep best suited to your service.



Example showing an electric step (Minibus Options)



Example showing a manual sidestep (The Madoch Centre)



## TOP TIP:

“For typical van conversions, both manual and automatic sidesteps are available. Coach built vehicles usually feature manual steps to meet step height regulations, often with manual ramp deployment on low-floor models. Ultimately, the choice depends not just on customer preference but also on the vehicle type you select.”

- Mellor Bus



## TOP TIP:

“It’s important that you consider the type of operation you want to offer both now and in the future. If you are likely to carry passengers with mobility needs, it is important that the step goes down to ground level.”

- Ian Harrison, Operations Manager, Transport for Tongue Ltd

# What sort of passenger lift or ramp do we need?

Choosing the right passenger lift or ramp is crucial for accessibility, vehicle space, and maintenance. Here are the key considerations:

- **Internal lifts**

These lifts are installed inside the rear of the vehicle. Although they take up more interior space, they are generally **lightweight, easy to deploy**, and require **less maintenance** because they are protected from weather and external elements.

- **Underfloor lifts**

Mounted beneath the vehicle, underfloor lifts free up interior space, making the rear area less congested. However, they are **exposed to weather** and other environmental factors, which means they may require **more upkeep**. They also require **more manual handling** when deploying and stowing the lift.

- **Lift size and wheelchair accommodation**

Consider the **size of the lift** carefully, as it must accommodate the range of wheelchair sizes you plan to transport. Underfloor lifts generally take up more floor area when deployed.

- **Maintenance and safety checks**

All lifts must undergo **regular servicing** and **LOLER (Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations) inspections** every six months. These checks must be conducted by a specialist engineer and are separate from routine vehicle maintenance.

- **Wheelchair ramps**

Ramps are a **lightweight, practical option**, especially suitable for small vehicles. While ramps can be fitted to larger vehicles, their length can make loading and unloading challenging due to space requirements. For small vehicles, consider fitting a **winch** to aid in loading wheelchairs safely. Some vehicle models also allow ramps to be fitted at the **side door** for easier access.

By carefully evaluating these options, you can select a lift or ramp solution that best fits your vehicle, passengers' needs, and operational environment.



## TOP TIPS:

“The advantage of having an external tail lift is that it releases a larger space at the rear of the vehicle for seating or storage. The benefit is that it slides into a box underneath the vehicle, and this, along with the fact that it used quality materials, ensures it would survive the rigours of a Scottish winter, where salt can be on the road for five months of the year.”

- Colin Whitton, Business Development Manager, Badenoch and Strathspey Community Connections

.....

“Make sure you know 100% how much space an internal lift takes up – you will lose seats if it isn't a very long wheel-based vehicle, unless the lift is an underfloor lift.”

- Caroline Wilson MBE, General Manager, Green Dragon Community Transport



## TOP TIP:

“Accessible minibuses usually offer both internal and underfloor lift options, but keep in mind internal lifts often reduce saloon seating capacity. Popular lift brands include PLS, Ricon, and Autolift, though customer preference often guides the final choice.”

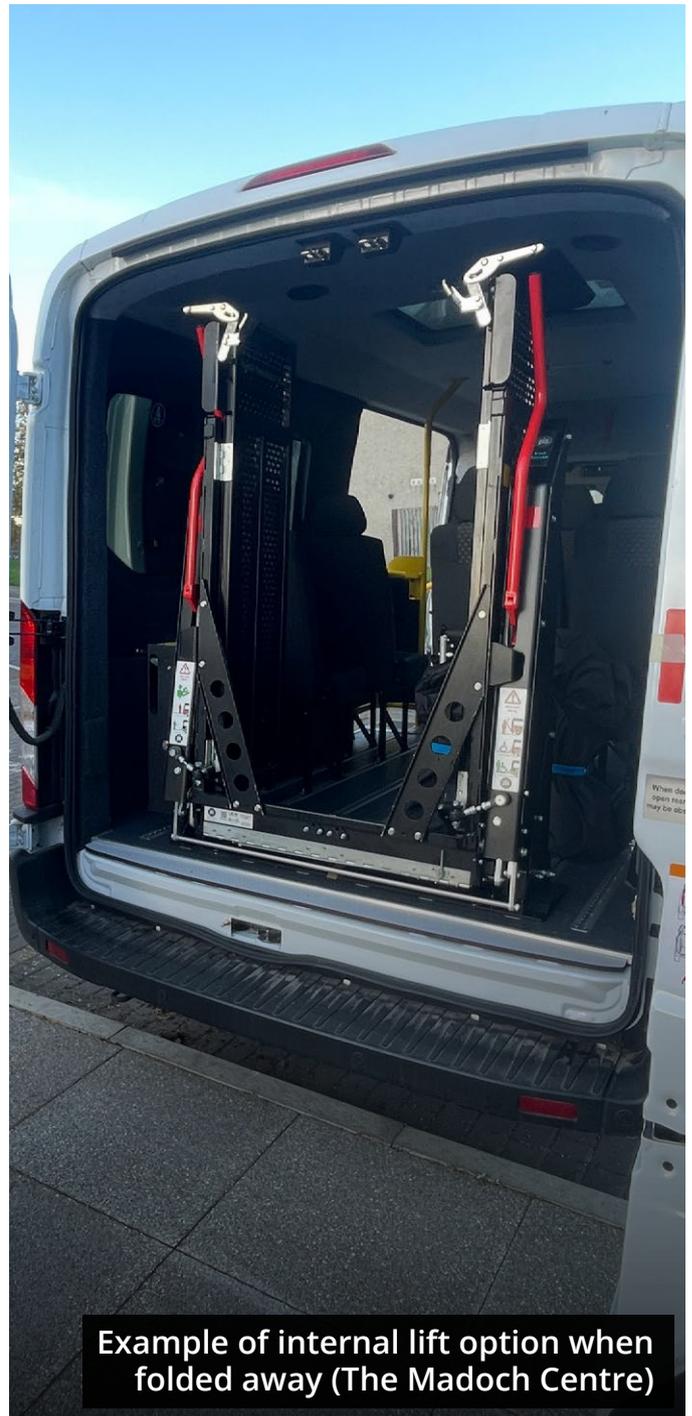
- Mellor Bus



Example of underfloor lift (Mellor Bus)



