



# Driving for Better Business

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## Managing young, novice and inexperienced van drivers

A practitioner-led guide from the National Highways  
Driving for Better Business Programme

This guide has been developed with fleet safety professionals, training specialists, and relevant academic research to offer practical ideas for supporting employees who are new to driving vans.

Organisations can adapt these suggestions to their own operations and risk management needs. While we have aimed to reflect good practice, this guide is for general information only and should not be taken as formal instruction, accredited training, or legal advice.

# Contents

Executive summary	4
Introduction	5
Understanding van transition risk	8
Age as a risk factor	10
Support mechanisms for inexperienced drivers	12
Tiered risk management approach	12
Permit to drive system	13
Driver profiling and assessment	13
Comprehensive vehicle induction	14
Distributed training methods	16
Mentoring and buddy systems	17
Training delivery methods	18
Monitoring and performance management	18
Continuous reinforcement	21
Establishing safety culture	22
Business benefits of effective novice driver management	24
Calculating return on investment	25
Essential tips for new van drivers	27
Operating principles	29
Case studies	31
Conclusion	34
Appendices	35
Glossary of terms	35
Quick reference: Key differences between cars and vans	36
Implementation roadmap	37
Common implementation challenges and solutions	39
Resources and further support	40
Research and evidence base	41
Acknowledgements	42

# Executive summary

## **Key insight**

Inexperience – whether with new vehicles, a new role, or new pressures – significantly increases collision risk. Younger drivers may face additional challenges linked to age, and this can amplify other risks if not managed well.

## **If you only do five things, make them these:**

1. **Implement a permit-to-drive system:** No one should drive a van until they've completed vehicle-specific training and assessment.
2. **Provide a comprehensive vehicle induction:** Cover all controls, how the van handles, and the key differences compared with a car.
3. **Use distributed training:** Spread learning over 4-6 weeks rather than intense, one-off courses.
4. **Monitor and coach actively:** Use telematics and/or cameras to support regular constructive conversations about driving behaviour.
5. **Establish a buddy system:** Pair new and inexperienced drivers with experienced, safe colleagues who can support their early development as mentors.

# Introduction

## Understanding transition risk

There are two key periods where collision risk increases sharply: before the age of 25 and when drivers transition to new vehicles, roles, pressures, or environments. Learning something unfamiliar requires mental effort and new behaviours. Any driver faces greater risk during a transition period – and youth can amplify this risk further.

**Critical principle:** Transition risk affects all drivers, regardless of age, experience, or qualifications.

Here are a few examples shared by practitioners:

- **The emerging professional:** A 19-year-old apprentice moving from a personal car to a fully loaded service van. The risk comes from the transition into high-pressure work driving, and it's heightened because the prefrontal cortex – responsible for judgement impulse control – is still developing at this age.
- **The career changer:** A 45-year-old joining a facilities management company who has driven cars for decades but never a high-roof van. Their experience may create over-confidence that masks genuine skill gaps.
- **The tradesperson:** A 35-year-old electrician moving from a small car-derived van to a long-wheelbase, high-roof panel van with very different handling, weight, and blind spots.
- **The technology shift:** A 50-year-old driver moving from a basic diesel van to a new electric vehicle with full advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS). The driving experience is completely different, and the driver must learn how to use, yet not over-rely on, assistance technology.

All four examples represent genuine collision risk, regardless of age or experience. This guide focuses on managing that risk across all driver demographics.



Vans handle differently, and in reality, their on-road behaviour as a van driver must be relearned.

### **Who needs extra support?**

Drivers may need additional support when they are:

- Moving to a new vehicle type – e.g., car to van, or car-derived van to panel van
- Changing weight class – e.g., moving to heavier vehicles which require different handling
- Using unfamiliar technology – electric vehicles, ADAS, or different driver aids
- Towing for the first time
- New to driving for work - particularly drivers aged 17-25
- Changing career - experienced workers who haven't driven professionally
- Moving into field-based roles
- Returning to driving after a long break
- Driving in the UK for the first time

## The confidence-competence gap

One of the biggest risks during driver transition is the potential mismatch between confidence and actual competence.

Research<sup>1</sup> shows confidence in handling a vehicle often increases within weeks, but true competence – especially in vans – takes much longer to develop.

This is also true for experienced car drivers who expect their “road sense” to transfer immediately. However, vans handle differently, and in reality, their on-road behaviour as a van driver must be relearnt.

This mismatch creates a risk window where drivers may:

- Overestimate their ability under pressure
- Take risks they would avoid once truly competent
- Miss hazards specific to vans
- Revert to inappropriate habits and behaviours that aren't suitable for larger vehicles

Studies also show that as new drivers become more confident controlling the vehicle, their safety behaviours can decline (faster speeds, closer following distances)<sup>2</sup>.

**Critical principle:** Experience in one vehicle type does not equal competence with another. Confidence may outpace competence during transitions.

Fleet managers can help by offering extended monitoring, coaching, and gradually increasing responsibilities during these periods.

<sup>1</sup> [https://gala.gre.ac.uk/id/eprint/19684/9/19684%20POULTER\\_Why\\_Do\\_Drivers\\_Become\\_Safer\\_%28OA%29\\_2018.pdf](https://gala.gre.ac.uk/id/eprint/19684/9/19684%20POULTER_Why_Do_Drivers_Become_Safer_%28OA%29_2018.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Lajunen T, Sullman MJM, Gaygisiz E. Self-Assessed Driving Skills and Risky Driver Behaviour Among Young Drivers: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Front Psychol.* 2022 Apr 13;13:840269. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.840269. PMID: 35496240; PMCID: PMC9043323.

