

# Technical Note



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## Implication of Removing Vehicles from Service (Mothballing)

### 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Several community transport (CT) operators have raised the question of any obligations for vehicle maintenance and safety checks during periods of being taken out of service (known as 'mothballing'). This note addresses this query and sets out a number of other general implications that should be considered in the event of vehicles being removed from service for indefinite periods of time.
- 1.1.2 During the COVID-19 crisis many transport operators have made adjustments to manage reductions of both provision and demand, and the furloughing of drivers is the most obvious way of limiting financial liabilities. If vehicle capacity cannot be utilised then removing vehicles from service may be a useful option to minimise standing costs. It should be recognised that vehicles could be removed from Public Service Vehicle (PSV) status but could continue in a different capacity (e.g. light goods) or could be taken off the road entirely (mothballed).
- 1.1.3 There are three levels of regulation or responsibility that will typically apply to a CT minibus:
- a) General road vehicle requirements as regulated by DVLA, namely
    - ◆ vehicle taxation
    - ◆ insurance (minimum cover for Third Party claims)
    - ◆ MOT
    - ◆ General roadworthiness

All of the above apply unless the vehicle is categorised under a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN).

b) Public transport operator requirements under PSV, s19, s22 or general trading law

- ◆ Preventative Maintenance Inspections
- ◆ insurance (any enhanced level of cover that is in place – e.g. for hire or reward purpose, also vehicle insurance could include element of public liability cover)
- ◆ notification requirements with Traffic Commissioner (change of operator status, variation or cancellation of registered services, permanent discontinuation of discs etc).

c) Any other maintenance or inspection of accessibility facilities (e.g. lifts) that may be due, manufacturer's recommended service intervals, warranties.

1.1.4 If vehicles are leased it will be necessary to check if mothballing causes any disruption to scheduled service intervals that may be built into the leasing package.

Table 1: Implication of Removing Vehicles from PSV Conditions, or Taking Off Road Entirely

Issue	Removing from Public Service Vehicle operations (including full PSV, Restricted PSV, s19 and s22) but continuing on-road capability.	Vehicle mothballed under a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN)
Traffic Commissioner notification	Need to notify Traffic Commissioner of any suspension or cancellation of registered bus route. If vehicle is to be used on-road in a different capacity, discs should be removed or transferred. Amendment can be made using the Vehicle Operator Licensing (VOL) system. If a valid PSV / s19 / s22 disc is no longer required, it can be returned and a refund made for the time left. In general, as discs are not vehicle specific, there is no difficulty in transferring discs between vehicles.	Vehicle cannot be parked or driven on public highway (unless en-route to a MOT test centre). Vehicle's on or off road status has no relevance to Traffic Commissioner if removed from PSV service and disc removed. It should be considered that a vehicle under SORN cannot be quickly reinstated to service and should not be factored into any emergency replacement contingency or continuity planning. If an off-road parking facility has to be found for a vehicle that is normally parked on the road, this may incur cost.
Insurance	Need to notify insurer of any change of purpose. This is important to retain continuity of cover, as unauthorised change of use could invalidate the cover. This would not normally incur any additional financial premium or benefit unless a different policy were sought. Might be possible to get a cheaper policy for a different purpose.	No insurance is legally required under SORN, so premium could be saved. However, a mothballed vehicle may still be at risk of damage, fire, theft etc and continuation of some insurance cover would be advisable.
Preventative Maintenance Inspections (PMIs) - the Traffic Commissioners have stated that "PMI intervals can be extended by up to 50% with a maximum of 17 weeks, whichever is the lesser, if it's not possible to obtain the PMI under the normal inspection arrangements. This needs to take into account	PMIs are only required for PSV vehicles, and so if this status is withdrawn, can be disregarded. However, it would be advisable to continue PMIs if possible. If PMIs are discontinued, operators should make necessary amendments using Vehicle Operator Licensing (VOL) system. Cost of the inspection could be saved or deferred.	No requirement for PMIs, therefore this cost could be saved.

