



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, DC 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: May 5, 2016

In reply refer to: H-16-5 and -6

Mr. James M. Bass
Executive Director
Texas Department of Transportation
125 East 11th St.
Austin, TX 78701

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation—railroad, highway, marine, and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, we carry out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinate the resources of the federal government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members affected by major transportation disasters. We are providing the following information to urge the Texas Department of Transportation to take action on the safety recommendations being issued in this letter.

On January 14, 2015, about 7:50 a.m., a 2015 Blue Bird Vision prison bus was traveling westbound on Interstate 20 near Penwell, Texas, when it departed the roadway and collided with a moving train.¹ The bus, operated by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, was en route to El Paso. It was occupied by 12 inmates and three correctional officers (including the driver).

On the previous evening, Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) maintenance crews had been advised to expect freezing drizzle and rain overnight. A salt brine solution was applied to major roads and bridges in the area. As the bus approached a two-lane bridge, it struck a section of previously damaged W-beam guardrail, departed the left edge of the roadway, entered the median, and became airborne between the westbound and eastbound parallel bridges. At the same time, a Union Pacific freight train was traveling southbound under the highway

¹ See *Bus Roadway Departure and Collision With Moving Train, Interstate 20, Penwell, Texas, January 14, 2015*, Highway Accident Brief NTSB/HAB-16/03 (Washington, DC: National Transportation Safety Board, 2016).

overpass. The bus fell about 20 feet onto an earthen area and continued forward, striking an intermodal flatcar. The train redirected the bus southward, and the bus body and separated components came to rest along the east side of the tracks. The train did not derail and continued on its route. The bus crash resulted in 10 fatalities: two correctional officers (including the driver) and eight inmates. One correctional officer and four inmates sustained serious injuries and were transported to Medical Center Hospital in Odessa. No members of the train crew were injured. Additional information about this crash and the resulting recommendations may be found at our website, www.nts.gov, under report number NTSB/HAB-16/03.

As a result of this investigation, we issued two new recommendations to TxDOT:

H-16-5

Train your personnel responsible for snow and ice control using the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials anti-icing/roadway computer-based winter weather training referenced in the state *Snow and Ice Control Operations Manual*.

H-16-6

Revise your policies in accordance with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials anti-icing/roadway computer-based winter weather training and the National Cooperative Highway Research Program Report 526 guidelines, to include spot treatment of interstate highway bridge decks, use of abrasives, and proper application rates for liquid anti-icing chemicals to account for long cycle times.

These safety recommendations are derived from the NTSB's investigation and are consistent with the evidence we found and the analysis we performed. Chairman HART, Vice Chairman DINH-ZARR, and Members SUMWALT and WEENER concurred in the recommendations.

The NTSB is vitally interested in these recommendations because they are designed to prevent accidents and save lives. We would appreciate receiving a response from you within 90 days detailing the actions you have taken or intend to take to implement them. When replying, please refer to the safety recommendations by number. We encourage you to submit your response electronically to correspondence@ntsb.gov.

[Original Signed]

By: Christopher A. Hart,
Chairman