Example of internal lift option (Minibus Options)



Example of internal lift option when folded away (The Madoch Centre)

# What internal height do we need in the vehicle?

When selecting a vehicle, internal height is a key factor for passenger and staff comfort as well as operational practicality:

- **Standing room**  
Ensure the vehicle provides enough **internal height** for passengers, staff, and volunteers to **stand up fully** inside the minibus, facilitating easier movement and safer boarding or exiting.
- **Mobility considerations**  
Vehicles with **lower internal heights** or smaller dimensions can be challenging for passengers with **limited mobility or flexibility**, potentially impacting accessibility and comfort.
- **External height restrictions**  
Consider any **parking constraints** or **operational area limitations** that may impose a maximum external vehicle height, such as low bridges, garages, or specific route restrictions. These factors will influence your choice of vehicle size and height.

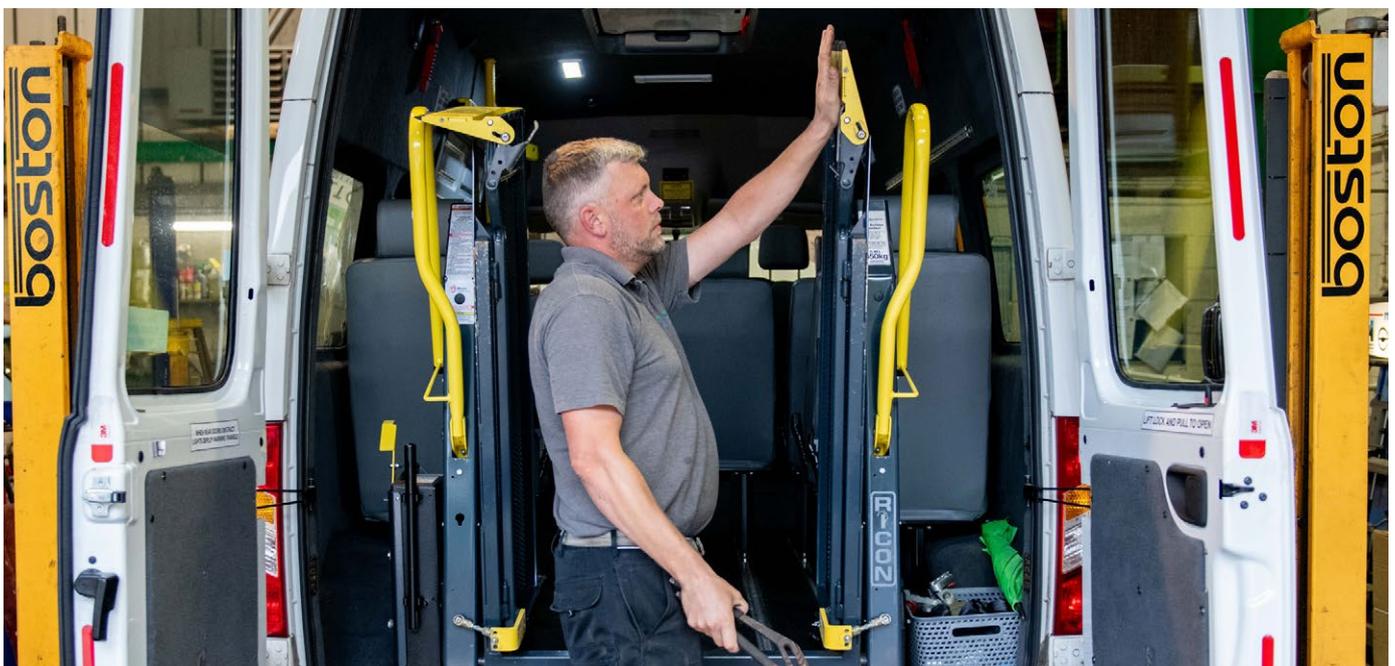
Balancing passenger comfort with practical limitations will help you select a vehicle suited to your operational environment.



## TOP TIP:

“Parking and route restrictions often limit the maximum vehicle height you can operate. Beyond that, focus on passenger needs and accessibility first - choose the right height and size based on who you’re carrying, not just the vehicle model.”

- Minibus Options



# How many wheelchair spaces do we need?

Deciding on the number of wheelchair spaces is a critical factor that directly impacts your vehicle choice and configuration. Consider the following points:

- **Maximum capacity**

An accessible minibus can accommodate up to **8 wheelchair spaces** if all seating is removable. The trend for wheelchairs is that they are getting bigger so this may not be possible in practice. If in doubt, consult MiDAS guidance.

- **Typical layouts**

Most vehicles offer space for 2 wheelchairs, which usually requires removing **4 seats per wheelchair space**. For example, transporting 2 wheelchairs means removing 8 seats, leaving **8 seats available** for seated passengers in a 16-seat minibus. If there is need for transporting mobility scooters, then seats will also need to be removed – between 4 and 6 depending on the size of the equipment.

- **Manual handling of seats**

Removing and reinstalling seats involves **heavy manual handling**. Consider how this will be managed safely and efficiently. New vehicles often feature **quick-release seats**, which make the process easier and faster.

