

44-490-510

Log H-510A



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Safety Recommendation

Date: January 13, 1988

In reply refer to: H-87-61 and -62

Mr. Jack Burkert
Director of Safety
American Bus Association
1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Mr. Wayne Smith
Executive Director
United Bus Owner's of America
1275 K Street, N.W.
Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20005

On April 4, 1987, a 70-passenger double-decked sightseeing bus carrying a driver and 65 passengers en route to Mount Vernon, Virginia, was traveling southbound in the right lane of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway portion of the George Washington Memorial Parkway approximately 3 1/2 miles south of Alexandria, Virginia. About 7 15 p.m. e.s.t., the top of the bus struck the Alexandria Avenue arched stone overpass. The bus was estimated to have been traveling between 22 and 42 mph. As a result of the impact, the bus roof was sheared off rearward, exposing the upper seating level. One passenger was killed and 33 passengers were injured. 1/

The parkway has a posted speed limit of 45 mph. On the southbound side of the parkway at the time of the accident there was a reflectorized 18- by 24-inch "Low Clearance" sign posted about 345 feet before the overpass. An identical sign was posted on the northbound side of the parkway. Visibility with respect to the sign in the southbound direction was partially obscured by low hanging branches. A turn-around road for vehicles unable to clear the underpass is located near each "Low Clearance" sign.

The bus was a British 1964 Bristol "LODEKKA" Model FLF right-hand drive (separate driver's compartment) double-decked sightseeing tour bus. It had five forward speeds and was designed to transport 70 passengers—38 on the upper level and 32 on the lower level. The exits consisted of a main entry which was a four-panel folding door on the forward left side, a floor-level emergency exit door in the rear on the main level, and an emergency exit window above the last seat across the rear of the upper level. The bus height was 13 feet 2 inches, the length was 30 feet, the wheelbase was 19 feet 2 inches, and the width was 7 feet 11 1/2 inches. There was no placard indicating vehicle-height clearance in the driver's compartment.

1/ For more detailed information read Highway Accident Summary Report—"Collision of Tour Bus with Bridge Overpass on the George Washington Memorial Parkway, Alexandria, Virginia, April 4, 1987" (NTSB/HAR-87/4/SUM).

Because these buses may be above the recommended minimum height clearances for low-clearance bridges and other structures, it is important that busdrivers are aware of their vehicle's height limitations. According to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials:

Where a depressed facility is a parkway with traffic restricted to passenger vehicles, the vertical clearance at structures desirably should be 15 feet and in no case less than 12.5 feet. The minimum clearance should be obtained within all portions of the roadway.

Since these vehicles may be driven in this environment, the Safety Board believes that double-decked buses should have a placard or decal indicating vehicle height in the driver's compartment for quick reference. This will ensure that busdrivers will take appropriate action when they come to a low-clearance structure.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the American Bus Association and the United Bus Owner's of America:

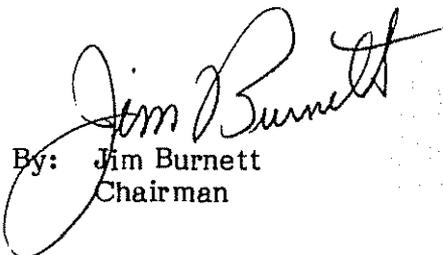
Inform members of the facts, conditions, and circumstances of the accident near Alexandria, Virginia, on April 4, 1987. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-87-61)

Recommend that members apply a placard or decal indicating vehicle height to the interior of double-decked buses for the driver's quick reference. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-87-62)

Also as a result of its investigation, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations H-87-58 and -59 to the National Park Service and H-87-60 to Webb Tours, Inc.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility ". . . to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations and would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendations in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations H-87-61 and -62 in your reply.

BURNETT, Chairman, and LAUBER, NALL, and KOLSTAD, Members, concurred in these recommendations. GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, did not participate.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman