

Your ELD, explained plainly

For bus drivers who have kept a paper logbook for years and are being told to use a screen. Nothing here is complicated. You already know how to do this — the machine just draws the line for you.

WRITTEN FOR PASSENGER CARRIERS — 10 AND 15, NOT 11 AND 14

Almost everything written about ELDs is written for freight. If you read a trucker's guide you will get the wrong numbers, and you will spend the day worrying about a thirty-minute break you do not have to take. This guide only uses the passenger-carrier rules.

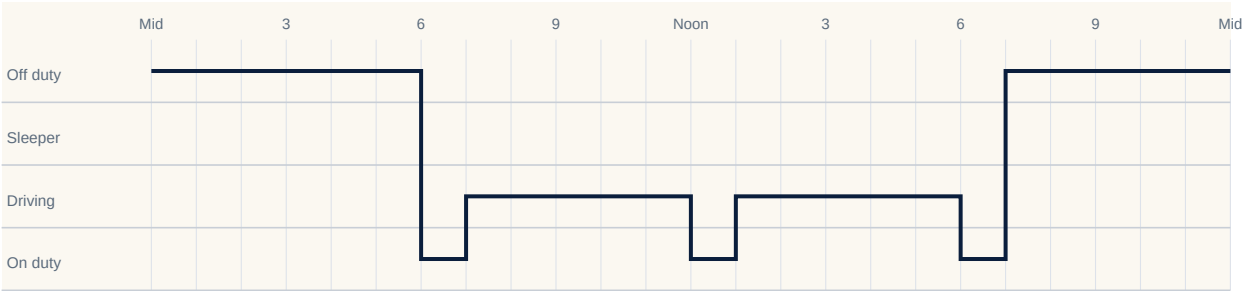
Before we start: you may not even need one

You are exempt from the ELD rule if your coach's engine is **model year 1999 or older**. That is the engine, not the body — a 1982 Silver Eagle is exempt. You are also exempt if you keep a log on **8 days or fewer in any 30-day period**. If either applies, paper is still perfectly legal and you can put this guide down.

49 CFR 395.8(a)(1)(iii) · 395.1(e)

1 · IT IS THE SAME DAY, DRAWN BY A MACHINE

Here is your logbook. Four rows, twenty-four hours, one line moving between them. You have drawn this by hand ten thousand times.



The ELD draws the exact same line. Same four duty statuses, same twenty-four hours. The only difference is that the driving row gets filled in for you, because the device is plugged into the engine and knows when the wheels are turning.

What you did on paper	What happens now
Drew the line yourself	The device draws the driving row. You still set the others.
Wrote the date, truck number, carrier	Filled in once, then it remembers.
Totalled the hours at the end	Totalled live, all day, in front of you.
Handed the book to the officer	Send it to him, or turn the screen around.
Kept the last 7 days in the book	Device holds the last 7 days plus today.
Fixed a mistake with a pen	Propose an edit. Your carrier accepts it. Driving time can never be edited.

The one real difference, said plainly

On paper, you decided what the line said. On an ELD, **the driving row is not yours to change** — not by you, not by your carrier, not by anybody. Everything else you can still correct. That single fact is what the whole rule is about, and it is why some people dislike it. It is also the end of anybody leaning on you to shade your hours.

2 · YOUR HOURS — THE PASSENGER-CARRIER RULES

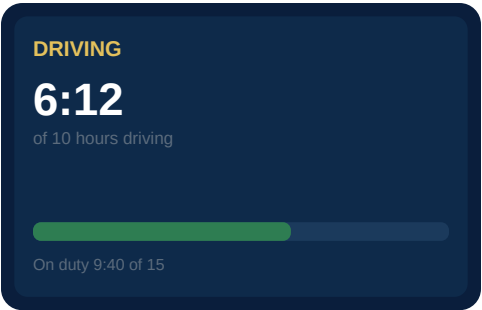
Rule	Your limit	Note
Driving	10 hours	after 8 consecutive hours off duty
On duty	15 hours	after 8 consecutive off duty — and this one is not a rolling window like a trucker's 14
Off duty needed	8 consecutive hours	before you may drive again
Weekly	60 in 7 days or 70 in 8	whichever your carrier operates
30-minute break	Does not apply	that is a property-carrier rule — it is not yours
34-hour restart	Does not apply	also property-carrier only
Sleeper berth	8 hours, splittable	two periods, neither under 2 hours, totalling 8

49 CFR 395.5 · 395.3 (property, for contrast) · Alaska has its own limits

The mistake that costs bus drivers the most

Waiting with your group is **On Duty**, not Off Duty. Sitting at the casino for four hours while they play, standing at the church while they load, waiting at the venue — that is on-duty time unless you have been genuinely released and are free to go do as you please. Log it wrong and your fifteen hours runs out somewhere you did not expect.