# Understanding van transition risk

## **Why the car-to-van transition is harder than you think**

New experiences create cognitive load – the brain works harder and tires faster. For novice van drivers, several challenges appear at once.

### **Visibility and spatial awareness**

- Larger blind spots with no rear-view mirror
- Different side-mirror positioning and usage
- Different sightlines and view of other road users
- Restricted overhead clearance awareness

### **Vehicle dynamics**

- Higher centre of gravity affects stability and cornering
- Bigger turning circle
- Longer braking distances
- Variable handling when loaded and unloaded
- More vulnerable to crosswinds and aquaplaning
- More rigid suspension, especially when laden

### **Perceptual changes**

- Higher driving position reduces perceived speed
- Less vibration means fewer sensory cues
  - Both can lead to unintentional speeding

### **Operational differences**

- Different speed limits for vans on certain roads
- Weight changing throughout the day
- Unladen vehicles have different braking risks
- Extra gears in most vans
- Some vans lack safety features (airbags, ADAS) common in new cars



Towing requires specific training.

### **Towing**

Towing brings a unique set of risks:

- Longer stopping distances - a loaded trailer can double or triple braking distances
- Altered handling and road positioning - a trailer affects turning circles, as well as vehicle steering, cornering, and balance
- Complex reversing with counter-intuitive steering inputs
- Risk of snaking or jack-knifing
- Lower speed limits on most roads
- Increased height and length which impacts junction visibility and parking
- Critical need for correct nose weight for stability
- Secure coupling and uncoupling procedures to prevent detachment

Towing requires specific training. It cannot be assumed to be a transferable skill from van driving.

# Age as a risk factor

**Key principle:** Young drivers experience many of the same transition challenges as older drivers who are new to vans, new to driving for work, or under unfamiliar time pressure, but mental factors and limited overall driving experience make these challenges more pronounced.

## Known young driver risk factors

Drivers aged 17-24 account for around one-fifth of all killed or seriously injured casualties in car collisions. Young male drivers are four times more likely to be killed or seriously injured than drivers aged 25 or over<sup>3</sup>.

### Reasons include:

#### Limited experience

- DVSA report that learners average 45 hours of lessons plus 22 hours of private practice before testing
- Currently there is no minimum driving required to pass the test
- Intensive courses can produce high pass rates but miss valuable broad road experience. Failure offers critical learning opportunities often missed in rapid qualification

Drivers with identical licenses could have dramatically different real-world mileage and experience, and present very different risk profiles.

#### Neurological development

The brain's prefrontal cortex - responsible for self-regulation, reasoning, and planning - continues developing into the mid-to-late twenties. This affects:

- Emotional regulation
- Impulse control
- Risk assessment
- Rational decision-making under pressure

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-older-and-younger-driver-factsheets-2024/reported-road-casualties-in-great-britain-younger-driver-factsheet-2024>

Circadian rhythms in young adults also differ:

- Young adults naturally sleep and wake later
- Early starts or long days can cause significant fatigue

Higher testosterone levels may also contribute to optimism bias, a belief that negative outcomes are less likely.

### **Contemporary challenges**

- Many young people are unused to turning off their phone, which can be a source of driver distraction
- Reduced attention span - almost 60% of adults between 18 and 34 believe their attention span has diminished<sup>4</sup>
- Managing learning a new job at the same time as learning to drive a new vehicle
- Financial pressures are more likely in young adults, which may lead to working long or extra hours despite fatigue.

### **The reality of young driver collisions**

Young driver casualties are greatest between 4pm–7pm and peak at 5pm<sup>5</sup>. This suggests greater risks at rush hour rather than at late-night where collisions are often associated with young driver fatalities. Likely contributors include:

- End-of-workday fatigue
- Pressure to complete final jobs or reach destinations
- Heavier traffic
- Transition from work focus to personal time
- Winter darkness during commuting times

Government data often attributes serious young driver collisions to 'driver or rider being aggressive or dangerous or reckless', 'travelling too fast for conditions (including loss of control or swerving)', 'exceeding speed limit' or 'inexperienced or learner'.

However, these labels often mask underlying causes such as poor hazard perception, inadequate vehicle familiarity, or misunderstanding vehicle dynamics under challenging conditions.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-in /assets/how-people-focus-and-live-in-the-modern-information-environment.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-older-and-younger-driver-factsheets-2024/reported-road-casualties-in-great-britain-younger-driver-factsheet-2024#factors-contributing-to-casualties>



# Support mechanisms for inexperienced drivers

## Tiered risk management approach

This tiered approach builds support in layers. Each tier assumes the previous one is already in place.