- **Seat storage and safety**

Removed seats must be stored in a **clean, dry environment**. When reinstalling seats, it's vital to ensure they are **securely locked into the floor** to prevent tipping or movement during travel.

- **Fold-up seats**

Some smaller vehicles offer **fold-up seats**, especially at the rear, which are easier to handle but usually accommodate only one wheelchair.

- **Wheelchair restraints**

The vehicle must have the correct number of **wheelchair restraints** — typically, a set includes **4 floor restraints plus one seatbelt or upper anchorage per wheelchair**.

While new vehicles come equipped with these, **second-hand vehicles may not**, so additional purchases might be necessary. Restraints are also required for transporting

mobility scooters details of which can be found here: [ui1075e Scooter Restraint User Manual](#)

- **Upper anchorage points**

When transporting a passenger in a wheelchair, their **shoulder belt should be attached to a point above and behind the passenger's shoulder level**.

In M1 vehicles (those with no more than 8 seats plus driver), an upper anchorage is a requirement.

In an M2 vehicle, (passenger carrying vehicle with more than 8 seats but not exceeding maximum weight of 5 tonnes), an upper anchorage point is not required by law. However, without an upper anchorage point, it means that the upper end of the shoulder belt must be anchored to the floor. This has been shown to significantly increase harmful compressive loading on the occupant's torso and spine in the event of a crash and is strongly discouraged. Occupant restraint systems with floor anchored shoulder belts also do not comply with industry standards.

This is why CTA strongly recommends that any wheelchair space has an upper anchor point. In a minibus this is usually a cant rail. Cant rails can sometimes be an additional extra or can even be covered over as part of a conversion.

For more information, see CTA Website where you will find the CTA Wheelchair Best Practice Guide: [www.ctauk.org/bpg1](http://www.ctauk.org/bpg1)

Understanding your passenger needs and operational demands will help you decide how many wheelchair spaces to include without compromising comfort or safety.



## CTA NOTE:

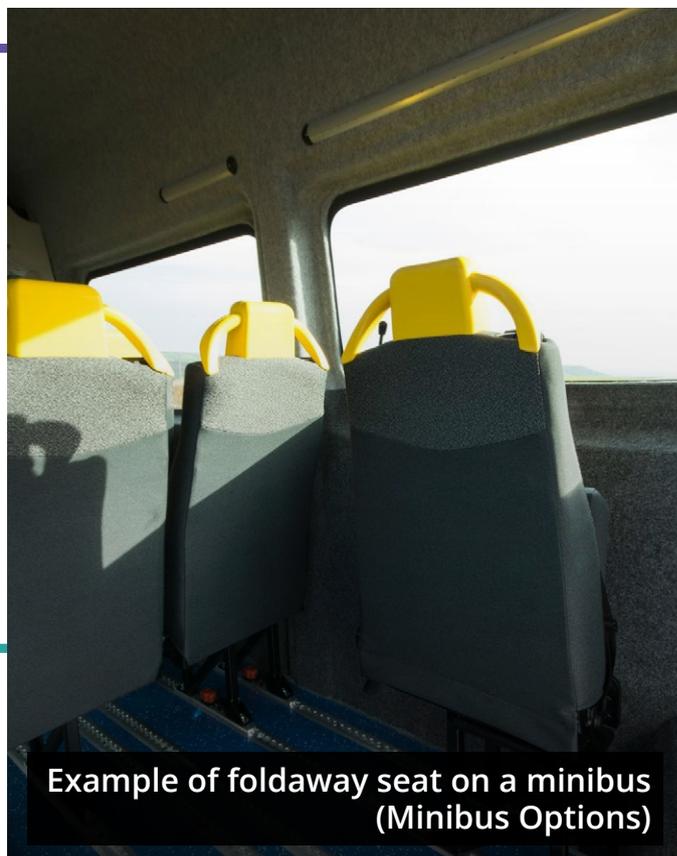
Not using an upper anchorage point when transporting a passenger seated in a wheelchair could be used as evidence of negligence in the event of an accident. We strongly advise that any vehicle you purchase that has a wheelchair space, has an upper anchorage point for the safe carriage of your passengers.



### TOP TIP:

“Think about how easy it is to remove seats. How many can be removed and how many wheelchairs can be carried with that configuration? Where will you store the seats and who will remove them?”

- Caroline Wilson MBE,  
General Manager,  
Green Dragon Community Transport



Example of foldaway seat on a minibus (Minibus Options)



### TOP TIPS:

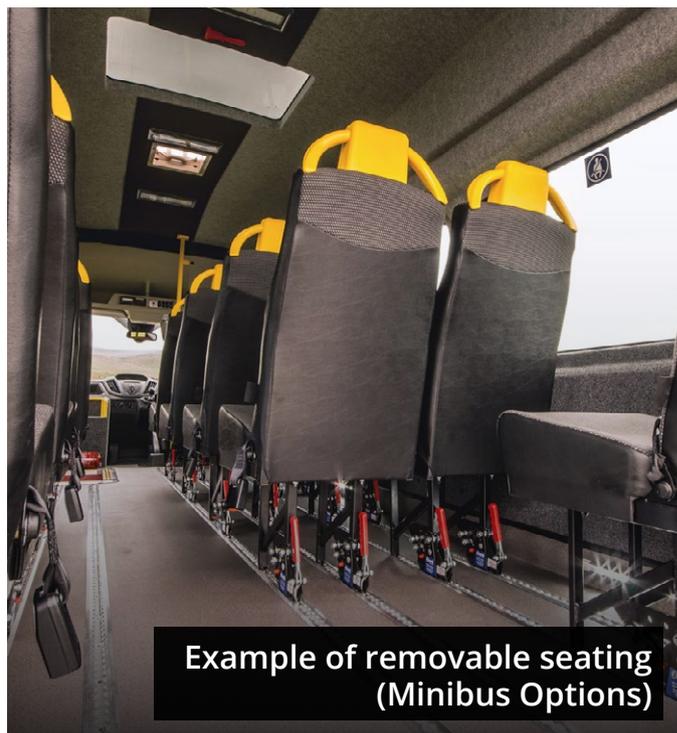
“Wheelchair capacity is a key factor in choosing your vehicle. Accessible minibuses can hold up to eight wheelchairs if seats are removable, but most service buses typically accommodate two. Seats, fixed or removable, are highly customisable in location and design to fit your specific needs.”

