

LeasePlan

How to reduce downtime

A guide for business-critical fleets



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Introduction

Downtime is something with which fleet managers everywhere are all too familiar. To an extent, it's inevitable. All vehicles require servicing, maintenance, repairs and inspections from time to time. But just because downtime can't be eliminated, it doesn't mean it can't be minimised.

In fact, minimising downtime is incredibly important, because every day a vehicle is off the road can be very costly for your organisation. It's not just the money you spend at the garage, repairing or servicing the vehicle. There are all the associated expenses on top: the cost of any replacement vehicles, the lost productivity because your employees can't work, and the time spent rearranging schedules.

Not many fleets take the time to fully appreciate all of these factors. When Autoglass surveyed 250 fleet managers in 2013, 40% were unable to estimate the business cost of having a vehicle off the road. Among those who could, the average estimate was £727 per day per van.¹

Even that estimate is a little low. The actual cost of having a van off the road can be as much as £1,000 per day. And that's before you consider the other ways that downtime can adversely affect your business. Not being able to deliver the goods or services you've promised can hurt your reputation and damage your relationship with customers and clients.

Fortunately, there are a number of steps you can take to reduce downtime and minimise these costs. That's why we've produced this guide: to help you keep your vehicles on the road as much as possible. It contains tips on everything from selecting the right vehicles to training your drivers.

Implement the advice in these pages, and you should be able to reduce downtime significantly. That will mean lower vehicle-off-road costs, more productive employees, and happier customers – all the ingredients for a healthier, more efficient fleet.

Mark Lovett, Head of Commercial Vehicles, LeasePlan UK



¹ <https://fleetworld.co.uk/only-27-of-fleets-perform-regular-maintenance-checks/>

Procurement

It all starts at the very beginning: choosing the right vehicles from the right supplier. Selecting a good supplier or leasing partner is important, because you may be relying on their network of suppliers and garages to get any work done quickly and efficiently. Make sure the service level agreement with your leasing company or maintenance provider sets out clearly the levels of availability you can expect.

A good supplier can also help you to select the right vehicles. A lot of unnecessary downtime can be avoided by being careful with your specifications and making sure that you get the best vehicles for the job. Consider all of your needs – size, payload, power, any specialist equipment – and involve your drivers and operators at an early stage to avoid problems later on. And don't be fooled into the false economy of a cheap vehicle that isn't fit for purpose. You'll only incur much greater costs down the line.

You can also reduce downtime by renewing your vehicles regularly. As vehicles age, they break down more often and spend more and more time off the road. Upgrading to newer models will therefore help you to keep your fleet on the move.

Regular checks

Prevention is better than cure, so it's crucial to carry out regular checks to catch any defects before they develop into more serious problems. 70% of MOT failure points are elements that a driver (not a mechanic) should be able to spot i.e. damage to a windscreen, bulbs not working, tyres needing attention. Your drivers, or other appointed employees, should perform a walk-around check of each vehicle at the start of each day.

These checks are important for safety reasons, and they also provide a good opportunity to spot defects early and schedule the vehicle for repairs or maintenance if necessary.

Scheduling

Some downtime is unplanned, resulting from breakdowns, accidents or other unforeseen issues. But some downtime is planned, in the form of regular servicing and MOT inspections.

The key to minimising the cost of planned downtime is organisation. You need to keep careful track of when your vehicles are due for their MOTs, and for any servicing and maintenance. Identify these dates well in advance so that you can fit planned downtime around your activities with minimum disruption.

If you can, arrange for your vehicles to be off the road at times when you don't need them for critical work anyway: at the weekend, perhaps, or in the evening. Coordinate different tasks – such as servicing and inspections – so that more than one can be completed during a single period of downtime. MOTs can be booked up to one calendar month in advance and still retain the same expiry date – in effect the MOT can last up to 13 months.

It's always worth checking ahead to make sure the garage or supplier has any parts or tyres your vehicles may need – and order anything they don't have in advance. That way, your vehicle won't have to spend valuable time off the road waiting for the right ones to arrive.

Another advantage of planning ahead is that, when necessary, you can arrange temporary replacement vehicles well in advance. That helps to ensure that you get the vehicles you need while avoiding expensive last-minute fees.

Driver training

Don't just focus on the vehicles themselves. The way they're driven is just as important for avoiding both accidents and excessive wear and tear. Good drivers keep their vehicles in good condition, meaning that they don't need to be taken off the road very often.

Make sure your drivers are well-trained – not just in general driving, but also on the specific requirements of their vehicle and any special equipment they use. New drivers should receive induction training, but it mustn't stop there. Regular training should be a key part of your drivers' continuous professional development. And it should include instruction on keeping their vehicles in good working order, as well as spotting defects early so they can be rectified.

It's also essential to review accident damage – trend analysis can help to determine whether there are any common issues that could be identified and remedied.

The power of data

When it comes to reducing downtime, as with so many other aspects of fleet management, data is a powerful tool. If you track your vehicles' mileage, you'll have a better idea of when they'll need servicing. If you monitor how often they break down – and what causes them to do so – you can identify any vehicles that need replacing.

And, with the help of new telematics systems, you can make use of more data than ever before. You can analyse how each of your drivers behaves, and identify whether any of them are causing greater wear and tear than usual or are more likely to be involved in an accident. These drivers should receive additional training to help them drive more safely and place less strain on their vehicles.

A 2015 survey of 500 British fleets for RAC Business found that 55% have seen lower levels of wear and tear thanks to the use of telematics, while 52% had seen a reduction in accidents. 48% said that telematics had helped to reduce their overall vehicle downtime.²

² <https://www.rac.co.uk/press-centre#/pressreleases/uk-firms-see-business-benefits-in-telematics-technology-1326902>

How LeasePlan can help


This may seem like a lot of work, but it's all worth it. And, fortunately, you don't have to do it alone. LeasePlan can help with each of the aspects of downtime management mentioned above.

Our Uptime Live service uses data from telematics to plan inspections, servicing, repairs and other scheduled maintenance around your work patterns, so that you suffer minimal disruption from downtime.

When your vehicles do require maintenance, we'll put our network of specialist suppliers and repairers to work for you. We'll arrange servicing by the hour, so that you don't lose the use of a vehicle for a whole day to complete a relatively short task. We'll also keep you informed of how the work is progressing and what time it is expected to be complete. And we'll keep detailed maintenance records for future inspections.

We have also released an app – My Vehicle Check – that is specially designed to make it easy to conduct daily walk around checks, report defects in real time, and see whether repairs are required. All the data is available online and provides a clear audit trail. Backed by the Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme, the My Vehicle Check app can help you to keep your vehicles compliant, reduce the burden of administration and minimise downtime.

There's much more we can help with too. Simply get in touch with our expert Commercial Vehicle team to find out more.



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