### **Tier 1: Minimum expected controls (All new-to-van drivers)**

1. Driving licence qualification check
2. Comprehensive vehicle induction
3. Driving-for-work policy refresher
4. Initial driver assessment or profiling
5. Basic monitoring through telematics

### **Tier 2: Enhanced controls (higher risk drivers) - in addition to tier 1**

6. Permit-to-drive assessment with a clear pass/fail standard
7. Extended mentor/buddy system for at least 6 weeks
8. Distributed training programme
9. Regular coaching conversations informed by telematics data

### **Tier 3: Best practice (drivers under 25 or with high-risk profiles) - in addition to tiers 1 and 2**

10. Extended mentorship for up to 6 months
11. Mandatory accompanied driving with a qualified driver
12. Additional classroom or e-learning modules
13. Targeted campaigns and refresher training

## Permit to drive system

Many organisations find it helpful for drivers to complete vehicle-specific training and assessment before operating company vehicles. These processes should reflect both the driver's needs and the vehicle characteristics.

### Core components:

- Desktop risk assessment
- Classroom safe driver induction workshop
- In-cab training (2.5 days standard, or distributed model)
- Pass/fail driving assessment
- Eyesight check

### Critical requirements:

- Appropriate licence qualification
- Minimum two years of driving experience
- No drink/drug driving or mobile phone offences in the past four years
- No more than seven penalty points
- Clear assessment results

Permits should be paused or revoked if drivers receive additional points, penalties, or serious events. Remedial training can help rebuild confidence and competence.

## Driver profiling and assessment

Before transitioning a driver into a new vehicle, practitioners recommend conducting a comprehensive assessment of their skills and experience.

### Assessment elements:

- Years of driving experience
- Points, penalties, and incident history
- Practical driving assessment in current vehicle
- Telematics scores (if available)
- Hazard awareness testing

**Critical principle:** If a driver performs poorly in a familiar vehicle or shows safety-critical weaknesses, provide extra training **before** moving them into a larger or heavier vehicle.

## Understanding risk profiles

Different drivers need different support based on their risk profile.

These categories may help shape decisions:

### Low risk profile:

- 5+ years' driving experience
- Clean license (no points) appropriate to the vehicle class
- No at-fault collisions in the past 3 years
- Strong assessment performance
- Experience with similar vehicle types
- Strong hazard awareness

### Medium risk profile:

- 2-5 years' driving experience
- Minor points or a single minor incident
- Good, but not excellent, assessment performance
- First time driving this vehicle type
- Developing hazard awareness skills

### High risk profile:

Drivers may fall into this group if they have *any* of the following:

- Under 2 years' driving experience
- Multiple points or a recent serious offense
- Concerns raised during assessment
- A significant vehicle type change
- Limited hazard awareness capability

Higher risk drivers benefit from closer monitoring, extended mentoring, and additional training.

## Comprehensive vehicle induction

Every driver should be introduced to their new vehicle in a structured way.

### Vehicle controls

- Steering, transmission, acceleration, and braking systems
- Lights, wipers, indicators, and navigation systems
- Practice activating key controls, so drivers are not searching during driving
- Any specialist equipment or bodywork

### **ADAS and technology**

- Explain assistive features and their limitations
- Set clear rules about when to use them (e.g., programme navigation before departure only)
- Stress that disabling safety equipment is not permitted
- Reinforce that ADAS supports but does not replace driver responsibility

### **Vehicle handling characteristics**

- Stability factors
- Load effects and weather impacts
- Differences between automatic, electric, and diesel acceleration characteristics
- Approaching junctions safely

### **Safe entry and exit**

- Choosing appropriate and legal parking
- Stepping out safely (including the Dutch Reach technique i.e., left-hand door opening)

### **Ergonomics**

- Seat, mirror, and steering wheel adjustment
- Lumbar support
- Mirror folding protocols

### **Operational procedures**

- Pre-use vehicle condition checks
- Defect reporting process
- Refuelling/charging requirements and minimum levels
- Weight and dimension awareness

### **Load management**

- Maximum weight and space limits
- Weight distribution across axles
- Load securing methods
- Impact of insecure/poorly distributed loads on stability
- How changes to the load affect vehicle dynamics (e.g., when making deliveries)
- Safe cab storage for personal items, tools, and equipment



People need to hear messages three to seven times to really understand and remember.

## Distributed training methods

Spreading training over several weeks often works better than intensive courses.

### Why it works

- Better retention
- Allows subconscious processing between sessions
- Encourages real-world application between lessons
- Demonstrates that safety support is ongoing and of value
- Reduces cognitive overload when people are learning new roles
- Reinforces message repeatedly

**Did you know?** People need to hear messages three to seven times to really understand and remember.

While distributed training may be less convenient, practitioners reported that it often results in fewer collisions, lower insurance costs, and reduced vehicle damage.

# Mentoring and buddy systems

Pairing inexperienced drivers with safe, experienced “buddies” can offer:

- Supervised short journeys
- Observation and practical tips
- Safe discussion and question opportunities
- Gradual confidence building

Choosing the right mentor is essential. Look for someone who demonstrates:

- Safe, consistent driving
- Patience and clarity when explaining techniques or mistakes
- Willingness to challenge unsafe behaviours
- Time to support the mentee
- Strong understanding and compliance of company policies

## **Mentor training may include:**

- Effective observation and feedback techniques – including balancing encouragement with constructive criticism
- Recognising cognitive overload
- Knowing when to intervene
- Documentation requirements

## **Structured mentoring programmes may include:**

- Clear learning objectives
- Defined timeframes (six weeks to six months)
- Regular scheduled check-ins
- Gradual independence
- Simple progress documentation

## **Mentor effectiveness indicators may include:**

- Collision and incident rates among mentees
- Telematics scores during and after mentorship
- Mentee feedback
- Mentor retention and engagement levels
- Time to competence data for different driver profiles

This helps identify great mentors and highlight relationships that may need support.

