C4 LOGISTICS

New tachograph rules for vans

The expert guide for transport and logistics managers



From 1 July 2026, vans over 2.5 tonnes running international hire-and-reward journeys come under the same drivers' hours and tachograph rules as HGVs. The 13-hour working day now counts waiting, loading and customs, not only driving.

Compliance deadline: 1 July 2026
Applies to: Vans 2.5t–3.5t GVW (including trailer) on international hire-and-reward journeys

Faster.
Smarter.
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Foreword

I've spent more than 25 years working in time critical freight and transport across the Channel, and I understand how quickly regulatory changes can affect day to day operations, delivery commitments and customer expectations.

From 1 July 2026, vehicles that have never previously fallen under tachograph rules will be brought into the same operating framework many HGV operators already work within every day.

This guide has been written to give operators a practical and straightforward view of what the new rules mean in reality. It answers three key questions.

- Does this apply to your business?
- What will you actually need to do?
- How can you continue delivering reliably and on time?

This guide is aimed at operators moving goods between the UK and Europe, and businesses operating internationally across Europe, including those using vans and light commercial vehicles that may now fall within scope for the first time.

It will also be relevant for:

- Transport managers
- Operations teams
- Planners and route schedulers
- Drivers
- Fleet and compliance managers
- Business owners responsible for transport operations and customer delivery commitments

I hope this guide helps bring some clarity to the changes ahead, gives you confidence in understanding your responsibilities, and supports you in preparing your operation before the new rules come into force.



"For many operators, this will be the biggest change since Brexit. The businesses that plan early and adapt routes and operations now will be in a far stronger position than those trying to react once delays and compliance issues start hitting deliveries."

Sébastien Barth,
Group Managing Director,
C4 Logistics

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Key terms

GVW (Gross Vehicle Weight): the maximum legal weight of the vehicle fully loaded, including any trailer. A 2.3t van pulling a 0.5t trailer reaches 2.8t, so it's in scope.

Smart Tachograph 2 (ST2): the current-generation digital tachograph (Gen2 V2) that records driving, breaks and rest automatically and can be read at the roadside.

Hire and reward: carrying goods commercially for a paying customer, rather than moving your own goods.

Cabotage: a domestic delivery carried out by a foreign-registered vehicle inside another country.

Authorised Consignor / Customs Regime 42: customs facilities that cut or remove the transit stop. See How C4 helps.

Introduction and overview

This guide explains the new tachograph rules that apply to vans from 1 July 2026, and how C4 helps you stay compliant without losing capacity, speed or margin.

Until now, light vans gave you flexibility. A driver could push on to hit a delivery window, absorb a long wait at a loading bay, or sit through a customs queue and still make the drop. The new rules remove that flexibility.

For many operators this is the biggest operational change to van-based international freight in a decade. Get it right and you protect your service and your reputation. Get it wrong and you risk vehicle prohibitions, penalties and broken delivery promises.

What is changing on 1 July 2026?

The tachograph and EU drivers' hours regime that HGV operators already follow is being extended to smaller vans. From 1 July 2026, vans over 2.5 tonnes GVW on international hire-and-reward journeys must comply. They need a tachograph fitted, and their drivers must keep to set limits on driving, breaks and rest.

Where the rules come from

These rules are part of existing EU transport law which includes the UK (under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement).

For years, HGV operators travelling across Europe have already had to follow rules covering:

- Maximum driving hours
- Mandatory rest breaks
- Daily and weekly rest periods
- Tachograph use and record keeping

Those requirements sit under two key pieces of legislation:

- Regulation (EC) No 561/2006, covering drivers' hours
- Regulation (EU) No 165/2014, covering tachographs

In 2020, the EU introduced the Mobility Package, a wider update to road transport rules across Europe. One part of that package, Regulation (EU) 2020/1054, extended the drivers' hours and tachograph rules to qualifying vans operating internationally.

That means many vans between 2.5t and 3.5t are now being brought into the same compliance framework that HGV operators have worked under for years.

Although the UK left the EU, these rules still apply to UK operators carrying out qualifying international journeys into Europe under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). The UK has implemented the changes through the Drivers' Hours and Tachographs (Amendment) Regulations 2025.

Enforcement in the UK sits with the DVSA, including roadside inspections and compliance checks.

What the rules are trying to achieve

These rules are designed to improve road safety, protect drivers, and create a more consistent playing field across international transport. As vans take on a growing share of cross border freight work, regulators are closing the gap between light commercial vehicles and the rules already applied to HGV operators.

