



February 5, 2024

HIR-24/01

Intersection Crash Between Medium-Size Bus and Combination Vehicle

Dermott, Arkansas
June 6, 2022

On June 6, 2022, about 2:41 p.m. central daylight time, a crash occurred between a medium-size bus and a truck-tractor combination vehicle at an intersection of US Highway 65 (US-65) and State Highway 35 (SH-35) near Dermott, Chicot County, Arkansas.¹ The bus was traveling westbound on SH-35 and, without yielding, began crossing the southbound lanes of US-65, where it was struck by the combination vehicle (see figure 1). Five bus passengers died and three bus passengers sustained serious injuries; both drivers were seriously injured.



Figure 1. The two vehicles postcrash at the scene of the collision. (Source: Arkansas State Police, annotations added by NTSB)

¹ (a) In this report, all times are central daylight time. (b) Visit [nts.gov](https://www.nts.gov) to find additional information in the [public docket](#) for this NTSB investigation (case no. HWY22FH010). Use the [CAROL Query](#) to search safety recommendations and investigations.

Location	Intersection of US Highway 65 and State Highway 35 near Dermott, Chicot County, Arkansas (see figure 2)
Date	June 6, 2022
Time	02:41 p.m. central daylight time
Involved vehicles	2
Involved people	10
Injuries	5 fatal (bus passengers), 5 serious (3 bus passengers, bus driver, truck driver)
Weather	Dry, clear, and daylight
Roadway information	Rural intersection of a 4-lane median-divided highway and a 2-lane roadway; concrete pavement