# Training delivery methods

## E-learning

- **Strengths:** Scalable, cost-effective, good for knowledge transfer
- **Limitations:** Less effective for changing behaviour on its own
- **Best used for:** First principles, company policies, and theory

## Classroom-based learning

- **Strengths:** Interactive, encourages discussion, allows external speakers to add credibility
- **Limitations:** Requires planning and can be harder to scale
- **Best used for:** Risk awareness, safety culture building, and group learning

## In-cab training

- **Strengths:** Highly personalised, offers immediate feedback, ideal for practical skill development
- **Limitations:** Time-intensive, difficult to scale, requires qualified instructors
- **Best used for:** Vehicle-specific skills and addressing individual development needs

## Combined approach (the optimal)

- Combine all three methods to offer the strongest, most rounded development

# Monitoring and performance management

Monitoring helps identify risk and support safe driving. Technology can help – but it only works when it's followed by human conversations.

## Active monitoring tools:

- Telematics tracking speed, braking, cornering, and acceleration
- External-facing cameras recording road events
- Inward-facing cameras recording in-cab driving behaviour
- Exception reports for risky manoeuvres
- Real-time dashboard alerts

**Critical principle:** Alerts alone don't change drive behaviour. Meaningful coaching is what drives improvement.



### **Recognition strategies:**

- Reward improvement, not only top performance
- Use league tables cautiously as they can demotivate lower-scoring drivers
- Reinforce positive behaviours
- Reward the safe behaviour or process, not the outcome

### **Intervention triggers**

Some situations suggest it's time for extra support:

- Involvement in a near-collision or collision
- Telematics scores dropping below an agreed level
- Scores for specific behaviours (e.g., close following) falling below expectations
- Points or penalties

This could lead to:

- Coaching discussions
- Additional training
- Temporary suspension of permit-to-drive

### **Making monitoring meaningful**

Many fleets invest in telematics and cameras but fail to extract their full value. Practitioners suggested a few ideas to help monitoring work better:

#### **Clear thresholds and escalation**

- Decide which risks matter most and set clear thresholds
- Focus may vary – some prioritise speeding, others look at the lowest scoring drivers
- New-to-vehicle drivers benefit from closer monitoring early on

Telematics scores and trends can also show whether the whole fleet is improving. If culture improves, average scores tend to rise, as well as expectations.

### **Coaching tips**

When discussing driver behaviour:

- Assume positive intent - most drivers want to be safe
- Describe the behaviour, not the person e.g., "Close following is dangerous" not "you are dangerous"
- Explore underlying causes (workload, fatigue, unfamiliar routes)
- Solve problems together: "What might help you manage this differently?"
- Document agreements and follow up dates

### **Positive reinforcement systems**

Recognising good performance helps build a strong culture, and is as important as correction:

- Awards for most improved drivers
- Public recognition for sustained safe performance
- Small rewards, such as fuel cards, equipment upgrades, preferred shifts
- Progression opportunities linked to safe driving
- Peer recognition schemes

## Privacy and trust

Monitoring only works if drivers trust why it's happening. This means being clear about:

- What is monitored and why
- How footage is used (e.g., coaching first, not discipline)
- When camera activate for privacy protection
- How long data is kept
- Drivers' right to view footage or raise concerns

Without trust, monitoring can feel confrontational and drivers may focus on avoiding detection rather than genuine safety improvement.

## Continuous reinforcement

Training only works if its reinforced. Simple reminders help keep safety front of mind.

### Communication channels:

- Driver briefings
- Seasonal reminders and targeted campaigns
- Dashboard stickers with key safety rules (use sparingly to avoid dilution)
- Steering wheel covers with pre-departure checklists

### Example steering wheel cover checklist:

#### Do not remove this until you have:

1. Completed your pre-use check
2. Walked around the vehicle to check for obstructions
3. Programmed your GPS
4. Adjusted mirrors
5. Fastened your seatbelt

# Establishing safety culture

Novice drivers learn from what they **see**, not just what they are told.

## **Show and tell principle:**

- Policies must match observed behaviours
- Leaders must model safe practice
- Colleagues should set a consistent example
- Operational pressure must never override safety

## **“If in doubt, shout out” culture:**

Drivers should feel able to speak up about:

- Personal health (fatigue, stress, anxiety, illness)
- Concerns about colleagues
- Unreadiness to drive solo after training
- Vehicle defects or concerns

**Drivers who raise concerns are valuable, not problematic.**

## **Leadership visibility**

Leaders can help by:

- Joining driver briefings and training sessions
- Emphasising learning from incidents
- Recognising safe performance publicly
- Visiting depots and field sites
- Following the same rules as drivers
- Talking about safety in operational updates

## **Addressing operational pressure**

How an organisation responds in pressured moments defines its real safety culture.

Examples:

### **Scenario: Running late and customer pressure**

- **Wrong response:** “Do what you can to get there on time.”
- **Right response:** “Contact the customer, explain the delay, arrive safely. We’ll handle the customer relationship.”

### **Scenario: Driver reports fatigue mid-shift**

- **Wrong response:** “We’re short-staffed, you need to finish the route.”
- **Right response:** “Stop in a safe location. We’ll arrange cover or reschedule deliveries.”