- Mellor Bus



“Passengers in wheelchairs must have properly sized spaces and secure restraints suited to their wheelchair and size. Removing seats to create wheelchair space is common but remember seats can be heavy and impact manual handling and vehicle care. Folding seats offer easier handling but usually suit only single-wheelchair vehicles.”

- Minibus Options



Example of removable seating (Minibus Options)

## Other accessibility considerations

When planning your vehicle, it's important to think beyond basic access to enhance passenger comfort and operational efficiency. Consider including the following features:

- **Extendable handrails**

Provide additional support for passengers as they enter and exit the vehicle, improving safety and ease of movement. If purchasing a brand new vehicle consider the option of having a handrail on either side of the door to make access even easier.

- **Overhead storage shelves**

Useful for storing smaller personal items safely above passenger seating without cluttering the floor space.

- **Driver-adjacent storage bin**

Convenient for the driver to store essential items within easy reach, helping maintain an organised cab area.

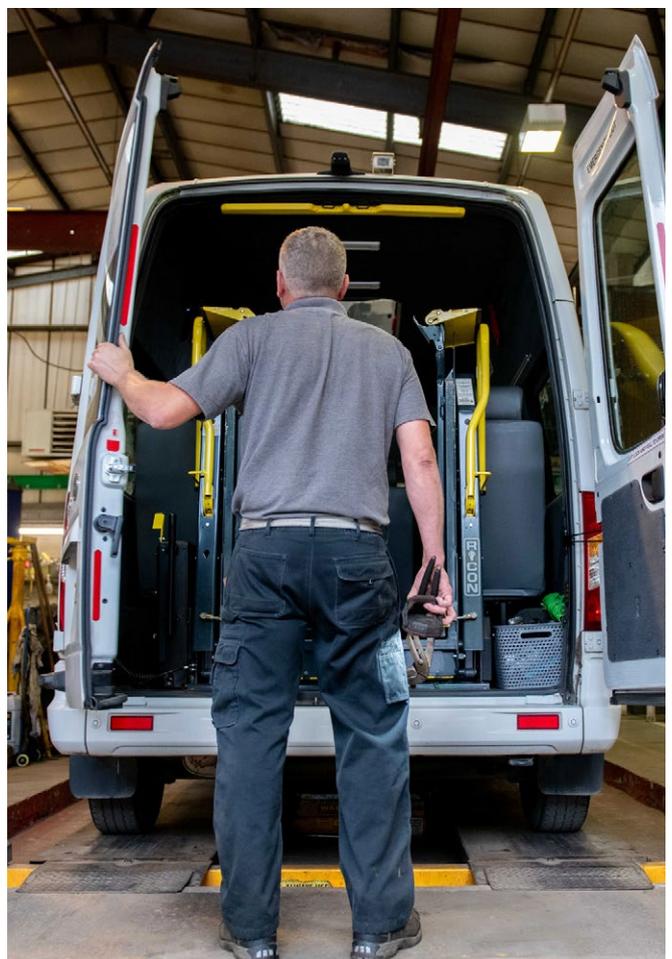
- **Rear storage area and bin**

Ideal for shopping bags or larger personal belongings, keeping the passenger area clear and comfortable. Don't forget that any mobility equipment such as walking frames, rollators etc., must be secured on a vehicle and so you should ensure there is adequate space to do so.

- **Towbar compatibility with tail-lift**

If your vehicle requires towing capabilities, ensure the towbar is compatible with any installed tail-lift equipment for seamless operation.

These additional accessibility features can significantly improve the passenger experience and operational practicality of your vehicle.



### TOP TIP:

"If you are transporting sports teams, you will need to factor in space for their equipment. Same with shopping trips!"

– Ian Harrison, Operations Manager,  
Transport for Tongue

# Safety and comfort considerations

Ensuring passenger safety and comfort is essential when choosing or specifying a vehicle.

## Below are key features to consider:

- **Front and rear sensors plus cameras**  
enhance driver awareness and assist with parking or manoeuvring in tight spaces.
- **Blind spot mirror warning lights**  
improve safety by alerting drivers to vehicles or obstacles in blind spots.
- **Rear passenger camera**  
helps the driver monitor passengers and maintain safety inside the vehicle.
- **Driver and passenger heating and air conditioning**  
ensure a comfortable environment for all occupants, regardless of weather conditions.
- **Quick defrost windscreen**  
reduces waiting time in cold conditions and improves visibility quickly.
- **Easy-clean seating and surfaces**  
choose materials that are simple to wipe down, promoting hygiene and reducing maintenance time.
- **Easy-clean, high-grip rubber flooring**  
provides durability, safety (prevents slips), and ease of cleaning.
- **Sat/nav system**  
assists drivers with efficient route planning and navigation.
- **All-season tyres fitted as standard**  
improves vehicle performance and safety across varied weather conditions.

Including these features can greatly enhance the safety, comfort, and operational efficiency of your vehicle.