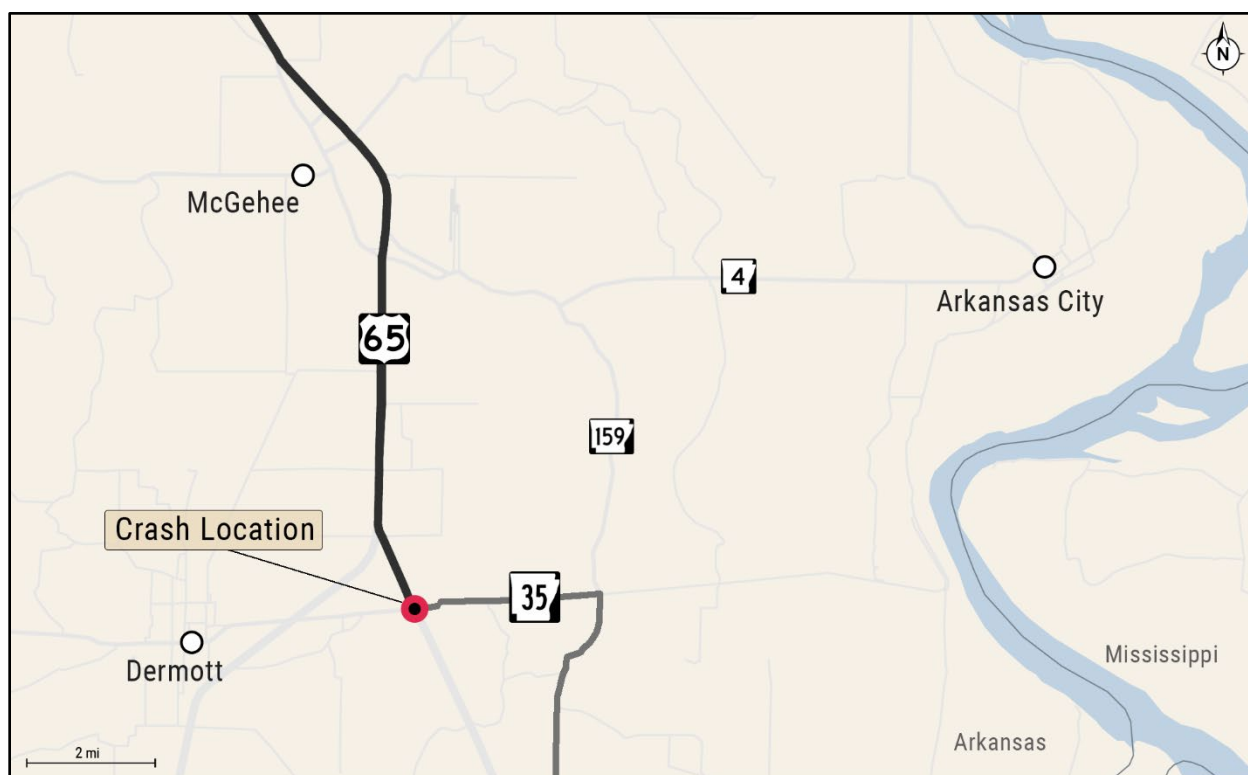


Figure 2. Map showing the location of the crash.

1.1 Background

On June 6, 2022, about 2:41 p.m., a 2018 Starcraft Allstar medium-size bus was traveling westbound on SH-35. The bus was operated by C.B. King Memorial School and occupied by a 47-year-old driver and eight passengers with disabilities, ranging in age

from 18 to 73 years. The bus crossed the northbound lanes of US-65 and then began crossing the southbound lanes of US-65 without yielding. The bus was struck by a southbound 2018 Freightliner truck-tractor in combination with a 2020 Walker MC304 tank-trailer. The combination vehicle was operated by J.B. Hunt and occupied by a 52-year-old driver.

At the location of the crash, the northbound and southbound lanes of US-65 are separated by a 137-foot-wide earthen median (see figure 3). Both travel directions have two through-lanes and one left-turn lane, each lane 12 feet wide. Both directions of travel had left and right shoulders, which were delineated from the travel lanes by solid yellow and white lines, respectively. The through-lanes were delineated by dashed white lines.

