

FLEET MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE FOR THE VEHICLES YOU ACTUALLY RUN.

A severe-duty schedule from a Denver fleet shop.

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By the team at Don's Garage Automotive and Transmission — family-owned in Denver since 1970, three generations of mechanics, transmission specialty.

Manufacturer maintenance schedules are written for retail customers driving 12,000 miles a year in normal conditions. Fleet vehicles aren't normal-conditions vehicles. They're severe-duty by Ford's own definition: high mileage, daily start-stops, often loaded, sometimes towing. Their maintenance schedule looks different — and the difference is the gap between \$300 fluid services and \$4,000 transmission failures.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Fleet vehicles need severe-duty maintenance intervals (donsgarageauto.com/resources/glossary/#severe-duty-interval) — manufacturer "lifetime fluid" claims don't apply to commercial use.
- Transmission service every 30,000 miles for heavy-duty fleet vehicles, 30,000-50,000 for medium-duty, 50,000-60,000 for light-duty.
- The most common fleet vehicles (Ford Transit, Sprinter, ProMaster, F-150, F-250/F-350, Silverado HD) each have specific failure curves and service requirements.
- Preventive maintenance costs roughly 1/10th of reactive repair when downtime is factored in correctly.
- Don's Garage builds fleet maintenance schedules tailored to each vehicle's duty cycle and provides itemized service records.

ON THIS PAGE

- Why fleet vehicles need a different schedule.
- Service intervals by mileage tier.
- By vehicle class.
- What fails at what mileage.
- How Don's helps fleet customers actually use this.
- Want this schedule built for your fleet?
- More from the fleet content engine.
- Fleet maintenance you can actually plan around.

Fleet vehicles wear faster than retail vehicles because they work harder. Don's Garage at 5515 Washington Street in north Denver has been keeping work vehicles on the road since 1970, three generations of mechanics. The schedule below is what we recommend across the most common fleet vehicles — cargo vans, pickups, SUVs, and sedans — tuned for severe-duty operation rather than the manufacturer's retail-customer assumptions.

Use it as a baseline. Every fleet's specific duty cycle is different, which is why we build customized schedules for fleet customers based on their actual vehicles, mileage tiers, and operating patterns. The general framework below is the starting point.

WHY FLEET VEHICLES NEED A DIFFERENT SCHEDULE.

Ford classifies fleet usage as "severe duty" — and it's not marketing language. Ford's own owner's manuals draw a distinction between normal-duty driving (highway commuting, occasional errands) and severe-duty driving (frequent short trips, heavy loads, dusty environments, towing, extended idling, daily commercial use). Most fleet vehicles check at least three of those severe-duty boxes.

A severe-duty maintenance schedule cuts standard intervals roughly in half. Oil changes go from 7,500-10,000 miles to 5,000-7,500. Transmission services drop from 100,000 miles to 30,000-60,000. Coolant flushes shift from "lifetime" to every 60,000-75,000 miles. The pattern is consistent across manufacturers — Ford, GM, Ram, Mercedes, Toyota all publish severe-duty schedules that are dramatically shorter than the schedules dealers tell retail customers about.

One independent fleet manager profiled in a [Work Truck Online case study](#) cut his transmission service interval from the manufacturer's recommended 70,000 miles to 30,000-50,000 miles for his fleet. His result: zero transmission failures in five years. That's the math: a \$300-\$500 transmission service every 30,000 miles is dramatically cheaper than one \$4,000 transmission rebuild plus 5-7 days of downtime.

SERVICE INTERVALS BY MILEAGE TIER.

Below is the severe-duty schedule we recommend for most fleet vehicles, regardless of make. Vehicle-specific notes follow in the next section.

Every 5,000 miles (or 6 months, whichever comes first).