Road safety

Driver fatigue remains one of the biggest risks in road transport. The rules on driving time, breaks, and daily and weekly rest are designed to reduce the likelihood of tired drivers being on the road.

Brake estimates that fatigue contributes to between 10% and 20% of all road collisions in the UK, with fatigue related crashes significantly more likely to result in death or serious injury. A UK government backed study also found that 30% of professional drivers surveyed said they had fallen asleep while driving at least once in the previous 12 months.

Requirements such as a 45-minute break after 4.5 hours of driving and limits on daily working time are intended to help prevent fatigue related incidents, particularly on long international journeys where pressure on drivers can build quickly.

Fair competition

The International Road Transport Union (IRU), the global road transport organisation, says the new rules are intended to create greater consistency across cross border transport operations and close long-standing regulatory gaps between vans and HGVs.

For years, operators running vans on international routes were often able to work outside the regulatory framework already applied to HGV operators. That created an uneven playing field, particularly for businesses already investing in tachographs, compliance systems, driver management, and route planning.

Bringing vans over 2.5 tonnes into the same regime helps ensure competition is based on service, reliability, and operational efficiency rather than on avoiding regulatory requirements.

Driver welfare

The rules are not only about enforcement and compliance. They are also intended to protect the people behind the wheel.

Mandatory breaks, minimum daily and weekly rest periods, and restrictions on excessive driving hours are designed to reduce fatigue, improve wellbeing, and support safer working conditions across the transport sector.

The European Commission says the wider aim of the road transport rules is to improve working conditions for professional drivers while ensuring consistent standards across Europe. The rules also prohibit drivers from taking regular weekly rest periods in the cab, recognising the importance of proper rest and recovery on long international journeys.

Am I in scope?

These three questions will quickly tell you whether the new rules apply to a journey. If the answer is yes to all three, that job must comply with the drivers' hours and tachograph regulations from 1 July 2026.

1 Is your van over 2.5t GVW?
Check the VIN plate, and include any trailer weight.

2 Is it international transport?
Crossing into the UK, EU, Norway or Switzerland.

3 Is it for hire and reward?
Carrying goods commercially for a customer.

YES to all three

You are in scope.

Comply from 1 July 2026.

NO to any one

Exempt for now.

Domestic-only journeys stay outside the rules.

Two details that catch people out

Trailers count.

GVW is the combined maximum of van plus trailer, so towing can pull a sub-2.5t van into scope.

Own-account isn't automatically safe.

If you carry your own goods internationally in a van over 2.5t, you can still be caught when driving is the driver's main job. There's a narrow exemption where driving is under 30% of monthly working time. If you think this may apply to your operation, it is worth checking the official guidance carefully.

Northern Ireland note: a delivery from NI into the Republic of Ireland counts as an international journey.

The numbers your drivers must comply with

Four limits now shape the working day. The one that catches most operators out is the 13-hour limit, because it measures the full working day, not just time spent driving.

The four numbers your drivers now live by

9h	13h	45m	11h
max daily driving	**max working day**	**mandatory break**	**daily rest**
Extendable to 10h twice a week	Counts waiting, loading and customs	After 4.5h driving	Minimum between shifts

Limit	The rule	Why it catches people out
9 hours	Maximum daily driving, extendable to 10 hours twice a week	Pure time at the wheel
13 hours	Maximum working day, 15 hours twice a week	Counts all time: waiting, loading, customs, not just driving
45 minutes	Break after 4.5 hours' driving (can split 15 + 30)	Mandatory
11 hours	Minimum daily rest between shifts	Limits how early the next run can start

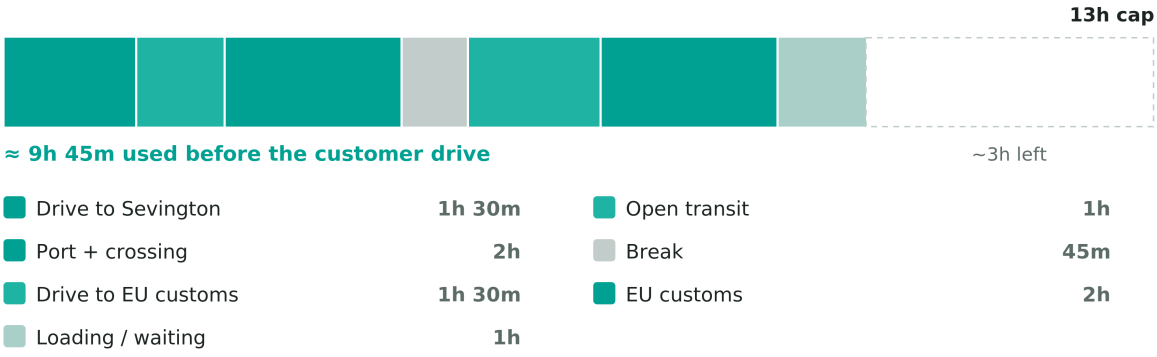
The 13-hour trap. The 13 hours is the whole working day: the window before a driver must take 11 hours' rest. Driving, waiting, loading and customs all sit inside it. A long customs stop burns the day even though the van hasn't moved.

