

Problem solvers



Are you facing a community transport problem? Perhaps you're assessing the implications of recent legislation or considering the specifications of a new vehicle. Whatever your community transport poser, *CTA Journal* can help.

Our problem solver, Amanda Howard (pictured), is a member of the CTA's advice and information team. Every day the team members field enquiries from across the UK's community transport sector and have

a wealth of knowledge and experience to draw upon.

If you have a problem that you'd like solved on this page, please write to Problem Solvers at *CTA Journal*, 26 Gransden Avenue, London E8 3QA.

What are the main reasons for a bus to fail its MOT? Why is it important to know this?

The Vehicle & Operator Services Agency (VOSA) is keen to keep operators informed of the top ten reasons that vehicles fail first or annual tests, with the aim of reducing future failures.

The Road Traffic Act 1956 introduced a compulsory system to periodically inspect all vehicles. The MOT test, which covers a wide range of aspects of the vehicle, is now computerised, which enables clear, statistical information to be compiled.

In 2006 VOSA introduced the Operator Compliance Risk Score (OCRS) for PSV operators, which informs VOSA examiners of the probability of an operator being compliant or non-compliant. It is a mechanism for calculating the risk of non-compliance; it is not an operator rating scheme. Vehicles run by operators which are more likely to be non-compliant are far more likely to be stopped and checked by examiners at the roadside.

The data that the OCRS compiles includes annual test data, fleet check inspections, roadside encounters and prosecution history. As the annual test results are included in an operator's OCRS, it is essential that vehicles are presented in a roadworthy condition. If a vehicle fails an MOT, the implication (not unreasonably) is that the vehicle has been on the road in an unroadworthy condition.

Currently the OCRS system does not apply to section 19 operators. However, if a vehicle operated on an O licence by

a charity fails its MOT, it is likely that a depot visit will eventually be made and all vehicles present at the time could be inspected. The same could happen if a minibus undertaking a home-to-school contract is inspected at the school and is found to be roadworthy.

For this reason it is important to complete a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN) notice for any vehicle being stored at your depot that you know is unroadworthy and not in use.

The CTA stresses to section 19 operators that they should undertake safety inspections and it should be made clear to the garage or person inspecting the vehicle that they are signing the inspection report to agree that the vehicle will remain roadworthy until the next safety inspection. If this procedure is followed there should never be a need for a pre-MOT visit to the garage and no MOT failures should be recorded.

The top ten reasons for failure at an annual test are as follows:

Headlamp aim

If the aim is too high or too far to the right, the headlamps are likely to dazzle other road users when the use of dipped headlamps is compulsory. If the headlamp aim is too low or too far to the left, this is likely to prevent the driver from being able to drive safely when use of dipped headlamps is compulsory. Headlamp aim is by far the most common failure at MOT and this may suggest that adjustment or fixing screws are loose, or that insufficient actions have been taken following a vehicle collision.

Lamps

Failures arise when lamps or lenses are insecure or damaged. This could cause injury or cause the lamps or lenses

to detach from the vehicle. Failure could also be caused by: front position lamps being inoperative, missing, dim, obscured, or affected by the operation of another lamp; lenses being broken or missing, operating intermittently, flickering when tapped or not facing forwards. Checking lamp effectiveness is part of the driver's walk round check and an MOT failure on this topic could point to walk round checks not being completed correctly.

Brake system

Failures to the brake systems are when the brake component is excessively worn, corroded, fractured, or reduced in diameter. The system includes all components, as well as brake cylinder, brake travel indicators, servos, disc and drums, vehicle electronics or anti-lock braking systems, pipes, hoses and hydraulic systems. Most brake system failures should be avoided with adequate safety inspections.

Body interior

Examiners will look at the whole interior of the vehicle – the floors, gangways, steps and stairs, and anything that could detach or cause injury to passengers. They will look for items included in Schedule 6 of *Construction & Use Regs* (see *CTA Journal*, May/June 2010 Journal). If the vehicle is accessible, examiners will also look at wheelchair spaces. They will check for missing, insecure or damaged retractable rails, partitions or panels that could detach or cause injury to passengers. They will check lifts and ramps for severe weakening, sharp edges or other protrusions, and lifts or ramps that cannot be secured in the stowed position. Regular driver's checks, safety

inspections and lift inspections should avoid these problems.

Doors & exits

The examiner will check that doors operate correctly. They will check all of the operating components to ensure that doors don't jam, become obstructed or cannot be opened from either the inside or outside of the vehicle. Drivers should check the operation of exit doors as part of the walk round check. A common reason for roadside failures is drivers not unlocking fire exit doors before leaving the depot.

Service brake

Roller brake testing will determine brake performance. Failure will happen if the brakes' performance does not meet prescribed Construction & Use requirements, when there is little or no braking effort at any wheel, or when the overall performance is below normal expectation. A safety inspection regime should avoid the brakes causing an MOT failure.

Seat belts

Examiners will look for dangerous defects, damage of a seat belt restraint, and belts that do not perform their intended purpose or are likely to fail when required. If the operator uses a "no-belt-no-trip" policy, the passenger may be the first to notice a fault. Seat belts should be serviceable at all times and this should be checked regularly.

Parking brake

Like the service brake on this page.

Suspension

The examiner will look for any fractured metal or loose, missing or broken springs, clips or bolts, which may affect the directional control of the vehicle. They will also look for air or fluid leaking from fractured pipes, which may cause a hazard to other road users. Many of these defects cannot be seen without a vehicle lift in a workshop or a well-lit pit. The quality of safety inspections should be called into question if this type of failure occurs.

Wiring

Examiners will check that the battery isn't leaking and is secure. They will look at the switchgear and wiring to ensure they are secure and adequately insulated. If the insulation is or will become ineffective due to chafing or heat, this could constitute a fire risk.

If one of your vehicles records a failure at its MOT, this should start a thorough investigation to make sure it does not indicate a larger failure of your maintenance and inspection procedures.

For further information on Operator Compliance Risk, visit the Transport Office website: transportoffice.gov.uk/crt/doitonline/bl/help/what_is_your_operator_compliance_risk_score.htm

The *Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness* can be downloaded from the CTA's website by either becoming a website registered user or by logging into the members' area.

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