What the device shows you all day



Two clocks, always visible. Driving hours used, and on-duty hours used. No arithmetic, no counting back through the week in a layby.

Most drivers who were dead against the change say this is the part they would not give back — not the compliance, just knowing exactly where they stand without doing sums.

3 · GETTING STARTED, IN ORDER

- 1 Check you actually need one**
Engine model year 2000 or newer, and you keep a log more than 8 days in any 30? Then yes. Otherwise stop here.
- 2 Pick a device from the FMCSA registered list**
This matters more than price. FMCSA **revokes** devices that stop meeting the standard, and running a revoked one is treated exactly the same as running no log at all. Check the list at eld.fmcsa.dot.gov before you buy, and check it again once a year.
- 3 Have it installed and pair it to your phone or tablet**
It plugs into the diagnostic port. Most are a two-minute job. Take the coach for a short run and watch the driving row fill in by itself — that is the moment it stops being frightening.
- 4 Put four things in the cab and leave them there**
The user manual. The data-transfer instruction sheet. The malfunction instruction sheet. And **eight days of blank paper log grids**. The first three may be on the device; the paper cannot be.
- 5 Do one week on both**
Run the device and keep your paper book beside it for a week. Compare them at the end of each day. You will stop checking by Wednesday.

49 CFR 395.22(h) — the four items you must carry

4 · WHEN IT BREAKS — AND IT WILL

This is the part that frightens people most, and it is the part with the clearest rules. A failed device is not a violation. Not knowing what to do about it is.

On the day it fails

- 1 Note the malfunction** and write down the date and time.
- 2 Go to paper immediately.** Reconstruct today, plus the previous 7 days, on your blank grids — unless the device can still hand you those records.
- 3 Tell your carrier in writing within 24 hours.**
- 4 Keep running paper** until the device is repaired or replaced. You are legal on paper during this.
- 5 The carrier has 8 days** from discovery to fix or replace it. Need longer? They must ask the FMCSA Division Administrator for your state, within 5 days of you reporting it.

49 CFR 395.34 · 395.22(h)

This is why the blank grids matter

Eight days of blank paper log sheets are not a suggestion, they are required equipment — like triangles and a fire extinguisher. The day the screen goes black on the shoulder of I-95 with fifty people behind you is not the day to find out you have none. **Buy a pad. Put it in the same place as your registration. Forget about it.**

Things that are not malfunctions

A flat tablet battery, a phone you left at home, or a subscription your carrier forgot to pay are **not** device malfunctions. They are your problem and they will be written up as no record of duty status. Keep a charger in the cab.

5 · CHOOSING ONE — AND WHO ACTUALLY ANSWERS THE PHONE

For a one or two coach operator, support matters more than features. You will not use ninety percent of what these platforms do. You will very much care whether somebody picks up at six on a Sunday morning when the thing will not boot and you have a church group waiting.

Provider	Roughly	What people say
Samsara	Higher end	Rated first overall in 2026 fleet-management reviews, with 24/7 support and the strongest satisfaction scores. Priced for fleets, not for one coach.
Motive	Mid	Strong platform, well known for compliance. Support quality is consistently rated below the product itself — worth knowing if you run nights and weekends.
Geotab	Lower	Noticeably cheaper per vehicle, but you buy through a reseller and your experience is entirely down to which reseller. Ask who supports you before you sign.
Garmin eLog	One-off	Buy the hardware, no monthly fee. Logging only — no fleet features. For a single owner-operator who wants compliance and nothing else, this is often the honest answer.

Four questions to ask before you pay anybody

1. **Are you on the FMCSA registered list today?** Get it in writing.
2. **Who do I ring at 6am on a Sunday, and is it a person?**
3. **What is the contract length and what happens if I sell the coach?**
4. **Is it set up for passenger-carrier rules — 10 and 15?** Some default to property-carrier settings and will show you the wrong clock.

Prices and rankings move. Check the registered list yourself at eld.fmcsa.dot.gov before you buy — that is the only source that matters, and it is free.

THE SHORT VERSION

- Pre-2000 engine, or logging 8 days or fewer in 30? You are exempt.
- Your numbers are 10 and 15. No 30-minute break. No 34-hour restart.
- Waiting with your group is On Duty.
- Carry the manual, both instruction sheets, and 8 days of blank grids.
- If it breaks: paper immediately, tell the carrier within 24 hours, 8 days to fix.
- Buy from the FMCSA registered list, and ask who answers on a Sunday.

One last thing. Nobody in this Nation learned this on their own and nobody expects you to. If you get stuck, ask in the Clubhouse — somebody has already made whatever mistake you are about to make, and they will tell you. That is the entire point of the place.

This guide explains the federal rules in plain language. It is not legal advice, and it does not replace 49 CFR Part 395 or your carrier's own policy. Rules change — the citations are here so you can check the current text yourself.