### **Scenario: Safety-critical vehicle defect found during pre-use check**

- **Wrong response:** "It'll be fine for today; we'll fix it tomorrow."
- **Right response:** "Take it off the road immediately, use a spare vehicle or postpone work."

### **Peer culture and social norms**

Culture isn't shaped by posters but by people.

- Stories about near-misses should focus on lessons learnt, not luck
- Experienced drivers should challenge unsafe behaviours
- New drivers should see everyone following the same rules, not a two-tier system

Organisations can strengthen positive peer culture through:

- Creating safety champion networks
- Setting team-based safety goals and rewards
- Encouraging open discussion of incidents and near-collisions
- Holding regular "safety conversation" sessions where drivers share challenges

### **Measuring culture**

Culture change requires measurement. Signs of a developing culture include:

- Anonymous surveys showing trust
- Increased near-miss reporting
- High quality safety conversations
- Consistent application of policies
- Exit interview feedback
- Investigations recognising cultural factors



## Business benefits of effective novice driver management

### **Duty of care**

Fulfils legal obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act while protecting employees and other road users.

### **Reduced insurance costs**

The **Association of British Insurers** data shows higher claim frequencies and costs for younger age groups in personal motor insurance. These patterns are often amplified in commercial operations with higher mileages and time pressures and result in higher premiums.

Insurers may reduce these costs when robust training and monitoring are in place. However, managing your risk will certainly lower your self-insured liability.

### **Vehicle related savings**

- Lower repair and maintenance costs
- Less unplanned vehicle off-road (VOR) time
- Better end of lease condition and valuation

### **Improved productivity**

- Minimised unscheduled downtime and VOR
- Smoother delivery and appointment schedules
- Less confidence loss requiring remedial support

### Customer satisfaction

- Reliable service
- Kept promises and commitments
- Professional on-road behaviour

### Brand protection

- Professional, safe, courteous drivers enhance brand value and reputation

### Staff retention

- New drivers who feel supported and valued stay longer and perform better

## Calculating return on investment

Good novice driver management fulfils legal and moral duties – but it also makes clear financial sense, which can help win support from stakeholders.

### Cost of collisions

(All following figures sourced Q1 2026, or estimated for illustrative purposes only).

This is a non-exhaustive list of the real costs of collision.

Organisations can work out their own figures, which will vary based on the circumstances and nature of the business.

- **Vehicle damage:** Average cost of collision in 2025 was £5,191<sup>6</sup> for cars; usually much higher for commercial vehicles
- **Insurance excess:** £250-£1,000 per incident; usually higher if it's a young driver
- **Premium increases:** 12-40% for following years<sup>7</sup>
- **Vehicle off road time:** £150- £250 per day in lost productivity, depending on driver salary
- **Replacement vehicle hire:** £40-£100 per day
- **Staff time on administration:** 5-10 hours at £15-£30/hour
- **Management time on investigation:** 3-8 hours at £25-£50/hour
- **Potential injury costs:** Medical, compensation, legal fees, third party liabilities

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.autoclaimsassist.co.uk/resource/insights/repair-costs-total-losses-2019-2025/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://continentalcarhire.co.uk/car-insurance-increase-after-accident-uk/#:~:text=On%20average%2C%20you%20can%20expect,on%20the%20factors%20given%20below%3A>

- **Driver sick leave or absence (assuming one week):** £500
- **Reputational damage:** Difficult to quantify but potentially significant

**Total cost per minor collision:** circa £5,000

**Total cost per serious collision:** £10,000-£50,000+

These figures are compounded by the record levels of write-offs occurring following collisions, which reached 66% of all car claims in 2025. This trend also affects commercial vehicles due to increasing vehicle complexity and high repair costs.

### Investment in prevention

Estimated costs for a comprehensive transition management programme:

- **Assessment and profiling:** £100-£200 per driver
- **Extended training program:** £500-£1,200 per driver
- **Mentoring time:** £300-£600 per driver (mentor time costs)
- **Monitoring systems:** £30-£50 per vehicle per month
- **Management oversight:** £200-£400 per driver annually

**Total investment per driver:** £1,500-£3,000 in first year

### Break-even analysis

In many fleets 10 new drivers typically result in around three collisions in their first year = £15,000-£20,000 in costs.

With a structured programme, this can reduce to one collision = £5,000 in costs.

**Net benefit:** £7,000 saved and premium levels protected after cost of training and interventions.

So, in this example, every prevented collision pays for at least two drivers' training and safety management, meaning a programme is likely to break even within one year.

### Long-term value

Strong novice-driver programmes deliver lasting benefits:

- Fewer collisions
- Lower insurance premiums
- Better vehicle utilisation
- Higher residual values
- Stronger culture and staff retention
- An enhanced reputation and better customer satisfaction
- Reduced stress on management and drivers
- Documented legal compliance demonstrating due diligence in duty of care

# Essential tips for new van drivers

## Visibility and positioning

- There's no rear-view mirror in most vans, so use side mirrors confidently, physically turn your head to check blind spots and get familiar with your limited visibility zones.
- Practice reversing without relying on cameras (in a safe environment). This helps if technology fails mid-shift.
- Keep your wheels straight at junctions. Angled wheels limit sight lines and could push you into traffic if someone hits you from behind.