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Interval	Service
Every 5,000 miles (or 6 months, whichever comes first).	Oil and filter change (full synthetic recommended for fleet duty)
	Tire pressure check, including spare
	Tire rotation
	Brake inspection (visual check of pads, rotors, lines)
	Multi-point inspection: lights, wipers, fluid levels, belts, and hoses
	Battery condition check (especially for vehicles with lots of start-stop cycles)
	Air filter inspection (replace if dirty, often by 15,000-30,000 miles depending on environment)

Every 15,000 miles.

Every 15,000 miles.

Interval	Service
Every 15,000 miles.	Everything in the 5,000-mile interval
	Cabin air filter replacement

Interval	Service
	Fuel filter inspection (replace per manufacturer interval, typically every 30,000-60,000 miles)
	Brake fluid level and condition check

Every 30,000 miles.

Every 30,000 miles.

Interval	Service
Every 30,000 miles.	Everything above
	Transmission service for vehicles in heavy duty (towing, hauling, frequent stops). For lighter-duty vehicles, the next service can wait until 50,000-60,000 miles. Either way, do not wait for "lifetime" fluid recommendations — fleet usage breaks fluid down faster than retail driving.
	Differential and transfer case fluid check (replace at 50,000-60,000 if not replaced earlier)
	Spark plug inspection (replace at 60,000-100,000 depending on vehicle and fuel)
	Suspension and steering inspection (ball joints, tie rods, control arms, sway bar links)
	Engine air filter replacement if not done earlier

Every 50,000-60,000 miles.

Every 50,000-60,000 miles.

Interval	Service
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Interval	Service
Every 50,000-60,000 miles.	Everything above
	Transmission service if not done at 30,000 (for lighter-duty vehicles)
	Differential and transfer case fluid replacement
	Coolant flush (do NOT trust "lifetime coolant" claims for fleet usage)
	Brake fluid flush
	Drive belt and timing belt inspection (timing belt typically replaced at 100,000-120,000 miles if vehicle has a belt rather than a chain)
	Power steering fluid replacement (manufacturers often don't specify an interval — 60,000 miles is a reasonable conservative target)

Every 100,000 miles.

Every 100,000 miles.

Interval	Service
Every 100,000 miles.	Everything above
	Spark plug replacement (if not done earlier)
	Timing belt replacement (if equipped — many newer vehicles use chains that don't need replacement)
	Water pump inspection or replacement
	Engine and transmission mount inspection

Interval	Service
	Major fluid flush across all systems if any have been deferred

After 150,000-200,000 miles.

After 150,000-200,000 miles.

Interval	Service
After 150,000- 200,000 miles.	Continue the schedule above on rotation
	Increased frequency of inspections — fleet vehicles past 150,000 miles enter the wear-failure zone where injectors, water pumps, alternators, starters, suspension components, and emissions hardware start failing in sequence
	Annual oil sampling becomes valuable for catching engine wear before catastrophic failure
	Plan for the rotation-out decision: at 250,000-300,000 miles, most fleet vehicles cost more in maintenance and downtime than a replacement vehicle costs to acquire

BY VEHICLE CLASS.

The schedule above applies to most fleet vehicles. These per-vehicle notes catch the things that fail commonly on specific platforms.

Ford Transit (cargo van) and Transit Connect.

The Transit is the workhorse of modern American fleets. Ford's manual claims "lifetime" fluids for the transmission and rear axle, but fleet experience says otherwise — change transmission fluid every 60,000 miles (45,000 if you tow), rear axle fluid every 60,000. Coolant at 60,000. Spark plugs at 80,000. Brake pads typically last 40,000-60,000 miles for retail use; figure 30,000-40,000 in fleet duty. Common high-mileage failures: ignition coils, water pumps around 100,000-130,000, transmission torque converters around 130,000-160,000.

Mercedes Sprinter and Ram ProMaster.

Diesel Sprinters need more attention to fuel system and emissions hardware than gas vans — DEF (diesel exhaust fluid) systems, EGR coolers, particulate filters all have their own service intervals and failure modes. ProMaster transmissions (the 62TE in older models, the 9-speed in newer) are sensitive to fluid quality and overdue services. Recommend transmission service every 50,000-60,000 for both, more aggressive if towing or running heavy loads. Both vans share a common pattern of front suspension wear (control arm bushings, tie rods) by 100,000 miles in fleet use.