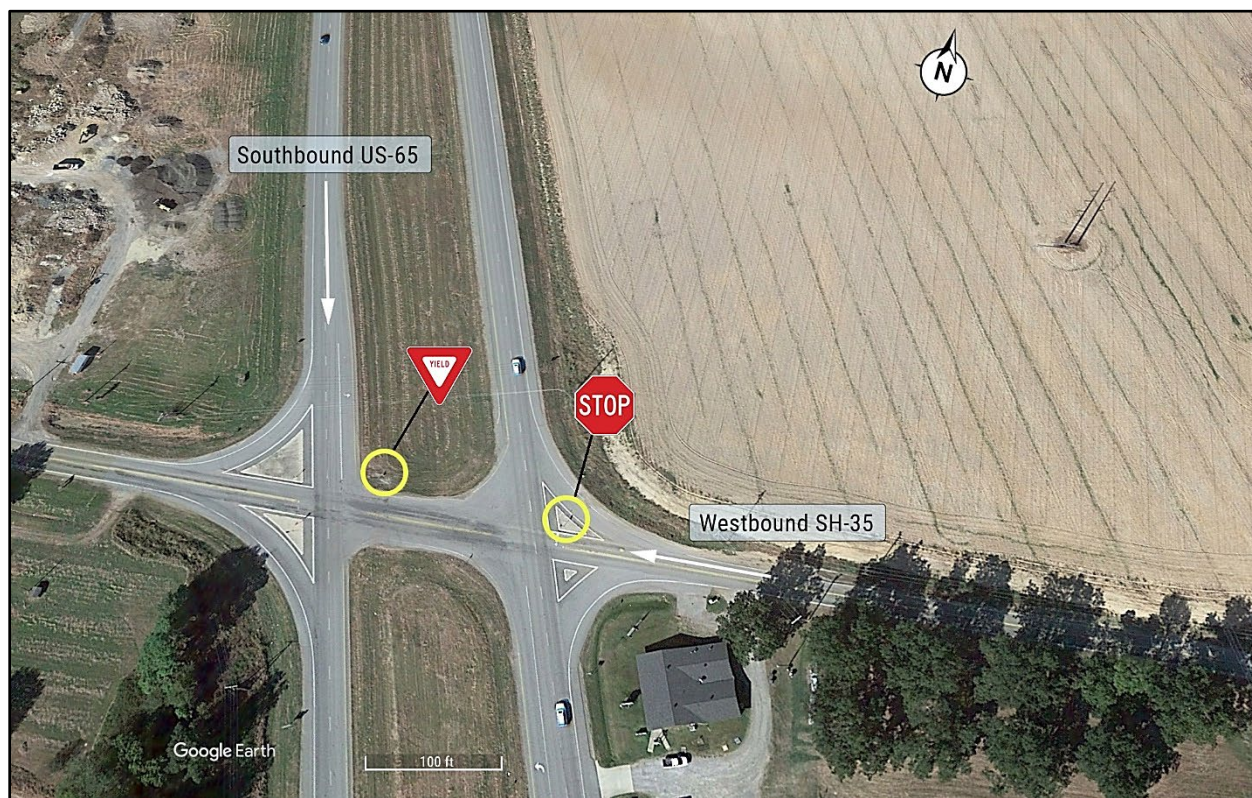


Figure 3. Overhead view of the intersection of US-65 with SH-35.

SH-35 intersects US-65 at an 89.5-degree angle. At the intersection, SH-35 consists of a single 10-foot-wide travel lane in both the eastbound and westbound directions of travel. In the westbound approach to the intersection (direction of travel of the bus), SH-35 traffic was presented with the following signage: (1) a stop ahead sign, located about 750 feet before the intersection with the northbound US-65 lanes; (2) a stop sign, located on a concrete island before the northbound lanes of US-65; and (3) a yield sign, located in the median before the southbound lanes of US-65.

The posted speed limit on US-65 in this area is 65 mph, and the posted speed limit on SH-35 is 55 mph. At the time of the crash, the roadway was dry, and the weather was clear. The investigation determined there were no environmental obstructions to either driver's line of sight.

1.2 Event Sequence; Driver and Occupant Information

1.2.1 Precrash Activities and Vehicle Information

About 7:00 a.m. on the day of the crash, the bus driver began her morning duties of transporting passengers from the Dermott area to the C.B. King Memorial School's adult center in Arkansas City, Arkansas.² After school activities ended about 2:00 p.m., the bus left Arkansas City to transport the individuals to their homes in the Dermott area. The bus was equipped with lap/shoulder belts in all seating positions.

About 12:41 p.m. that same day, the truck driver arrived at the J.B. Hunt yard in Stuttgart, Arkansas, and started his work shift. After completing a pretrip inspection of the combination vehicle, the truck driver left for Flowood, Mississippi, about 12:55 p.m.

The truck-tractor was equipped with a Detroit Diesel electronic engine control module (ECM), which recorded data related to the crash. The truck-tractor was also equipped with Bendix SafetyDirect, a monitoring and recording system that continually tracks driving performance metrics and records pertinent information. The system records video from the forward-facing camera when triggered by critical events, such as rapid deceleration. The carrier provided the NTSB with video footage from the forward-facing camera, which showed 10 seconds of pre-impact events (see figure 4). Based on the ECM data and the video footage, the combination vehicle was traveling in the right lane of southbound US-65 at 61 to 62 mph during the 10 seconds before the collision. The ECM data showed that the truck driver applied brakes during the 1-second interval before impact.³

² The school operates six centers, including those in McGehee and Arkansas City.

³ The ECM recorded the data at 1 Hz, precluding a more precise timing of brake application.

