

### **MiDAS in Test Valley**

#### **What is MiDAS?**

MiDAS is the Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme, a national scheme to enhance the driving and passenger awareness skills of minibus drivers. Although it is not a legal requirement to have MiDAS to drive a minibus, it is increasingly being accepted as good practice, and most organisations operating minibuses insist on their drivers holding a MiDAS Certificate.

There are two types of MiDAS: Standard and Accessible. The main difference is that Accessible MiDAS includes training in the use of tail-lifts and the securing of wheelchairs in minibuses. Accessible is therefore designed for those drivers who are likely to work with the elderly or those with disabilities.

#### **What does the training involve?**

The course involves a half-day classroom course for Standard MiDAS (extended by an additional half-day for Accessible MiDAS), at the end of which the applicant must pass a theory assessment covering the information discussed during the course. The only preparation suggested is a reminder of the contents of the current Highway Code, though it is perfectly possible for anyone to pass the theory without any prior preparation.

This classroom session is followed on a separate occasion by a private driving assessment in a minibus, lasting up to 90 minutes (depending on the previous experience of the driver), and including relevant driving skills training. It is not necessary for candidates to have any prior experience of driving a minibus, and candidates will not be put through a formal assessment until the trainer judges they are ready. The driving session can include initial familiarisation and practice.

Once the driver has passed both the theory test and the driving assessment, a certificate is issued which lasts for four years, and which is recognised nationally as a common standard.

#### **Can anyone drive a minibus?**

There are restrictions for certain drivers, and a car driving licence does not automatically entitle anyone to drive a minibus. In particular:

- **All drivers** must have “D” or “D1” amongst the categories defined on their licence (or “A” on old style Green licences issued prior to 1990). Without these, a driver is not licensed to drive a minibus.
- **Drivers over the age of 70** do not automatically retain the “D1” category but must apply to the DVLA providing evidence of a medical examination by a doctor.
- **Drivers who passed their test after 1 January 1997** may not drive minibuses if they are being paid for doing so, or if the minibus exceeds certain weights (3500kg for ordinary minibus, 4250kg if adapted for wheelchairs). The professional advice is that a person cannot be considered to be a volunteer driver for an organisation if he/she is also a current paid employee for that organisation. This particularly affects younger teachers driving after school for sports teams/outings/etc.
- A clean driving licence is preferable, though not essential. Note will be taken of any endorsements as it may indicate an underlying characteristic of the person’s driving skills and their suitability to drive a minibus.
- Drivers must also be able to read a number plate at 20 metres, and their eyesight will be tested before the start of the driving assessment.

All drivers must submit their driving licence for examination by TVCS at the start of the course (those with photocard licences must also bring the accompanying paper document). A driving assessment cannot be undertaken unless TVCS have confirmed that the driver is eligible to drive a minibus of that size.

If drivers are in any doubt about their eligibility, they should contact TVCS for advice before committing themselves to the course.

### **Are there any particular requirements for Accessible MiDAS?**

Drivers should be aware that Accessible MiDAS is likely to involve some manual handling (of minibus seats and wheelchairs) and awkward stooping/twisting (to secure a wheelchair in a minibus). TVCS accepts no responsibility for any difficulties or injuries experienced by drivers in connection with the normal Accessible training, and drivers should be reasonably fit to do Accessible.

### **Where and when are courses held?**

Courses are generally held at the TVCS offices in Wessex Chambers, Andover, and the Horsefair, Romsey, on weekdays, with applicants for Standard MiDAS attending from 0900 to 1300, and Accessible staying on until 1630. Lunch is not provided.

Courses can also be held elsewhere, and at other times (including evenings and weekends) by arrangement.

The Driving Assessment is usually undertaken on a separate day, at a mutually convenient time, either in a minibus provided by the candidate or in one of TVCS's own minibuses, and can be in Andover or Romsey.

Provisional dates are set for courses, but courses will only be held if there are sufficient numbers booking to attend (usually 6 or 7 per course).

### **What is the cost?**

The charge for the course depends upon the status of the organisation for which the driver will be driving, and whether it is for Standard or Accessible MiDAS. From 1 April 2006 charges range from £45 to £75.

If the assessment is being done in a minibus provided by TVCS, there will be an extra £10 charge to cover costs involved. This will be reimbursed when the driver undertakes their first drive in a TVCS minibus on behalf of the organisation hiring the vehicle.

Payment is required in advance, and refunds will only be given if the candidate cancels at least 7 days ahead of the course, or if TVCS cancel a course and no alternative date can be agreed with the applicant.

### **How do I get on a course?**

If you haven't already done so, please contact Test Valley Community Services on 01264 362600 to register interest, find out when the next courses are being held, and obtain a Booking Form. When you ring, it would be useful to have your driving licence handy, as you will probably be asked some basic questions to confirm your eligibility. We will also want to know which organisation you will be driving for, and whether you need to take the Accessible module. We can then advise what charges will be applicable.

***For more information, ring Zoe Bussian (Community Transport Assistant) or Dick Hewett (Community Transport Manager) on 01264 362600, or email [transport@tvcs.org.uk](mailto:transport@tvcs.org.uk).***