Issue	Removing from Public Service Vehicle operations (including full PSV, Restricted PSV, s19 and s22) but continuing on-road capability.	Vehicle mothballed under a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN)
<p>whether any monitored defects were reported on the previous safety inspection.”</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-heavy-goods-and-public-service-vehicle-operators-covid-19">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-heavy-goods-and-public-service-vehicle-operators-covid-19</a></p>		
<p>MOT Test</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-mots-for-lorries-buses-and-trailers#history">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-mots-for-lorries-buses-and-trailers#history</a></p>	<p>An MOT is required appropriate to vehicle class regardless of PSV status. Buses have been automatically given a 3-month MOT exemption from the date it was originally due.</p> <p>Vehicles and trailers originally due an MOT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>) in March or April 2020 have been given two 3-month exemptions</li> <li>) in May, June, July or August 2020 will only get one 3-month exemption</li> </ul> <p>At best, the cost of the MOT test can be deferred for six months.</p>	<p>Under SORN, vehicles do not require a valid MOT certificate. The cost of the test could be saved or deferred.</p>
<p>Vehicle Tax</p>	<p>There are no temporary changes to vehicle tax. Tax will be due as normal (or renewal of a disc if in Disabled Passenger Vehicle or other exempt class). No beneficial cost implications.</p>	<p>This will only create a saving if vehicle was in taxation class that that was not exempt.</p>
<p>Responsibility for maintaining roadworthiness</p>	<p>There has been no relaxation of this expectation which is a general criteria that applies to all road vehicles – there is a continuing requirement for vehicles to be fully roadworthy, and vehicle service &amp; maintenance facilities have not been subject to any lockdown closure orders.</p>	<p>As this does not apply to vehicles under SORN, service and maintenance costs could be saved or deferred. However, mothballed vehicles still require some level of maintenance (see below). If vehicle is subject any maintenance plan or service recommendations (such as manufacturer's warranties) that are based on time intervals rather than mileage, then they should still be adhered to. Lift maintenance on CT vehicles is</p>

Issue	Removing from Public Service Vehicle operations (including full PSV, Restricted PSV, s19 and s22) but continuing on-road capability.	Vehicle mothballed under a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN)
		generally based on time intervals and should not be neglected.
Breakdown & Recovery Arrangements	General vehicle breakdown cover would still be needed but passenger recovery element no longer required. There could be cost saving here.	Not required, therefore cost can be saved.
Cleaning	Vehicle would need some degree of cleaning but possibly this would be less extensive than if it were still carrying passengers. Certainly, the more intensive COVID-19 recommended cleaning regime would only be needed dependent on vehicle usage.	Any cleaning cost can be saved or deferred.



## 1.2 Mothballing Vehicles – General Issues

1.2.1 A mothballed vehicle will still require some attention. As vehicles tend to thrive on hard work, there can be adverse consequences of standing down a minibus, and leaving it unattended for a period of time. If you do choose to mothball a vehicles, the following should be considered:

### J Tyres

- ◆ if parked outside, exposure to rain and sunlight can break down tyre rubber and cause cracks to form on the wall. A tyre is susceptible to this if the same area of the wall is continuously exposed to direct sunlight. If the vehicle has to be parked outside, try to find a shaded spot. Tyres could be covered with sheeting or fabric. More importantly move the vehicle every few days (if only for a few inches) to rotate the tyres.
- ◆ flat spots – a deformity caused by all of weight of the minibus being place on one spot of the tyre for a long period. Again, move the vehicle every few days (if only for a few inches) to rotate the tyres.
- ◆ Pressures – tyres often deflate when left standing, so check before vehicle is driven.

J Battery – there is great risk of the battery becoming flat on an idle vehicle. Disconnecting the battery is not usually recommended – some advocate leaving the battery connected to a solar panel trickle charger (which can be bought for about £30).

1.2.2 Restarting – the minibus should be started regularly (twice a week ideally) and the engine brought up to running temperature - assuming exhaust emissions are not a problem where the vehicle is standing. During this running the air conditioning should be activated to circulate the lubricants.

1.2.3 Regularly check the engine compartment – believe it or not a common problem for idle vehicles is rodents chewing through rubber tubing. This can also be a cause of fluid leakage, which should be looked out for beneath the vehicle.

1.2.4 After any period of mothballing, before returning to service a PSV should be given a pre-use inspection, and the cycle of PMIs recommenced (see below). It is also important to ensure that recommended service intervals are adhered to.

## 1.3 Traffic Commissioner Guidance

1.3.1 The Office of the Traffic Commissioner has issued guidance on returning vehicles to service, as below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-heavy-goods-and-public-service-vehicle-operators-covid-19>)

- 1.3.2 “Although it is always recommended that a pre-use inspection is carried out prior to putting vehicles that have been stood idle back into service, the traffic commissioners recognise that operators will want to start using vehicles as soon as possible and there may be delays in businesses starting again when there may not be enough slots available at maintainers to inspect vehicles.

Therefore, for fleets that are unused during this period the following principles can apply:

- J The PMI schedule is frozen or paused during the period that the vehicle is not used
- J The time to the next inspection can include any relaxation that applied to relevant vehicles under question 6 above
- J If the vehicle has exceeded its normal or, if it qualified for the relaxation at question 6, its extended PMI period, a technically competent person, (technician if possible) is to carry out an enhanced walkaround check, which includes tyre pressure measurement and brake performance test. The brake performance test, if not undertaken on a roller brake tester, will include a measured temperature check of the brakes after a road test. The temperatures are to be recorded and retained
- J Vehicles over 12 years old and more than 50% or 4 weeks, whichever is greater, over their PMI cycle will receive a full preventative maintenance inspection before use
- J Regardless of the combination of relaxations applied, no vehicle will be put into service if more than 17 weeks has elapsed since the last full PMI.”