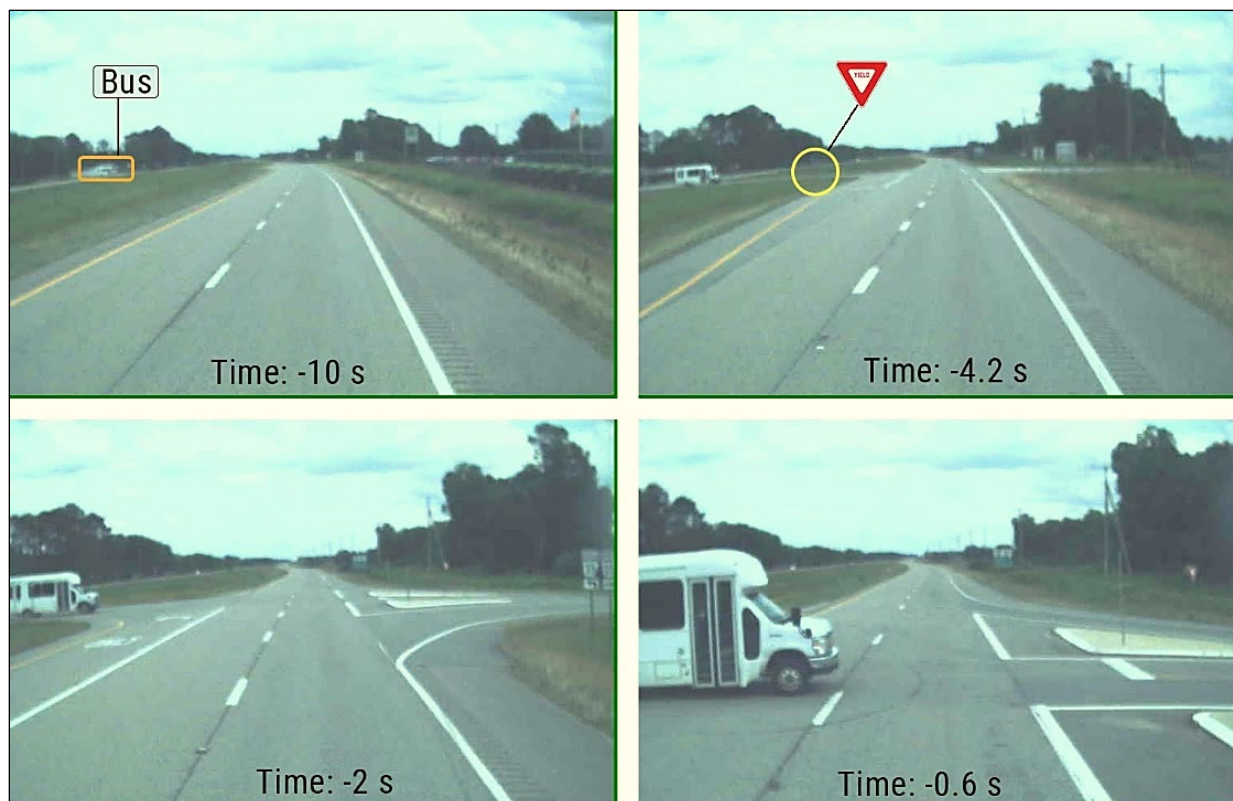


Figure 4. Screenshots of the video footage from the truck-tractor’s Bendix SafetyDirect forward-facing camera at 10 seconds (top left), 4.2 seconds (top right), 2 seconds (bottom left), and 0.6 seconds (bottom right) before impact. (Source: J.B. Hunt, annotations added by NTSB)

To determine the movement of the bus across the intersection and estimate its speed, the NTSB examined data from the airbag control module (ACM) recovered from the bus and the video footage from the truck-tractor’s forward-facing camera.⁴ The estimated speed of the bus had an uncertainty range of +/- 3.5 mph. This examination showed that:

- 10 seconds before the crash (estimated), the bus stopped at the stop sign before the northbound lanes of US-65,⁵
- 4.2 seconds before the crash, the bus completed crossing of the northbound lanes, traveling about 18 mph,

⁴ For additional information about the ACM data from the bus, as well as the ECM data from the truck-tractor, see the Arkansas State Police Crash Reconstruction Team Event Data Recorder Analysis report in the docket of this investigation.