## TOP TIPS:

“Always fit a dashcam and factor that cost in. We have needed to review footage a few times now and been glad we had this. Some insurers also reduce their costs if you have these fitted.”

– Alison Harley, Programme Manager, Climate Action Strathaven

“We have some unique requirements regarding our ideal specifications due to our geography and weather. Two examples of this would be in the fitting of all-season tyres as standard and heating, both for the driver and the rear passengers. Lots of our passengers are elderly and their comfort is our top priority.”

– Colin Whitton, Business Development Manager, Badenoch and Strathspey Community Connections

## Some other accessories that will assist the driver:

- **Stereo**

the more complicated the system, the more chance of accidents. Keep it simple.

- **Mud flaps**

consider adding heavy duty mud flaps to all wheel arches. This should help to reduce the amount of cleaning required.

- **Fire extinguisher and first aid kit**

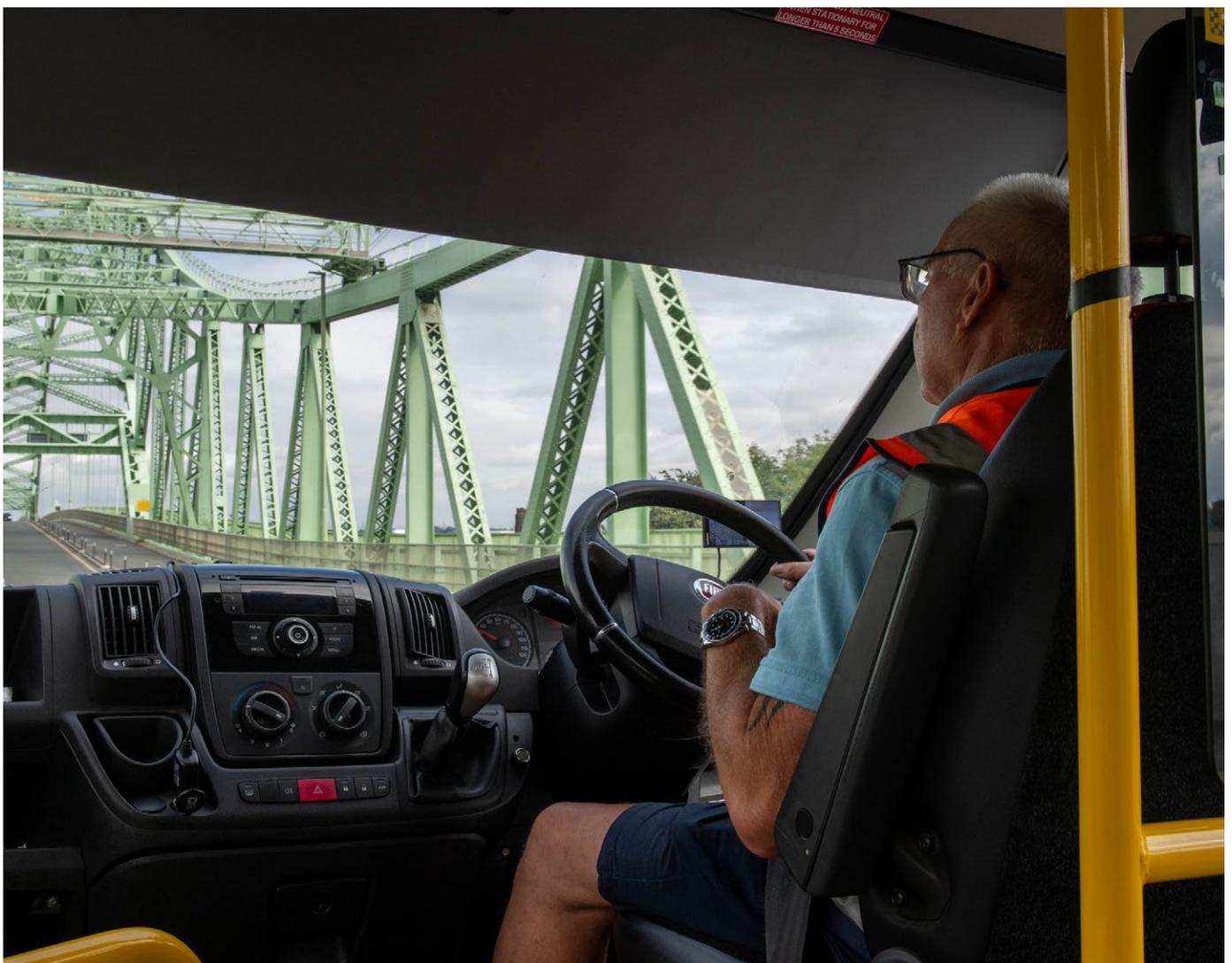
one fire extinguisher should be fitted within easy reach of the driver and the other fitted in the saloon compartment where it is visible and accessible. A first aid kit must also be available on the vehicle, as required by law.



### TOP TIP:

“A straightforward stereo which can connect to Bluetooth is recommended. Don't go for fancy Android systems. Most drivers just want a bit of background noise.”

– Susan Dever, Executive Manager, Coalfield Community Transport



# Vehicle maintenance requirements

Proper maintenance is essential to keep your vehicle safe, reliable, and compliant with legal standards. Whether you purchase new or second-hand, the following maintenance obligations apply:

- **Daily walkaround checks**

Drivers should perform a daily visual inspection of the vehicle to identify any immediate issues. This routine check helps catch problems early and ensures safe operation.

- **PSV maintenance checks**

Every 6–13 weeks, a qualified garage must carry out a thorough PSV (Public Service Vehicle) maintenance inspection to ensure the vehicle meets safety and operational standards. Frequency of the checks will depend on the age of the vehicle, the mileage you cover, and you can contact the DVSA's team to determine the best frequency for your fleet. We'd recommend that you read through the DVSA's Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness for details and templates. More information can be found [here](#).

