



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: NOV 2 1999

In reply refer to: H-99-55

Ms. Barbara Harsha
Executive Director
National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives
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Washington, DC 20002-4241

School bus and motorcoach travel are two of the safest forms of transportation in the United States. Each year, on average, nine school bus passengers and four motorcoach passengers are fatally injured in bus crashes, according to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and motorcoach industry statistics. In comparison, NHTSA statistics show that in 1998, over 41,000 people were fatally injured in highway crashes. Although much has been done to improve the safety of school buses and motorcoaches over the years, the safe transportation of bus passengers, especially students and senior citizens, continues to be a national safety priority. Children and seniors are predicted to be the fastest growing segments of our society, and these groups are the primary users of bus transportation. Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board initiated a special investigation to determine whether additional measures should be taken to better protect bus occupants.

In addition to examining bus crashworthiness issues, the resulting special investigation¹ addressed a number of data collection issues hampering effective accident study, including the methods used by the States to collect source data on bus accidents. In discussing the findings of this special investigation with Safety Board staff, NHTSA representatives indicated that source data collected by the States may be incomplete due to a lack of specificity on accident reporting forms and in vehicle registration files. For example, Alabama's accident reporting form defines a bus as "a motor vehicle providing seats for **16** or more persons including the driver and used primarily for the transportation of persons." New Mexico's form defines bus as a vehicle that has seats for more than **15** people (including the driver).

The Model Minimum Uniform Crash Criteria (MMUCC) were developed in 1998 with the cooperation of NHTSA, the Federal Highway Administration, and the National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives. They developed the model in an attempt to address the disparate accident data being collected by the States and to provide requested Federal guidance to States that were revising their accident data reporting forms. One purpose of the

¹ For additional information, read *Bus Crashworthiness Issues*, Highway Special Investigation Report, NTSB/SIR-99/04 (Washington, D.C.: National Transportation Safety Board, 1999).

model was to ensure that the States were collecting at least the minimum amount of information needed for the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS).

The MMUCC's definition of a bus, however, is different from other Federal definitions. The MMUCC's data collection requirement for an accident involving a bus includes an indication of whether the accident was school bus-related and whether the vehicle configuration was one of two bus types, that is, either a bus with seats for more than 15 people, including the driver, or a bus with seats for 7 to 15 people, including the driver. If States are being advised that school bus involvement and vehicle capacity are the only bus data that need to be collected, then NHTSA may have difficulty accurately identifying the bus body type of an accident vehicle for use in the FARS database. Because of these factors, the Safety Board concluded that the MMUCC do not provide specific enough guidance to the States on bus body type coding. Therefore, the Safety Board recommends that the National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives:

In conjunction with the Department of Transportation, amend the Model Minimum Uniform Crash Criteria's bus configuration coding to comply with standard definitions and classifications of buses. (H-99-55)

The Safety Board also issued Safety Recommendations to the U.S. Department of Transportation, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the bus manufacturers. 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 action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you within 90 days regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation H-99-55 in your reply. If you need additional information, you may call (202) 314-6169.

Chairman HALL, Vice Chairman FRANCIS, and Members HAMMERSCHMIDT, GOGLIA, and BLACK concurred in this recommendation.

By: Jim Hall
Chairman