⁵ Due to uncertainties associated with the video speed estimates and the limited duration of the electronic data, the investigation could not definitively determine whether the bus came to a complete stop at the stop sign for northbound US-65.

- 2 seconds before the crash, the bus reached the location of the yield sign, traveling about 18 mph,
- 0.6 seconds before the crash, the bus began to cross the right lane of southbound US-65, traveling about 21 mph.

The data showed that when the bus crossed the northbound lanes of US-65, it did not decelerate as it approached and passed the yield sign and then began crossing the southbound lanes of US-65. It was not possible, based on the video footage, to determine whether the bus driver turned to look in the direction of the combination vehicle before the collision. The front end of the truck-tractor struck the right side of the bus, just aft of the front passenger loading door. The bus sustained extensive intrusion damage on the right side and the bus body separated from its chassis (see figure 5). At impact, the truck-tractor jackknifed to the right and the tank-trailer rolled over while detaching from the truck-tractor.⁶



Figure 5. Damage to the bus, showing the detached chassis (left) and the interior intrusion (right).

The truck-tractor was also equipped with Wabco OnGuardACTIVE, a suite of advanced driver assistance systems that included forward collision warning and automatic emergency braking systems for mitigation of rear-end collisions, as well as an adaptive cruise control. The forward collision mitigation system on the truck-tractor was not designed to detect cross-traffic and did not activate during the crash.

The investigation identified no precrash mechanical deficiencies for either vehicle.

⁶ *Jackknifing* is the folding of an articulated vehicle so that it resembles the acute angle of a folding pocketknife.

1.2.2 Driver Information

The truck driver held a valid commercial driver's license (CDL) with tank-vehicle endorsement and corrective-lens restriction. He had worked for the motor carrier as a commercial vehicle driver since 2016. The bus driver held a current class D Arkansas driver's license with a corrective-lens restriction and no endorsements; she was not required to have a CDL to operate the bus. She had worked for the school as a bus driver since 2020. Examination of the two drivers' cell phone records showed that neither was using their cell phone at the time of the crash.

Further, the NTSB examined the drivers' activities in the days before the collision by interviewing both drivers and analyzing their work schedules and phone records. The bus driver told investigators she was unable to remember any events of the week preceding the crash. Based on her work schedule and phone records, she had about a 5.5-hour opportunity for sleep the night before the crash. She was off duty the previous 2 days and had a more than 12-hour opportunity for sleep during each of those 2 nights. Based on the interview with the truck driver and analysis of his work schedule and phone records, he had a more than 8-hour opportunity for sleep each of the 3 nights before the crash. The truck driver did not work the day before the collision and reported obtaining "plenty of rest." He also reported always trying to get an adequate amount of rest.

At the request of the NTSB, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Forensic Sciences Laboratory conducted postcrash toxicological testing of blood specimens from both drivers. The testing of the bus driver's blood specimen identified trazodone—a prescription antidepressant medication—near a low-therapeutic concentration. Trazodone can have sedating effects and typically carries a caution about operating hazardous machinery including automobiles.⁷ The FAA testing of the truck driver's blood detected the prescription antidepressant medication citalopram and its metabolite N-desmethylcitalopram, as well as the non-sedating over-the-counter antihistamine medication fexofenadine.⁸ J.B. Hunt also had the truck driver take the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) postcrash tests for alcohol and other drugs, as required by 49 CFR 382.303; the results were negative for the tested substances.⁹

⁷ According to the bus driver's medical records, she was using trazodone to treat major depressive disorder with insomnia; the healthcare provider's records show that these conditions were controlled.

⁸ (a) *Citalopram* sometimes carries a warning for users to avoid driving until they know how the medication affects them, although cognitive deficits are not well established (Fairweather, Pozzo, Kerr, Lafferty and Hindmarch 1997; Paul, Gray, Love and Lange 2007). In a postcrash interview with the NTSB, the truck driver reported that he used citalopram to treat anxiety. (b) *Fexofenadine* is generally not considered impairing.