- **Annual MOT testing**

Unlike privately owned cars, brand new PSV vehicles do not benefit from a 3-year MOT exemption. Therefore, an annual MOT test is mandatory to certify roadworthiness.

- **Passenger lift LOLER inspections**

Passenger lifts must be inspected under the LOLER (Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations) every 6 months by a qualified engineer. This inspection is separate from garage maintenance and critical for passenger safety.

- **Maintenance supplier arrangements**

Identify and establish contracts with local maintenance providers to ensure timely servicing and repairs. Having clear agreements in place helps maintain consistent service quality.

- **Leasing and maintenance packages**

If you opt to lease a vehicle, full maintenance lease options are often available at an additional cost, offering convenience and predictable budgeting. Many of CTA's commercial affiliates offer leasing solutions, you can browse them on our directory:

[www.ctauk.org/commercial-directory](http://www.ctauk.org/commercial-directory)

Regular, proactive maintenance protects your investment, enhances passenger safety, and ensures compliance with regulations. Get in touch with the CTA Advice Service if you need any assistance.





## TOP TIP:

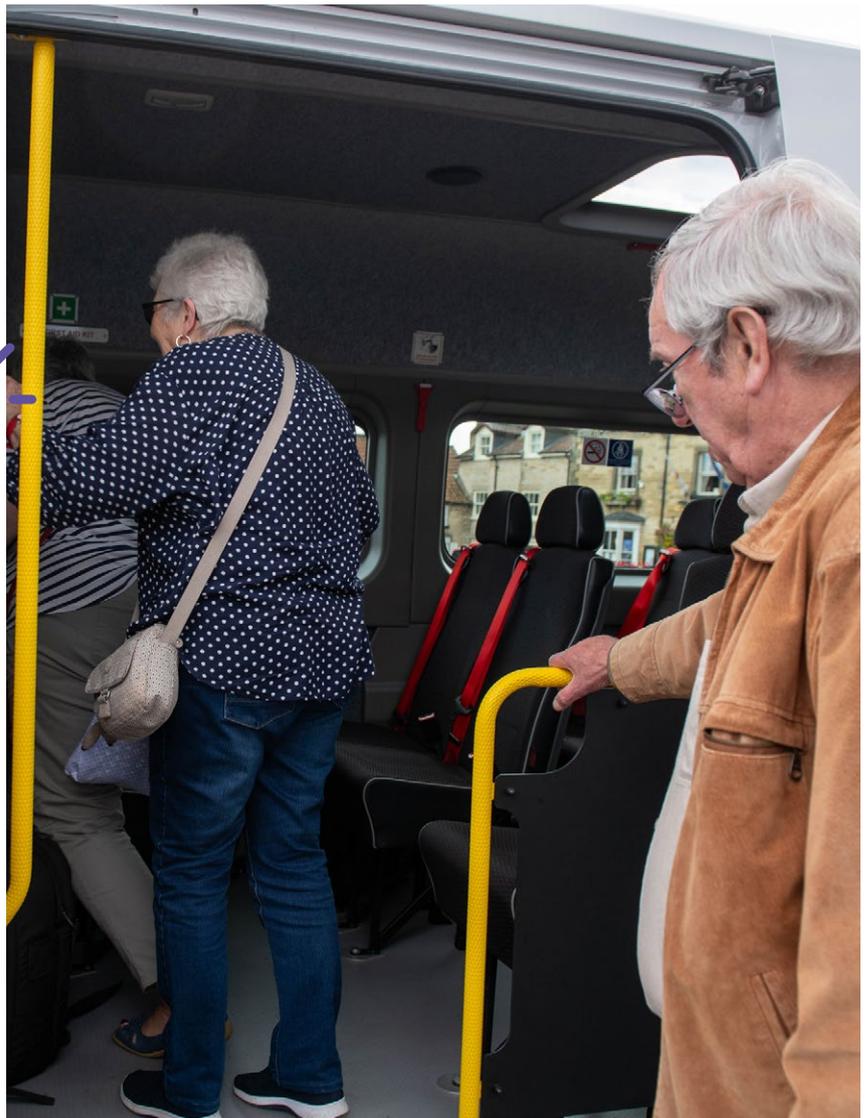
“Full maintenance lease hire options are often available from third-party lessors for an extra cost. Bus converters like Mellor Bus and Treka Bus may also offer service packages at the time of ordering a base vehicle, remember to ask during the specification stage.”

- Mellor Bus



“To keep your vehicle warranty valid, always follow the manufacturer’s service schedule, including for extras like tail lifts, steps, heaters, and air conditioning. Daily driver checks help catch maintenance issues early, but unexpected problems may still require workshop attention.”

- Minibus Options



## TOP TIP:

“We try to have our vehicles safety checked every 8 weeks. The cost of this is £72 per vehicle (2025). It’s very important that a budget is undertaken every year to forecast the upcoming 12 months. If you’re buying an older second-hand vehicle or one with lots of miles on the clock, you’ll need to factor in additional safety checks.”

- Ian Harrison, operations Manager, Transport for Tongue Ltd



## What sort of insurance do we need?

CTA members have exclusive access to tailored insurance support from our two trusted partners Business Choice Direct for motor insurance and WRS Insurance Brokers for business insurance. Find more information on CTA website by visiting the following link: [www.ctauk.org/insurance](http://www.ctauk.org/insurance).

Make sure that your insurance broker has a full understanding of all your activities, including those that take place away from your own premises. You should also make it clear if you use volunteers and what permit you operate under.

