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Vans suffer blocked DPFs three years before cars – at identical mileage

By Natalie Middleton / Fleet World / 23 September 2026

Commercial vehicles in the UK suffer from blocked diesel particulate filters (DPFs) roughly three years earlier than private cars, according to a major new data analysis.

A van blocks at roughly the same odometer reading as a car, but it gets to that mileage a lot quicker

A study of 36,135 DPF cases handled by national mobile specialist DPF Fixer between November 2024 and July 2026 revealed that the median commercial vehicle blocks at 8.4 years old, compared to 11.3 years for private cars.

For fleets, the critical takeaway is that this three-year gap is driven entirely by workload rather than mechanical failure. The median mileage at failure is almost identical, standing at 98,552 miles for vans and 96,119 miles for cars – a difference in mileage of under 3%. The working vehicle covers 11,935 miles a year against the car's 8,624, and so arrives at the same reading three years faster.

"Mileage is the constant and time is the variable," explained Shaun Clarke, general manager of DPF Fixer. "A van blocks at roughly the same odometer reading as a car, it just gets there a great deal quicker."

Clarke warned that this accelerated workload requires a change in thinking for maintenance.

"For a fleet that changes the question from whether a DPF clean is a mid-life job to whether it is a scheduled one, because it lands inside the replacement cycle rather than at the end of it," he outlined.

The data underscores this urgency: 45.6% of the commercial vehicles in the dataset were under eight years old when they blocked, and 13.7% were under five – against just 1.7% of private cars. Commercial vehicles account for 24.5% of all DPF cases in the analysis and 30.2% of jobs actually attended.

One in seven vans doesn't warn of DPF failures

The research also shows that the dashboard is a less reliable prompt on commercial vehicles than on cars – highlighting a major risk for fleet managers.

Of the commercial vehicles attended, 13.9% showed no warning light at all, against 8.3% of private cars, while 32.9% gave no DPF-specific warning of any kind. Only 4.1% had escalated to a red DPF warning, compared with 14.7% of private cars – the single largest gap between the two groups in the dataset.

DPF Fixer attributes this discrepancy to professional fleet management styles rather than vehicle design.

Clarke elaborated: "Operators are catching these at amber, or catching them with no light at all, because they are booking on performance, fuel figures and scheduled checks rather than waiting for the dashboard to tell them.

Private motorists are three and a half times more likely to have reached a red warning before anyone picks up the phone. That gap is a fleet-management gap, not an engineering one."

Low mileage and new emissions standards offer no protection

The median mileage at DPF failure is almost identical; 98,552 miles for vans and 96,119 miles for cars

The report also debunks the myth that low-usage vehicles are safe from DPF issues.

Around 14.4% of commercial vehicles arrived with under 50,000 miles on the clock. Commercial vehicles covering less than 5,000 miles a year blocked at a median of just 27,694 miles, and were older when it happened, not younger. Across both categories, 1,304 vehicles doing under 5,000 miles a year needed a DPF clean; a pattern DPF Fixer attributes to short-journey, stop-start use that never allows a full regeneration cycle.

Furthermore, newer emissions standards are heavily represented. Euro 6d and Euro 6d-temp vehicles made up 30.5% of commercial jobs attended, against 11.7% of non-commercial work – showing that the newest emissions equipment on the road is already generating a material share of commercial demand.

Manufacturer winners and losers

DPF Fixer also indexed each make and model against its share of the UK licensed diesel LCV, HGV and bus parc to prevent high-volume models from skewing the data.

On that basis, the Ford Transit range – 27.7% of all commercial cases – scores 1.24, close to par against its 22.3% share of the parc. The headline figure reflects how many are on the road, rather than a Ford-specific problem.

The clearest outlier is the Mitsubishi L200 at 2.82, close to three times its expected rate, followed by the Vauxhall Vivaro at 1.99 and the Renault Trafic and Master at 1.78. At the other end, the VW Transporter and Caddy (0.41) and the Toyota Hilux (0.38) turn up at well under half the rate their numbers would predict. Among makes, Volkswagen is the most under-represented major commercial brand at 0.60, with Toyota at 0.54.

A downtime problem, not a breakdown

For operators, the data shows that DPF failures are more likely to incur downtime and performance problems, not breakdowns.

Almost all of these vehicles were still driveable when the engineer arrived: 99.2% started and ran, while 63.9% of commercial vehicles were reported as suffering power loss. The practical cost to an operator is therefore degraded performance and fuel economy, a vehicle held back from work and the risk of escalation – rather than a roadside failure.

The data also shows that some 68.2% of commercial operators came straight to a specialist without a prior garage diagnosis, ensuring a quick turnaround that minimises vehicle downtime and gets assets back on the road.

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