⁹ The Arkansas State Crime Laboratory conducted the tests, which were negative for alcohol and other tested-for drugs.

1.2.3 Injuries and Occupant Protection

As a result of the crash, five bus passengers died and three passengers sustained serious injuries. Both drivers sustained serious injuries. Two of the fatally injured bus passengers were ejected during the crash; one had been seated in a wheelchair located in the rear of the bus, while the seating position of the second ejected passenger is unknown.

All seating positions on the bus were equipped with lap/shoulder belts. Based on the bus ACM data, the bus driver was not belted at the time of impact. Although she stated that she always ensured passengers were belted in their seats and their wheelchairs secured, she had no recollection of the crash trip. Due to the catastrophic damage to the bus and the bus driver's inability to recall the trip and the events of the crash, the NTSB was unable to evaluate the adequacy of her pretrip safety procedures, determine the bus passengers' seating positions at the time of the crash, and whether they had been properly belted in their seats and the deceased passenger's wheelchair had been properly secured.

The truck driver reported using his lap/shoulder belt at the time of the crash. Postimpact, the truck-tractor's forward-facing camera fell from its position and the subsequent video footage confirmed that the truck driver was wearing the lap/shoulder belt.

1.3 Additional Information

1.3.1 Roadway and Traffic Characteristics, and Sight Distance Observations

As measured in 2022, the average annual daily traffic on US-65 in the area of the crash was 5,600 vehicles; the average annual daily traffic on SH-35 was 1,770 vehicles. In 2018, the Arkansas Department of Transportation performed construction that realigned SH-35 from a 70-degree intersection with US-65 to the current 89.5-degree angle. Examination of a 5-year crash history—from 2008 to 2012—at the intersection prior to the realignment showed 18 crashes (1 fatal and 13 right-angle collisions).¹⁰ In the 4-year period after the intersection realignment—from August 2018 to May 2022—there were 5 crashes (1 fatal and 3 right-angle collisions).

Nine days after the crash, NTSB investigators conducted sight distance observations to assess the bus driver's ability to see the combination vehicle. Driving an exemplar medium-size bus similar in configuration, another employee of the school

¹⁰ Additionally, in the 7-year period between 2012 and 2018, there were 31 crashes (1 fatal and 27 right-angle collisions).

approached the intersection in a westbound direction, replicating the path of the crash-involved bus. When the exemplar bus was in the intersection, the A-pillar of the interior structure partially obscured the exemplar driver's view of southbound US-65 traffic, which necessitated the driver to move in the seat to obtain the complete view of the southbound lanes (see figure 6). There were no environmental obstacles, including the roadway geometry, that obscured the driver's view of the southbound US-65 lanes when the exemplar bus approached them.



Figure 6. View of the US-65 southbound lanes from the exemplar bus. The location of the yield sign is circled in yellow.

The NTSB examined the appropriateness of signage on SH-35, particularly the yield sign in the median. According to guidance in the 11th Edition of the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD), a less restrictive measure, such as a yield sign, should be placed at intersections where a full stop is not always necessary (Section 2B.10). The MUTCD also provides exemptions, such as engineers should consider a stop sign instead of a yield sign. The exemptions include (a) restricted view of the through-road for the side-road traffic, and/or (b) six or more crashes in a 3-year period (Section 2B.11). These exemptions do not apply to the current crash.

1.3.2 C.B. King Memorial School

C.B. King Memorial School, Inc. is a private, nonprofit agency that provides services to persons with developmental delays or disabilities. Because the school's transportation operations are intrastate only, the school is not required to register with the USDOT. At the time of the crash, the school owned 56 vehicles; 5 required a CDL to operate them. A CDL was not required to operate the bus involved in this crash.