Ford F-150 (light-duty pickup).

America's most common fleet truck. Ford's recommended oil interval is 7,500-10,000 miles for retail; cut to 5,000 for fleet. Transmission service every 30,000-50,000 if towing regularly, 60,000 if not. Common high-mileage issues: spark plug wear and coil pack failures around 80,000-100,000, transfer case actuator failures around 100,000, and on EcoBoost engines, intake valve carbon buildup around 80,000-120,000 miles (a known issue on direct-injected engines without port injection assist).

Ford F-250 / F-350, Chevy Silverado 2500/3500, Ram 2500/3500 (heavy-duty pickups).

Heavy-duty trucks under fleet duty hit transmission failure thresholds earlier than light-duty trucks because of the loads they carry and the trailers they pull. Cut transmission service interval to 30,000 miles flat — don't even consider longer. Diesel variants need fuel filter replacements per manufacturer schedule (typically 15,000-25,000 miles), DEF system attention, and more frequent oil sampling. The 6.7L Powerstroke (Ford) and Duramax (GM) diesels both reward consistent maintenance with 250,000+ mile service lives; both punish neglect with \$8,000-\$15,000 repair bills.

Chevy Silverado 1500 / GMC Sierra 1500 (light-duty pickup).

Pattern similar to the F-150. Oil at 5,000, transmission service at 30,000-50,000 depending on duty cycle. Common issues on the Active Fuel Management (cylinder deactivation) systems found on the 5.3L V8 — lifter failures around 80,000-120,000 miles are well-documented. AFM-related failures cost \$2,500-\$4,000 to repair. Fleet operators sometimes proactively disable AFM via reflash to avoid the issue entirely.

Chevy Express / GMC Savana (cargo van).

Older platform than the Transit/Sprinter, but extremely common in older fleets that haven't transitioned to newer European-style cargo vans. Maintenance pattern is conservative — 5,000-mile oil intervals, 30,000-mile transmission services. The 4L80E and 6L80 transmissions are robust but not invincible. Common high-mileage failures: rear u-joints around 100,000 miles, water pump around 120,000-150,000, alternator around 150,000-180,000.

Toyota Tacoma and Tundra (mid-size and full-size pickups).

Toyota truck reliability is well-earned, but fleet duty still cuts service lives. Oil at 5,000-miles in fleet (not the Toyota Maintenance program's 10,000-mile interval). Transmission service at 60,000 for most use, 30,000 if towing regularly. Common high-mileage issues: water pumps around 100,000-130,000, lower ball joints around 100,000, frame rust on older Tacomas in salted-road regions. The 5.7L V8 Tundra and 3.5L V6 Tacoma are both robust to 250,000+ miles with disciplined maintenance.

Fleet SUVs (Tahoe, Suburban, Expedition) and sedans.

Many fleets run SUVs as crew transport, supervisor vehicles, or sales-fleet sedans. Maintenance pattern matches the equivalent pickup platform — Tahoe/Suburban follow Silverado intervals, Expedition follows F-150 intervals. Sedans (Camry, Malibu, Fusion, Altima) used as sales fleets typically run lighter duty than work trucks but still benefit from 5,000-mile oil intervals and 60,000-mile transmission services. Common SUV-specific issues: third-row HVAC blower motors fail around 80,000-100,000, rear air suspension components on Expeditions/Navigators around 100,000-130,000.

WHAT FAILS AT WHAT MILEAGE.

Every fleet vehicle hits roughly the same failure curve. Use this to plan budgets and replacement timing.

40,000-60,000 miles.

Brake pads (front first, rears last longer). First set of tires reaching minimum tread. Battery on most vehicles. Wiper blades (multiple times by now). Air and cabin filters multiple times.

60,000-100,000 miles.