Before you start, ensure that you have your vehicle, driver and no-claims bonus information to hand. To ensure a speedy quotation you should have all vehicle details and if relevant to you, information on any prior no claims bonus and any named drivers' records.

Be clear about your requirements and think about the type of services you want to offer:

- **Who will drive your vehicle?**

Consider if you want to name your drivers or request an 'Any Driver' policy. You may want to consider both and weigh up the options.

- **Check your driver's licences**

Make sure whoever you want to drive your vehicle, that they have the appropriate category present on their licence. Please speak to us if you have any doubts.

- **Be clear about exactly how you will use the vehicle**

Depending on how you use the vehicle, you may need cover extensions like 'Hire and Reward' and group hire, BCD will ensure you get the correct cover, no matter what your plans.

- **Hire or reward**

Operators need to be very careful before assuming that their operation is not for 'hire and reward'. If the vehicle is going to be used for 'hire or reward' on a permit, then this should be made explicit when purchasing insurance.

- **Self-hire**

Do you want a self-drive option so other not-for-profits can loan the vehicle from you and use their own driver? If yes, make sure you tell BCD so they can allow for this and ensure 'self-hire' is specifically covered on your policy

- **Breakdown cover**

We would consider breakdown cover a critical requirement, many insurers include the cover within the policy at no additional cost and if they don't as standard BCD can support you with an independent policy.

- **Other safety measures and money saving options**

Via BCD you can get additional discounts for valid MiDAS certificates and if your drivers have previous experience driving a minibus and can prove it, further discounts may be available. Fitting a dashcam may also reduce the cost.

- **Public liability and Business Insurance**

This provides cover for third party claims against an organisation. Although not a legal requirement, public liability insurance is something that a group cannot really afford to ignore, and we would strongly recommend that you add this cover. We would recommend speaking to WRS Insurance Brokers about this and other business insurance.



### TOP TIP:

“Here at BCD we consider ourselves the CTA’s ‘voice’ in the insurance market, via this pledge we secured several exclusive deals for CTA members including the generous MiDAS discount. So, rest assured, if your policy is brand new or up for renewal, we can both save you money and be very confident that we can find you the exact cover for the best possible price.”

– Tristan Scaife, Director of Commercial, Business Choice Direct



## Do we need to tax the vehicle?

Yes, all vehicles must be taxed to be legally driven on public roads. However, accessible vehicles may qualify for road tax exemption under certain conditions.

### Road tax exemption for accessible vehicles

If all your passengers travelling in your vehicle are disabled, you may qualify for **road tax exemption**. To apply, you'll need to request a **change of use** with the DVLA.

### How to apply for exemption

To request a change of use and apply for exemption, send the following documents to the DVLA (remember to keep copies for your records):

- V5C (vehicle logbook)
- MOT certificate
- A letter on your **organisation's headed paper**, explaining who you are, what the vehicle is used for, and that the vehicle is being solely used for the purpose of carrying disabled passengers
- **Photographs** of the vehicle, both interior and exterior, clearly showing its accessible conversion features

This process ensures the vehicle is reclassified appropriately for tax purposes. Once approved, your vehicle may be exempt from paying road tax.



## How do we fuel the vehicle?

Fuelling your vehicle efficiently and cost-effectively is an important part of managing your operations. The method will depend on whether you're operating a diesel or electric vehicle.

### Diesel vehicles

For diesel vehicles, consider using a **fuel card** rather than handling cash or reimbursement processes. Fuel cards offer:

- Secure, cashless transactions
- Centralised billing and reporting
- Potential discounted fuel rates

One example is The Fuel Store, which offers a range of fuel card options suitable for fleet vehicles. CTA currently works in partnership with The Fuel Store. The organisation began as a fuel card reseller, helping organisations of all sizes access lower fuel costs and dependable customer service.

Today, The Fuel Store offers wide UK forecourt coverage and is known for helping customers save time and money through straightforward, reliable service. For more information visit: [www.thefuelstore.co.uk](http://www.thefuelstore.co.uk).

### Electric vehicles (EVs)

If you're considering or operating an **electric vehicle**, it's important to assess your local **charging infrastructure**. While **e-fuel cards** and digital charging payment options are becoming more widely available, coverage can be limited, especially in **rural areas**. Before committing to an electric vehicle, ensure that:

- Charging stations are **accessible along your routes**
- Your depot or parking location has **reliable charging options**
- You've considered the **range** of the EV versus your daily travel needs

By planning your fuelling or charging strategy in advance, you can reduce costs, simplify admin, and ensure consistent service delivery.

# Where will we store the vehicle?

Proper vehicle storage is essential for maintaining safety, security, and operational readiness. Whether you're operating a single vehicle or managing a small fleet, consider the following when planning storage:

## Secure parking location

- **Do you have access to your own secure parking area?**

Ideally, vehicles should be stored in a gated or monitored location to reduce the risk of vandalism or theft.

- **Can a local organisation or business offer safe parking space?**

Partnerships with community centres, schools, or businesses may provide affordable or even free parking options.

- **Are there any costs involved?**

If using a third-party location, be sure to factor in regular **parking fees or rental charges** as part of your operating budget.

## Electric charging (if applicable)

- If you're using or planning to use an **electric vehicle**, check whether the parking location has access to **charging infrastructure**.
- Consider the **type of charger** available (fast vs. standard) and whether it's **compatible** with your vehicle model.

## Key storage and access

- **Where will the keys be kept?**

Choose a secure, accessible location for storing keys, ideally within easy reach for approved drivers, but secure enough to prevent unauthorised access.

- Consider using a **key safe**, lockbox, or monitored **key management system** if multiple drivers share the vehicle.