The school's Transportation Handbook described the school's transportation policies, including minimum requirements for drivers to be hired and requirements for obtaining a school bus driver physical examination certification.¹¹ The handbook also described the training that the transportation employees receive about ensuring that all passengers are belted prior to departure. The school had a pre-employment and postcrash drug testing program. However, it did not include random drug testing, as required by 49 *CFR* 382.305. The school also provided numerous training courses for its transportation employees, including child and passenger safety, lift operation and wheel securement training, and defensive driver training. Records showed that the crash-involved driver was current on all required training courses.

1.4 Postcrash Actions

After the crash, C.B. King Memorial School installed front and rear inward-facing cameras on all its buses, which cover the entire interior of the buses. The school officials reported that they review the video footage weekly to ensure that drivers adhere to the school's transportation policies. The school has also expanded its existing defensive driving training program and instituted requirements for pre- and post-trip vehicle inspections.¹² Additionally, the school has established a transportation committee that meets weekly to discuss emerging issues in the school's transportation department. Finally, the school has enrolled in a USDOT drug-testing program administered by the Arkansas Transit Association.

2. Analysis

Weather and visibility were not contributing factors in this crash. There were no environmental obstructions that reduced the bus driver's sight before crossing the

¹¹ The crash-involved driver received her last school bus driver physical examination certification in 2021. This is a wellness examination—as part of the school's policy—and not a USDOT-required physical for obtaining a CDL medical certification.

¹² Postcrash, the school began implementing the Defensive Driving program, developed by the Arkansas Transit Association.

southbound lanes of US-65. The vehicle examination did not identify any pre-existing mechanical conditions that could have contributed to the crash. The severity of the crash at highway speed precluded any reasonable expectation that the bus could have retained its structural integrity. In addition, the investigation excluded cell phone use, licensing, and driving experience of either driver as factors in this crash. Postcrash toxicological testing of the truck driver did not detect alcohol or other drugs that could have affected his response in this crash. The investigation also excluded fatigue of the truck driver as a factor in his response to the impending collision.

Based on the video footage from the truck-tractor's forward-facing camera and the data from the bus ACM, the bus stopped at the stop sign ahead of the northbound US-65 lanes. However, as the bus moved across the median and passed the yield sign, the bus driver did not decelerate the vehicle; instead, the bus speed increased slightly. Although the right-side A-pillar of the bus partially obscured the bus driver's view of the southbound US-65 lanes, she should have been able to move in her seat to obtain a complete view of the southbound lanes. The video footage from the truck-tractor's forward-facing camera showed the bus at the location of the stop sign—10 seconds before the crash—demonstrating that the combination vehicle would have been visible to the bus driver as she began crossing the intersection. However, due to the low resolution of the video footage, we could not determine whether the bus driver saw the combination vehicle or even turned to her right to evaluate the safety of crossing the southbound lanes of US-65.

The postcrash toxicological testing of the bus driver identified the antidepressant medication trazodone, which can have sedating effects. However, the investigation was unable to determine whether she experienced any significant sedating effects that could have affected her response in this crash. The bus driver had had an approximately 5.5-hour opportunity for sleep the night before the crash, indicating a potential for fatigue. Fatigue leads to slowed reaction times and reduced vigilance, and it also affects the visual scanning pattern (Dinges and Kribbs 1991; Schleicher, Galley, Briest, and Galley 2008). These performance decrements can be observed even with low levels (1-2 hours) of sleep loss (Belenky and others 2003). Furthermore, the Dermott crash occurred in the afternoon, when some people experience a mid-afternoon circadian dip, typically characterized by decrements in performance and attention (Van Dongen and Dinges 2000). All these factors, combined with the bus driver's failure to yield to the obvious hazard, suggest that she was likely fatigued at the time of the crash.

2.1 Onboard Video Recorders

For many years, the NTSB has recognized the value of onboard video footage in accurately and comprehensively assessing the precrash environments, as well as the behavior and actions of the involved drivers and passengers. Such video footage led us

to conclude that deficient conditions of the roadway and traffic safety hardware contributed considerably to the inability of an otherwise attentive bus driver to avoid a crash in San Jose, California (NTSB 2017), that a safety driver was distracted by her phone leading up to a crash in Tempe, Arizona (NTSB 2020), and that a truck driver had a clear and prolonged view of a stopped traffic queue in Phoenix, Arizona, but was inattentive due to fatigue (NTSB 2023).