First major service inflection point. Brake rotors typically need replacement (resurface or replace). Spark plugs on most vehicles. Coolant flushed (or should be). First transmission service if not done earlier. Front suspension components (control arm bushings, sway bar links) start showing wear. Some vehicles see ignition coil failures.

100,000-150,000 miles.

Water pump becomes a common failure point. Timing belt (if equipped) needs replacement. Front suspension components typically need replacement (ball joints, tie rod ends, control arms). Brake calipers can start sticking. EVAP system components fail. AC system service (refrigerant top-off, condenser inspection) commonly needed. Some transmissions show first signs of slipping or hard shifting.

150,000-200,000 miles.

Wear-zone failures begin. Alternator and starter often need replacement. Fuel pump fails on some vehicles. Major suspension overhaul commonly needed. Transmission may need rebuild if maintenance was deferred. Engine mounts and transmission mounts deteriorate. Catalytic converters on some vehicles. Power steering pump fails on some vehicles.

200,000-300,000 miles.

Decision zone. Vehicles with disciplined maintenance routinely run to 300,000+. Vehicles with deferred maintenance typically don't make it past 200,000-250,000 without a major repair that exceeds the vehicle's value. This is where fleet managers face the rotation decision: invest in a \$4,000-\$8,000 repair, or rotate the vehicle out of revenue duty into backup or sale.

HOW DON'S HELPS FLEET CUSTOMERS ACTUALLY USE THIS.

A maintenance schedule is only useful if someone follows it. Most fleet operators we work with don't have time to track service intervals across 10-30 vehicles, and CMMS software is overkill for a fleet that size. Don's offers a simpler alternative.

Bring your fleet by for a baseline assessment. We log each vehicle's current mileage, recent service history (whatever you have), and condition. We can build a forward schedule for each vehicle in your fleet based on its specific mileage tier and duty cycle. We can send reminders when each vehicle is due. You bring it in, we do the service, you don't have to think about it again until the next reminder.

Records are itemized — what was done, what parts, what labor, what mileage. Useful for your own fleet records, useful for resale value when you eventually rotate vehicles out, useful for warranty work down the road.

Single point of contact. The person who books your first truck can keep handling your account whenever possible. Over time, they get to know your fleet, your duty cycles, your preferences. They know which trucks tow, which ones run city routes, which ones idle a lot. The schedule for your fleet ends up being more accurate than what any generic schedule could provide.

WANT THIS SCHEDULE BUILT FOR YOUR FLEET?

Bring your fleet to Don's at 5515 Washington Street in Denver. We'll spend an hour with each vehicle, document where each one stands, build a forward schedule, and start tracking it for you. No commitment, no hard sell. The first conversation is just figuring out what you've got and what makes sense.

COMMON QUESTIONS

FLEET MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE QUESTIONS.

WHAT IS THE RECOMMENDED MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE FOR FLEET VEHICLES?



HOW OFTEN SHOULD I SERVICE THE TRANSMISSION ON A FLEET VEHICLE?



WHAT IS SEVERE-DUTY MAINTENANCE FOR FLEET VEHICLES?



WHEN SHOULD I SERVICE A FORD TRANSIT FLEET VEHICLE?



WHEN SHOULD I SERVICE A FORD F-150 FLEET VEHICLE?



HOW OFTEN SHOULD HEAVY-DUTY PICKUP TRANSMISSIONS BE SERVICED IN FLEET USE?



WHEN DOES A FLEET VEHICLE TYPICALLY NEED MAJOR REPAIRS?



SHOULD I FOLLOW THE DEALER'S MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE OR A FLEET SCHEDULE?



HOW DO I TRACK FLEET VEHICLE MAINTENANCE WITHOUT EXPENSIVE SOFTWARE?



WHAT'S THE MOST EXPENSIVE FLEET VEHICLE FAILURE TO PREVENT?



WHERE CAN I GET FLEET MAINTENANCE IN DENVER?



CAN A SMALL REPAIR SHOP MANAGE A FLEET MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE FOR ME?

