

Faslane 365: Transport briefing

This is a briefing for those who are organising group transport to Faslane, based on the experiences of organising transport (minibus and coaches) from Tyneside (about 4 hours).

General

Booking transport can get very expensive, and the night before an action (or the night after, when everyone is tired) is not a good time to be chasing for money. So:

- Try to get advance payment (or deposits at least) before booking spaces.
- Be ready to *double-book* seats unless you've received some payment for them. Non-payers can be booked in, but their seat isn't guaranteed until they've paid. . . .
- Up to 10% of the group may back out or be unable to come at the last minute: don't get carried away by rising numbers a few weeks before the action, and book an extra minibus 'on spec'. The peak in numbers is usually 1–2 weeks before you go.

Option A: coach plus driver

This can be viable and takes a lot of weight off potential drivers. You may have to go down this route if you have no drivers who are suitably qualified or old enough (see next section). But it can be very expensive if places are not all filled, so try to get some subsidy or financial support first.

You will have to allow for regular breaks for the driver if travelling more than a few hours, plus a longer (9 hour) rest period each day. Make sure the driver knows exactly where you are going: if near the end of their driving hours quota, they will have no flexibility to alter the route or go somewhere extra (this can happen if they get lost in Glasgow on the way).

Commercial drivers will generally have no problem taking a group to an action involving police and arrests, though you should explain what the trip is about before setting off! But they will have to obey police directions and you won't have the flexibility to try different routes or be able to ignore any stopping restrictions at Faslane.

Option B: self-drive minibus

First of all, can you drive a minibus on your current driving licence?

- If you do not have a separate minibus ('PCV') licence (requiring an additional driving test and medical), you are not allowed to drive a minibus "for hire or reward" (whatever the date of your licence). That means that the passengers cannot be required to pay a fare or make a contribution (in cash or kind, including by someone else on their behalf) towards the running costs of using the vehicle.
- You must be 21 or over.
- If you held a licence before 1997, you should be entitled to drive a minibus: check for category D1 on a new-style licence (or group A on an old-style paper-only licence).
- If you got your licence in or after 1997, you will only be allowed to drive a minibus on a voluntary basis for a non-commercial body, and for social purposes. You are not allowed to be paid, except for out-of-pocket expenses, and cannot drive a minibus with a trailer or with a maximum authorised mass over 3.5 tonnes (extra allowance is made for equipment to carry disabled passengers). You must have had your licence for at least 2 years.
- For insurance reasons, you may not be able to drive a hired minibus if you are under 25. In some areas, you may not be able to hire a minibus at all unless you have the separate minibus licence, so check with the hire company as early as possible.

- If you need (or want) to book a minibus licence training and test, contact the Community Transport Association on 0845 130 6195 for advice or local details.

For a 2-day (minimum) trip, ensure that you have *at least three* drivers for each vehicle. You may have to show proof of address (utility bill etc) for each driver as well as a licence, so ensure all drivers' licences show their correct address. The maximum size of a minibus is 17 seats (including the driver), though in some areas you won't be able to hire bigger than a 15-seater. Check when hiring whether there is a mileage limit on the insurance, and what the *insurance excess* is if any damage is done (if you can bring the excess down to a reasonable level with an additional payment, always do so for the driver's peace of mind). As you may be travelling out of office hour periods, ask the hire company for a 24-hour number for their vehicle rescue service.

Most accidents happen within the first or last 30 minutes of the journey, so take special care when returning the vehicle while tired. If in any doubt, pretend you're a learner driver and get your passengers to direct you when parking etc. And remember that most minibuses take *diesel* not petrol—check before filling up!

Note that you should be careful not to use the minibus as part of an arrestable action, as this may invalidate your insurance and/or hire agreement. If the vehicle is deemed to be being used to directly support an action, 'unfriendly' police may contact the hire company and then take control of the vehicle: this could get very expensive (as well as leaving you with no transport!).

Option C: group/cheap train travel

Tickets (to Helensburgh Central) via mainline train to Glasgow can be surprisingly cheap, if bought well in advance (for a good independent website, use www.chester-le-track.co.uk): for instance, price from Newcastle-upon-Tyne is £13 each way. Your local station will tell you if tickets for your date are in the system yet, or for those using GNER trains you can check at www.gner.co.uk. Cheap sleeper tickets are also a possibility between London and Glasgow: £19 each way if booked online and as early as possible (www.firstscotrail.com, look for the "bargain berths" page under "Caledonian sleeper:" the main sleeper page tells you how far ahead you can currently book). Alternatively, a group of 10 or more may be able to get very good-value tickets closer to the date of travel: visit your local station or call 0870 010 4490 for Virgin, 08457 225 010 for GNER.

Almost all cheap train tickets are now booked as separate single journeys, so you can travel by different routes/methods in each direction. The cheapest tickets are all (moreorless) unexchangeable and non-refundable, so allow lots of time for getting back from Faslane/police stations for the return journey. One advantage of train travel is that you'll have no exhausted drivers in the group (unless you're part of an RMT blockade...).

Coach travel will usually be cheaper, especially if not booked early enough, but won't get you as far as Helensburgh and is a lot worse for planning your action (or sleeping) on. From Helensburgh, a regular bus services goes via Faslane (Peace Camp at Shandon, near South Gate, then North Gate near the cemetery) to Garelochhead/Coulport: service 316 runs half hourly weekdays (once every 2 hours on Sundays), 0870 6082608 or www.traveline.org.uk for details.