The NTSB has also advocated for onboard video recorders in school buses, motorcoaches, and combination vehicles such as the one involved in this crash. In a 2015 safety report titled *Commercial Vehicle Onboard Video Systems*, the NTSB examined two crashes—one involving a school bus and another involving a motorcoach—and the benefits of such video systems as they relate to collision analysis and the evaluation of both driver and passenger behaviors (NTSB 2015). In the 2015 report, we issued a safety recommendation to various commercial transportation associations regarding the optimal use of onboard video systems.¹³

More recently, as a result of an investigation of a crash that occurred during inclement weather conditions in Mt. Pleasant Township, Pennsylvania—in which three truck-tractor combination vehicles encountered an overturned motorcoach laid across the travel lanes of an interstate—the NTSB issued a safety recommendation to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to mandate onboard video recording systems on all buses and heavy trucks, and to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to provide proactive guidance to motor carriers regarding the use of those systems (NTSB 2022a).¹⁴

Onboard video recorders can also function as an oversight mechanism for ensuring that drivers adhere to regulations and company policies, and for monitoring passenger behavior. The NTSB recently investigated a crash in Decatur, Tennessee, involving a utility service vehicle and a school bus, in which the service vehicle driver lost control of the vehicle, which then crossed the centerline and collided with the school bus (NTSB 2022b). The onboard video recorder on the school bus was essential in determining that the service vehicle driver overcorrected after the initial loss of vehicle control, and that some pupils on board the bus were not properly seated in their seats, which increased their risk of injury. As a result of the information obtained from this video footage, the NTSB issued a safety recommendation to various school transportation

¹³ See Safety Recommendation [H-15-2](#). Based on the number of responding recipients, the overall (plurality) classification of this recommendation is Open–Await Response.

¹⁴ See Safety Recommendations [H-22-3](#) and [-4](#), classified Open–Unacceptable Response and Open–Acceptable Response, respectively.

associations regarding the importance of regularly reviewing footage from onboard video recorders.¹⁵

In the Dermott crash, the forward-facing camera on the truck-tractor was essential in determining the movement of the bus as it was crossing the intersection. Had the bus been equipped with an inward-facing camera, it could have helped NTSB investigators determine whether the driver looked to the right as she approached the yield sign, and the passengers' seating positions and whether they were using seat belts.

3. Conclusions

3.1 Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the Dermott, Arkansas, intersection crash was the failure of the bus driver to yield to the combination vehicle, likely as the result of fatigue.

3.2 Lessons Learned

The benefits of onboard video recorders go beyond assisting crash investigators in understanding the movement of vehicles involved in a crash. They are essential in evaluating the behavior of drivers and passengers, and can also serve as an oversight mechanism for ensuring compliance with transportation safety regulations and company policies. The NTSB has recognized these multifaceted benefits of onboard video recorder systems and has issued safety recommendations designed to fully utilize those advantages. Drivers' fitness for duty, including being rested when operating a vehicle, is an essential component of safe driving. The C.B. King Memorial School's postcrash changes—including installing inward-facing cameras on all its buses, the new oversight policies, and expanding its existing defensive driving training program—would help address the deficiencies uncovered in this investigation.

¹⁵ See Safety Recommendation [H-22-25](#). The overall (plurality) classification for this recommendation is Open—Initial Response Received.

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NTSB investigators worked with the **Arkansas Department of Transportation**, the **Arkansas State Police**, and **J.B. Hunt Transportation** throughout this investigation.

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For more detailed background information on this report, visit the NTSB investigations website and search for NTSB accident ID HWY22FH010. Recent publications are available in their entirety on the NTSB website. Other information about available publications also may be obtained from the website or by contacting—

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