Scenario: an example UK–EU run

Here's where the hours actually go on a standard transit run, before the drive to the customer even starts.

Where a 13-hour working day actually goes

A single UK–EU transit run, before the drive to the customer even starts.



Stage	Time
Drive to Sevington	~1h 30m
Open transit document	~1h
Port and Channel crossing	~2h
Mandatory break	45m
Drive to EU customs	~1h 30m
EU customs, close transit	~2h
Loading and waiting	~1h
Total hours	**≈ 9h 45m**

That leaves barely 3 hours of a 13-hour day for the drive to the customer, plus loading and unloading. Plan as if the day is all driving and the run becomes illegal, or undeliverable, halfway through.

Driver set-up and compliance

For many operators, the biggest challenge is not fitting the tachograph. It is adapting driver schedules, route planning and daily processes to work within the rules.

Step	What it involves
Fit a Smart Tachograph 2	Every in-scope van needs a Gen2 V2 smart tachograph fitted by an approved centre. Fitting slots are filling up, so book early.
Get a driver card for each driver	Every driver of a tachograph-fitted van needs their own DVSA digital driver card. These can take several weeks to arrive, so apply now.
Check your operator licence	Since May 2022, vans and van-and-trailer combinations over 2.5t on international hire and reward already need a standard international goods vehicle operator licence. If you're moving into international van work, this applies to you.
Set up data handling	Download driver-card data at least every 28 days and vehicle-unit data at least every 90 days and keep it securely for at least 12 months for inspection.

The device, cards and licence are your own admin, but C4 can point you to approved fitters and walk you through what's needed. Where we add the most value is the journey itself and keeping your routes deliverable once the rules apply.

Why this matters: the risk of getting it wrong

If an in-scope vehicle runs without an ST2 device and compliant drivers' hours from 1 July 2026, the consequences can affect drivers, vehicles, deliveries, customer relationships and operator licences.

Potential consequences include:

- **Vehicle prohibition:** the van is stopped where it stands until the breach is fixed.
- **Fixed penalties:** graduated, up to £/€ 5000, issued to both the driver and the operator.
- **Operator licence and prosecution:** serious or repeated breaches can put your operator licence at risk and lead to prosecution.
- **Knock-on cost:** delayed deliveries, stranded loads and added cost, with reputational damage and lost customer confidence.

In the UK, for example, DVSA guidance states that drivers' hours and tachograph offences can result in "fixed penalties, court proceedings, prohibitions and action against the operator's licence."

Your options

There is no one-size-fits-all answer. The right set-up depends on the route, the payload, delivery expectations, driver availability and the commercial reality of the job.

Option	The trade-off
Plan for longer transit	Simplest to adopt, but it ties up the vehicle and driver for longer and can reduce how many jobs a week a route carries.
Two drivers per van	Solves the hours outright, but doubles labour cost on the route and depends on a driver market that's already tight.
Sub-2.5t vehicles	Stays outside the rules, but payload drops to around 400kg, so it only suits light, low-volume loads.
Transhipment through a hub	Adds network resilience and capacity, but the extra handling and coordination tend to raise cost rather than lower it.
Airfreight	Fast and compliant for urgent loads, but the cost only makes sense for high-value, time-critical goods.

The aim isn't to pick one and apply it everywhere. It's to match the response to each route, with the costs in front of you.

How C4 helps

C4 has been preparing for these changes well ahead of the July 2026 deadline, helping customers adapt routes, customs processes and delivery planning to keep disruption to a minimum. The aim is to keep deliveries compliant while reducing delays, downtime and unnecessary cost.

The C4 toolkit at a glance

Each tool targets a specific pressure the new rules create, and several of them buy back time at the border.