## Understanding van physics

### The bigger you are, the harder the impact.

Mass x velocity equals momentum and the greater your momentum, the more kinetic energy is released on impact. Vans are heavier than cars and so have far more kinetic energy even at low speeds. In real-world collisions where full braking distance isn't available, this means greater impact forces and higher fatality risk.

A laden 3.5-tonne van traveling at 30mph carries three times the kinetic energy of a 1.2-tonne car at the same speed. This is why small speed differences matter enormously in vans. The differences between 25mph and 35mph in a collision can be the difference between walking away and a fatality.

### Leave more room

Extra room between you and the vehicle in front means more time to think, react, and slow down. Leave even more room if conditions are poor.

### Reduce speed in poor conditions

Maximum limits assume ideal conditions. Reduce speed in darkness, rain, near roadworks, or on detours. Remember that "ideal conditions" means dry roads, good visibility, light traffic - conditions that rarely exist simultaneously.

### Know your limits:

- Speed limits for vans (typically 30 mph built-up, 50 mph single carriageway, 60 mph dual carriageway, 70 mph motorway)
- Height restrictions – bridges, car parks, underpasses
- Weight limits – calculate total including load, fuel, and occupants
- Width restrictions – narrow lanes, gates, car park spaces
- Fuel consumption or range



The legal minimum tread depth is 1.6mm across the central three-quarters of the tread<sup>8</sup>.

## Vehicle maintenance and awareness

### Tyre care

Tyres are your only point of contact with the road. Check pressure, condition, and tread regularly. The legal minimum tread depth is 1.6mm across the central three-quarters of the tread<sup>8</sup>. However, stopping distances increase significantly below 3mm, particularly in wet conditions. Many fleet safety policies require replacement at 2mm or 3mm for this reason.

### Understand blind spots

Set mirrors correctly and check effectively before manoeuvring. When in doubt, wait. Always indicate clearly. If you require a banksman in low-speed manoeuvres, ask for help.

Blind spot awareness is particularly critical when:

- Changing lanes on motorways
- Turning left (cyclists or pedestrians alongside may be invisible)
- Reversing
- Pulling away from stops

### Suspension differences

Vans have more rigid suspension. Potholes cause greater damage to vehicle and occupants, especially when the vehicle is laden.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.tyresafe.org/the-checks/tread-depth/>

# Operating principles

1. **Planning focus:** Prioritise safety over speed. Good route planning creates smoother, more efficient journeys and fewer risks. Driving faster or more aggressively rarely saves meaningful time in urban environments, because traffic has built-in delays, like lights and junctions. At higher speeds, you save only seconds per mile for each 10mph increase, but massively risk and fuel consumption.
2. **When you feel overwhelmed:** Pull over safely, take 30-60 seconds to breathe, collect your thoughts, and review the situation. Allow for 15 minutes breaks every two hours.

Signs you should pull over:

- Feeling flustered or panicked
- Making multiple minor mistakes
- Unable to find an address or understand directions
- Concerns about the vehicle
- Extreme weather
- Fatigue

## Specific driving situations

All drivers should follow the Highway Code and keep their knowledge refreshed: [www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code)

These are additional suggestions for van-specific safety:

### Roundabouts and junctions

- Position early for your exit
- Use both mirrors before changing lanes
- Allow extra space for your longer vehicle
- Don't assume you can accelerate like a car
- Watch for vehicles cutting across your path

### Motorway driving

- Use the left lane unless overtaking
- Signal early - other drivers need more warning
- Build speed on slip roads before merging
- Maintain a steady speed rather than constant variation
- Be mindful of wind effects, especially from passing trucks
- Plan fuel or charging stops

### **Urban driving**

- Expect cyclists and pedestrians in blind spots
- Take extra care near schools and residential areas
- Use lower gears for better control
- Plan routes to avoid tight turns and streets where possible
- Park considerately - your vehicle occupies more space

### **Adverse weather**

- Rain: Reduce speed by 10-20%, increase following distance
- Ice/snow: Avoid driving unless essential, reduce speed by at least 50%
- Wind: Slow down on exposed sections, roads, and bridges
- Fog: Use fog lights correctly, reduce speed significantly
- Night: Use full beams appropriately, reduce speed on unfamiliar roads
- Cab controls: Know how to demist the screen and use the heating/ air conditioning

### **Loading and unloading**

- Park on level ground where possible
- Apply your parking brake before exiting
- Use hazard lights if stopped on the road
- Open load doors carefully (load can shift)
- Check load security before moving off again
- Close and secure all doors before driving

# Case studies

## SP Electricity North West: Zero collisions in 11 months

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**Challenge:** Young employees averaged three collisions monthly between them.

**Approach:**

- Half-day training courses over four sessions
- External expert presentations (DfBB, BRAKE)
- Emphasised most common causes of collision, especially distraction
- Emphasised the need to focus, especially at night, and in difficult conditions
- Parent testimonials from collision victims
- Scientific explanation of cognitive development and risk perception

**Results:**

- Zero collisions from November 2024 to October 2025
- High engagement from participants
- Training now integrated into apprenticeship and recruitment programmes

**Key success factor:** Balanced approach combining statistics, national perspective, and personal testimonies. Informative and supportive rather than critical.

**Participant feedback highlights:**

- "I understand now why the sessions have been held with under 25-year-olds, given the statistics."
- "The real-life incident pictures keep it fresh in your mind."
- "This morning, I was thinking about the stopping distance I needed while driving to work."
- "The guest speaker made a huge impact; it definitely hit home."