Careful planning around vehicle storage will help ensure your vehicle is protected, easily accessible, and ready for daily use.



### TOP TIP:

"Parking a larger vehicle, especially in poor weather or low light, can be challenging. Unlike cars, features like front/rear sensors and cameras aren't always standard on minibuses, so be sure to specify them if needed. Also consider adding extra exterior lighting to improve visibility when operating in dark or uneven areas like car parks or rural roads."

- Minibus Options

## Costing example

We have detailed some costings below about buying a vehicle and considerations for its first year of operation. These are based on an electric 9-seater WAV (2025) being driven by volunteers. If your requirement is for a minibus and paid drivers, then these costings will increase. A brand new minibus ranges from £60,000 upwards depending on model.

EV wheelchair accessible MPV	£47,000.00
Coordinator salary and oncosts (PT)	£21,000.00
Journey booking software/ subscriptions	£1500.00
Staff training	£400.00
Volunteer recruitment	£200.00
Volunteer training	£400.00
Volunteer expenses	£400.00
Vehicle Insurance	£1,000.00
Vehicle maintenance and cleaning	£500.00
Contribution to EV fuel costs	£1,000.00
Membership fee (CTA)	£120.00
Permit S19	£11.00
Marketing	£200.00
ID / clothing	£200.00
Signwriting	£500.00

# How do we ensure the purchase goes as smoothly as possible?

Buying a vehicle is one of the most significant investments a community transport operator will make. To help ensure the process runs smoothly, and to avoid potential issues, it's important to plan carefully, manage expectations, and maintain open communication.

## 1. Set clear expectations from the start

- Supply chain delays have caused extended lead times and price fluctuations for some of our members in recent years, so factor this into your planning.
- Understand that sellers may be dealing with factors outside their control, **open and realistic timelines** are essential.

## 2. Communicate openly and consistently

- Maintain **clear and regular communication** with your supplier or dealer.
- Be honest about your **budget** and **vehicle requirements** from the outset to avoid misalignment later in the process.

## 3. Protect yourself financially

- Do not pay anything without an **official invoice**.
- Always ask for **written confirmation** (via email or post) when a purchase agreement is made.
- Avoid making any **advance payments or deposits** unless clearly required, some reputable sellers do not ask for them.

## 4. Work with reputable sellers

- A trustworthy seller will not pressure you into a quick decision.
- You should feel empowered to ask questions and take the time you need to be confident in your choice.

## 5. Have multiple points of contact

- Request **more than one named contact** at the supplier in case someone is off sick, on leave, or leaves their role. This helps avoid unnecessary delays or confusion.

## 6. Be prepared for the vehicle's arrival

- Make sure everything is in place to get the vehicle on the road quickly once it arrives. This may include:
  - Parking arrangements
  - Insurance
  - Fuel/ charging setup
  - Driver access to keys
  - Maintenance plan
  - Accessibility equipment training (if required)

By following these best practices, you can reduce risk, avoid surprises, and help ensure your new vehicle meets the needs of your service from day one.

### CTA NOTE:

Our CTA Commercial Directory showcases a range of products and services designed specifically for community transport operators. Some listings also include special discounts for CTA members. Find out more about our partners and commercial affiliates at: [www.ctauk.org/commercial-directory](http://www.ctauk.org/commercial-directory)



## In summary

Purchasing a vehicle is a major decision, one that comes with both excitement and responsibility. Whether you're buying your first accessible minibus, replacing a long-serving vehicle, or expanding your fleet, taking the time to carefully consider all aspects of the process will help ensure you make the right choice for your organisation and the people you serve.

This guide has been designed to walk you through the key questions and considerations, from funding and licensing to accessibility, safety, and day-to-day maintenance. We hope it has made the process feel clearer, more manageable, and less overwhelming.

## We would like to thank our commercial affiliates and members who contributed directly to the production of this guide which wouldn't have been possible without their insight and expertise.

- Badenoch & Strathspey Community Connections
- Business Choice Direct
- Climate Action Strathaven
- Coalfield Community Transport
- Green Dragon Community Transport
- HCL
- Mellor Ltd
- Minibus Options
- The Madoch Centre
- Transport for Tongue Ltd

.....

If you have any further questions, need tailored advice, or would like support at any stage of your vehicle purchasing journey, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the Community Transport Association (CTA). We're here to help. Let us know how we can support you in delivering safe, inclusive, and reliable transport for your community.

Contact us on [advice@ctauk.org](mailto:advice@ctauk.org)



# Quick operational checklist

- MiDAS training for drivers**
- Enhanced DBS for driver and passenger assistant if applicable**
- Section 19 permit in each vehicle**
- Vehicle tax**
- First aid kits in vehicles**
- Fire extinguisher** – a legal requirement – one to be fitted into the cab and one in the rear of the vehicle
- Fuel card**
- Driver handbook** – with key personnel contacts, passenger safeguarding, breakdown and emergency protocol
- Mileage log for driver to complete at the start and end of the day** (these need to be kept on file for 15 months)
- Vehicle daily checklist** – done by the driver each time they pick up a vehicle (also need to be kept on file for 15 months)
- PSV maintenance checks** – every 6-12 weeks for your vehicles (depending on the age of the vehicle)
- MOT** – yearly (as they are passenger carrying vehicles this is done yearly even if they are new)
- Servicing** - yearly with MOT
- LOLER checks** – every 6 months
- Driver licence checks** – every 6 months

# cta

community transport  
association

## **Community Transport Association**

91 Princess Street  
Manchester  
M1 4HT

[advice@ctauk.org](mailto:advice@ctauk.org)  
0345 130 6195

[www.ctauk.org](http://www.ctauk.org)

© CTA 2026  
Charity registered no. 1002222