Tool	What it does	What you gain
EasyQuote	Instant online quoting and booking, 24/7, with compliance checked at the point of booking	Quote in under 60 seconds, with a full audit trail
Journey Calculator	Models the full compliant day before despatch, including driving, breaks, loading and customs	See the real working day and margin up front on the C4 customer portal
Authorised Consignor	Issues the transit document at your premises, so the driver skips the Sevington stop	Recover 1–2 hours per journey; free to register
Customs Regime 42	Imports goods at the French border into free circulation, removing the transit step	Recover up to 8 hours that standard transit can lose. C4 manages the full compliance framework
C4 Availability System	Real-time visibility of vehicles and drivers, with relay and transhipment capacity built for 2026	Capacity that stays deliverable under the new limits

What to expect when you work with C4

Six clear stages, starting with a simple check of whether the rules affect you at all. **No obligation.**

How it works, step by step

1 Get in touch
Tell us what you move and where. No obligation.

2 We check your scope
We confirm which of your routes the rules apply to.

3 We map your routes
We work out the compliant timing for each run, customs included.

4 You get a plan
We agree the best option for each route, with the costs set out.

5 We set you up
We sort your access to the C4 portal and quoting tools.

6 You're up and running
Book in minutes, with records ready for any roadside check.

Benefits and outcomes

Handled well, the new rules become a planning exercise, not a threat to your service. You keep your delivery windows, your capacity and your margin.

Practical

Every in-scope route mapped, with a compliant plan that still hits your windows.

Financial

Recover up to 1–2 hours per journey (Authorised Consignor) and up to 8 hours (Regime 42), protecting capacity and margin.

Time-saving

Quote and book in under 60 seconds, with compliance checked automatically rather than by hand.

Peace of mind

No surprise prohibitions or penalties, and a full audit trail at every roadside check.

Operational

Capacity actively built for July 2026, so express runs stay deliverable under the new limits.

Reputation

Delivery promises you can keep, protecting the relationships your business runs on.

Frequently asked questions

Scope and the rules

Q. Do vans really need a tachograph from July 2026?

Yes, if the van is over 2.5t GVW and runs international hire-and-reward journeys. From 1 July 2026 it must have a Smart Tachograph 2 fitted and follow the drivers' hours rules.

Q. We only do one or two international runs a year. Are we still in scope?

Yes. There's no minimum frequency. A single in-scope journey triggers the rules.

Q. Does towing a trailer change our GVW?

Yes. GVW is the combined maximum of van plus trailer, so towing can pull a sub-2.5t van into scope.

Q. Is a journey from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland international?

Yes. Crossing from NI into the Republic counts as an international journey.

Q. A foreign-registered van does a domestic job (cabotage). Do the rules apply?

Yes. Cabotage sits within EC Regulation 561/2006, so the same drivers' hours rules apply.

Q. Are journeys to non-EU countries like Switzerland covered?

Journeys into the EU and wider EEA are covered. Some non-EU countries apply equivalent rules under separate agreements, so check the specific route with us rather than assume it's exempt.

Q. What are the penalties at a roadside check?

Vehicle prohibition, graduated fixed penalties (up to £/€ 5000) for both driver and operator, and possible prosecution or operator-licence action for serious or repeat breaches.

Getting ready

Q. How long does it take to get a driver card and a tachograph fitted?

Allow several weeks for DVSA driver cards, and book a fitting slot early, as approved centres are getting busy ahead of the deadline.

Q. What records do we need to keep?

Download driver-card data at least every 28 days and vehicle-unit data at least every 90 days, and keep it securely for at least 12 months so it's available for inspection.

Q. Where do drivers sleep during daily or weekly rest?

Daily rest can be taken in the van if it's fitted with a bed. Weekly rest must be away from the vehicle, in a hotel or at home. The cab is not permitted for weekly rest.

Working with C4

Q. Can C4 tell us which of our routes are affected?

Yes. The Journey Calculator and our route analysis service do exactly that. Share your routes and we map them with you.

Q. Why have C4 increased rates?

The increase reflects the cumulative impact of revised break requirements, mandatory rest periods, extended journey times, reduced market capacity and the hotel-rest obligation for weekly rest, alongside sustained fuel cost increases.

Your next step

We are here to help you to understand the rules and comply.

Getting started takes one short conversation and costs nothing:

01.

Check your scope.
Answer the three questions or let us confirm which of your routes are caught.

02.

Send us two or three key routes.
We map the compliant timeline and show you exactly where the hours pressure sits.

03.

Get your plan.
We recover the time the rules would otherwise take and set you up to quote and deliver compliantly.

Book your free route check

Whether you have one in-scope van or a whole fleet, we'll make compliance practical and keep your delivery promises intact.

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