## Northern Powergrid: Distributed learning success

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**Challenge:** Young drivers disproportionately represented in collisions despite excellent overall safety record (>96% telematics scores fleet-wide).

### **Approach:**

#### **Standard permit to drive programme for drivers over 25:**

- Desktop risk assessment
- Safe driver induction workshop
- 2.5 days intensive in-cab training
- Pass/fail DVSA-standard assessment

#### **Extended programme for drivers under 25 (in addition to permit to drive scheme):**

- Two full days plus four half-days of training over six weeks
- Pairing with qualified drivers during six-week period
- Extended six-month mentorship after initial training
- No solo driving without qualified driver present during mentorship
- Additional review and retraining if collision occurred during mentorship

#### **Entry requirements for driving for work:**

- Minimum two years' licence holding
- No drink/drug/mobile phone convictions in past four years
- Maximum seven penalty points

#### **Supporting initiatives:**

- Mandatory slow-speed manoeuvring course with pass/fail test
- Universal 'spotter' training for all employees (even non-drivers)
- Seasonal campaigns and interactive communications
- Safety props (ice scrapers, steering wheel covers with safety messages)

**Results:**

- Improved telematics scores
- Reduced collision frequency
- RoSPA Gold Awards for 23 consecutive years (North-East) and 20 years (Yorkshire)
- Multiple industry awards including What Van? Fleet Risk Manager 2025

**Key philosophy:**

“There is no ‘one silver bullet’ for changing driver behaviour. You need the combination of e-learning, classroom learning, in-cab tuition, physical tests and constant reminders.”

**Skanska:****Decentralised professional driver management**

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**Challenge:** 300 light commercial vehicles across engineering, construction, and facilities management contracts. Drivers are qualified professionals (engineers, tradespeople) rather than professional drivers.

**Approach:**

- Decentralised responsibility to project transport leads
- Central support through commercial transport and logistics team
- Standardised induction materials and training opportunities
- Fleet management system providing daily vehicle check and behaviour data

**Induction process:**

- Driver onboarding pack for all new employees
- Licence verification
- Company practices and policies training, including vehicle checks, safety and risk assessments
- Thorough vehicle education (FORS-aligned)
- Online risk assessment within first month
- Prescribed e-learning for identified weaknesses
- Discretionary half-day in-vehicle training for new/novice drivers
- All drivers complete FORS recommended training and extensive in-house training

**Results:**

- Extremely rare on-road collisions
- Positive feedback from novice drivers
- “Those who request in-vehicle training seem to really benefit from it. They feel better prepared, safer and more confident for the coaching.”

**Key principle:**

Flexible, needs-based approach tailored to individual performance.

## Conclusion

Effective management of driver inexperience requires a systematic, sustained approach that:

- Recognises vehicle changes, youth, and inexperience as individual but often related risk factors
- Provides tailored support based on individual risk profiles
- Uses distributed learning instead of one-off intensive sessions
- Blends different training methods and reinforcement mechanisms
- Maintains active monitoring supported by constructive coaching conversations
- Builds a safety culture that is visible from leadership down
- Creates the psychological safety for drivers to speak up about concerns

The case studies show that these approaches can deliver clear, measurable improvements: fewer collisions, improved telematics scores, lower costs, and greater driver confidence.

Most importantly, they help keep people safe - protecting employees, other road users, and the communities in which vehicles operate.

Investment in proper transition management is not only operationally beneficial; it is a moral and legal responsibility that strengthens safety, reputation, and overall performance.

# Appendices

## Glossary of terms

**ADAS** - Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (lane-keeping, automatic braking, etc.)

**DVSA** - Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency

**FORS** - Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme

**KSI** - Killed or Seriously Injured

**LCV** - Light Commercial Vehicle

**Pre-frontal cortex** - Brain region responsible for rational decision-making, impulse control, and risk assessment

**STATS19** - Police collision reporting system capturing detailed incident data

**Telematics** - Technology monitoring vehicle and driver performance (speed, braking, acceleration, location)

**VOR** - Vehicle Off Road (unavailable due to damage or maintenance)



## Quick reference: Key differences between cars and vans

Feature	Car	Van
Visibility	Rear-view mirror + windows	Side mirrors only + significant blind spots
Braking distance	Standard for weight	Heavily affected by load - can double when laden
Speed limits	Standard national limits	Often 10-20 mph lower on single/dual carriageways
Stability	Low centre of gravity	High centre of gravity; wind-sensitive
Weight variation	Minimal daily change	Significant variation affecting handling throughout day
Speed perception	Standard eye height	Higher position reduces perceived speed
Rear wheels	Stable when light	Risk of lock-up when unladen during braking

# Implementation roadmap

For organisations starting or enhancing their transition management approach, the following phased model may help. Each phase builds on the last, with room to adapt to your organisation's needs.

## Phase 1: Foundation (Months 1-3)

### Immediate actions:

- Carry out gap analysis against this guide's recommendations
- Review current induction and training processes
- Analyse collision and incident data for patterns
- Identify any current transition-related risks
- Secure leadership commitment and any required budget

### Quick wins:

- Implement pre-transition driver profiling
- Update vehicle induction checklists
- Establish clear permit-to-drive requirements
- Create simple "If in doubt, shout out" reporting channels

## Phase 2: Enhanced support (Months 3-6)

### Programme development:

- Design distributed training programmes
- Create mentor selection criteria and training
- Introduce a tiered support framework
- Develop structured coaching conversation templates
- Strengthen monitoring and feedback systems

### Pilot programmes:

- Test enhanced programmes with small driver groups
- Gather feedback and refine
- Measure early results
- Create internal case studies to support wider rollout

## Phase 3: Full implementation (Months 6-12)

### Scaling up:

- Roll out the programmes across all driver transitions
- Train managers in coaching skills
- Establish mentor networks
- Introduce recognition and reward systems
- Embed safety culture activities across teams

### Measurement:

- Track collision and incident trends
- Monitor telematics improvements
- Review changes to insurance costs
- Gather driver feedback and retention
- Calculate ROI

## Phase 4: Continuous improvement (Ongoing)

### Optimisation:

- Review programme effectiveness quarterly
- Refresh approaches following incident investigations
- Incorporate new research and best practice
- Share learning across the organisation
- Benchmark with industry peers

### Sustainability:

- Embed transition support into everyday operations
- Maintain visible leadership commitment
- Update training materials regularly
- Recognise and celebrate success and positive results
- Address emerging risks proactively

# Common implementation challenges and solutions

## **Challenge: “We don’t have time for extended training”**

**Reality:** Collisions take far more time to deal with than training does.

**Solution:** Use distributed training. Half-day sessions over several weeks fit more easily around operations but deliver better results.

## **Challenge: “Experienced drivers don’t like being treated like novices”**

**Reality:** This indicates insufficient explanation of transition risk and over-emphasis on age rather than vehicle familiarisation.

**Solution:** Frame this as professional development and vehicle-specific familiarisation – the same approach elite drivers take when they change vehicles.

## **Challenge: “We can’t afford monitoring systems”**

**Reality:** Basic telematics costs £30-50 per vehicle per month. One prevented collision often covers a year of monitoring.

**Solution:** Start with basic telematics for high-risk drivers and expand once the benefits are clear. Use driver self-reporting and incident patterns to supplement technology.

## **Challenge: “Our best drivers are too busy to mentor”**

**Reality:** If your best drivers can’t help develop future talent, succession planning and safety culture will suffer.

**Solution:** Build mentoring into performance expectations, recognise mentor time in workload planning, and reward it appropriately.

## **Challenge: “Management pushes safety aside when under pressure”**

**Reality:** This is the most critical challenge. Without leadership commitment, no programme will succeed.

**Solution:** Introduce board-level safety accountability and clear protocols for decisions under pressure. Safety must be a genuine priority, not just a stated value.

# Resources and further support

## **Driving for Better Business**

National Highways and Driving for Better Business offer a range of free, practical tools to support each stage of managing road risk.

### **Predict - Risk assessment**

- Gap analysis: <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/gap-analysis-introduction/>
- Fleet confidence footprint: <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/fleet-confidence-footprint/>

### **Prevent - Proper management systems**

- Driving for Work policy builder: <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/driving-for-work-policy-template-builder/>

### **Prepare - Vehicle and driver roadworthiness and journey management**

- Driver roadworthiness: Managing physical and mental well-being: <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/publications/driver-roadworthiness-guide/>
- Managing mental health toolkit: <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/publications/>
- Van driver toolkit: <https://vandrivertoolkit.co.uk/>
- Car driver toolkit: <https://cardrivertoolkit.co.uk/>
- CALM driver: <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/calmdriver/>

### **Perform - Measuring driver performance and staging interventions**

- Fleet safety focus updates: <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/fleet-safety-focus-monthly-updates/>
- Case studies: <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/case-studies/>
- Articles and thought leadership: <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/articles/>
- Podcast: The hidden risk: <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/podcast-the-hidden-risk-driving-for-work/>
- Immediate post-collision response: <https://courses.arm.org.uk/courses/nh-post-collision-response>
- Fleet data outcomes: <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/dfbb-publications/fleet-data-outcomes/>

## **Post-action analysis - How to manage and learn from collisions and near misses**

- Incident management guide:  
<https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/support/>
- Guide to incident investigation:  
<https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/publications/>
- Benchmarking:  
<https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/gap-analysis-introduction/>

## **External organisations**

### **RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents)**

- Driver training standards
- Safety culture resources
- Awards and recognition programmes

### **BRAKE (Road safety charity)**

- Fleet safety campaigns
- Training programmes
- Victim support and awareness

### **FORS (Fleet operator recognition scheme)**

- Fleet management standards
- Best practice guidance
- Accreditation programmes

### **Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM RoadSmart)**

- Advanced driver training
- Corporate programmes
- Continuing professional development

# Research and evidence base

This guide reflects insights from:

- Department for Transport collision statistics
- Academic research on driver behaviour and human factors
- Fleet operator case studies
- Neuroscience research on cognitive development
- Behavioural change research

For specific references and detailed research findings, visit the DfBB publications library.

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- Fleet safety professionals
- Driver training experts
- Academic research
- Case study organisations that shared their experiences

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# Driving for Better Business

an award-winning  
free programme from



Driving for Better Business is a free-to-access National Highways programme that helps employers reduce work-related road risk, protecting staff who drive or ride for work as well as the people they share the road with.

Our mission is to improve safety for all those who drive or ride for work by sharing good practice and demonstrating the significant business benefits of managing work-related road risk more effectively.

[www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com](http://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com)

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