

**Remarks Prepared for
David Strickland
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

**Bus Industry Safety Council
Meeting
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Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be here. NHTSA programs cover a broad spectrum of safety issues, but, as is true for the Department of Transportation, our top priority and common denominator throughout is safety.

The core value in NHTSA's mission is the protection of the American public – the American consumer. I'm energized by the possibilities unfolding for the Department of Transportation and NHTSA to reach new levels of service and protection of that public. I think you will be, too.

There is a new way of thinking at the Department and in Washington. We are broadening our approach to solving our safety issues. The President has proposed a transformative U.S. transportation policy that improves public health and safety, fosters livable communities, promotes infrastructure repair and

long-term economic competitiveness, while achieving environmental sustainability.

This translates into Federal support for more transportation choices, more public transportation, and more commercial and residential development around transportation hubs. This is not only good news for the American way of life, this is pretty good news for the motorcoach business.

Motorcoach safety is a high-profile issue for NHTSA. Though motorcoach crashes may be relatively rare, when they do happen, they can cause a significant

number of fatalities and serious injuries in a single event.

And there has been an increase in the average number of annual motorcoach fatalities in the past 10 years; the five-year average number of fatalities in 2008 is 3 times that in 1998.

We need to bring this number back down. If you dissect the numbers, you find that ejections account for 64 percent of motorcoach passenger deaths.

NHTSA is working on several priority safety areas to mitigate these losses.

I'd like to review for you some of NHTSA's action items to improve motorcoach safety. In 2009, NHTSA worked with other modal administrations in the Department of Transportation to develop a systems-oriented safety strategy for enhancing motorcoach safety. The DOT motorcoach safety plan is based on a two-pronged approach:

- 1). Address the root cause of motorcoach crashes. These are: driver fatigue, inattention, medical conditions, and the oversight of unsafe carriers.**

2). Address the root cause of fatalities and injuries. These are: vehicle rollover, occupant ejection, structural integrity, and fires.

We conducted the first-ever motorcoach crash test in 2007, and then, during 2008-2009 we conducted sled tests and static tests to develop performance requirements for seat belts on motorcoaches. We expect to publish a notice of proposed rulemaking this summer to require seat belts on all seating positions in motorcoaches. We need to prevent ejections and keep passengers in their seats, thereby mitigating fatalities and injuries in crash and rollover events. The proposal will provide a definition of a motorcoach and will deal

with the issue of retrofitting seat belts on existing motorcoaches.

Our estimates indicate that installing lap/shoulder belts on new motorcoaches will be cost effective. In fact, some manufacturers and operators have already started to equip their motorcoaches with seat belts. For example, Greyhound (First Group) is already installing belts on new buses.

Between 1999 and 2008, there were 24 fatal rollover events that resulted in 97 deaths. Seventy-six of those 97 were ejected from the motorcoach.

By improving the structural integrity of the vehicle we can ensure adequate survival space for occupants in the event of a rollover, and we can strengthen the bus structure surrounding the windows to improve their effectiveness in preventing ejections.

In February of 2008, we conducted four tests for rollover structural integrity to compare the performance of existing motorcoaches under the U.S. school bus and European requirements. All four motorcoaches failed. We then conducted a verification rollover test with a fifth, newer model to develop performance requirements for motorcoach structural

integrity in rollover events. The newer and larger motorcoach passed the European test requirements.

We expect to announce our regulatory decision in this area later this year.

Directional loss of control is one of the causal factors in heavy vehicle crashes, including motor coaches.

Over the last two years, we have been looking closely at electronic stability control systems. We examined roll and yaw stability of motorcoaches with and without ESC for different steering maneuvers to develop test procedures and performance metrics.

Currently, most members of the American Bus Association (ABA) have Electronic Stability Control (ESC) system as standard equipment on class 8 motorcoaches. NHTSA has been conducting cooperative research with both suppliers and manufacturers on stability control systems. Two members of the ABA have arranged for the Agency to lease buses for research testing. This has been very helpful.

We believe that ESC is the most effective stability enhancing technology currently available. We plan to announce our regulatory decision in this area later this year.

We are also examining the area of improved tire performance and expect to publish a notice of proposed rulemaking upgrading the performance of tires used on commercial vehicles, including motorcoaches, later this year.

In the area of improved emergency evacuation, we completed motorcoach emergency egress research at the Volpe research center in January and anticipate the completion of the feasibility assessment, and the development of performance requirements later this year, along with our decision on regulatory action.

Another area we are looking into is fires. There are more than 2,200 bus fires annually. These add up to a \$24.2 million annual cost in direct property damage.

We began a motorcoach flammability research and test program with the National Institute of Standards and Technology. We are looking at the development of more stringent flammability and fire detection requirements.

The program will also review existing flammability standards and procedures. We'll be taking a look at various test procedures to assess the flammability of materials used in both the interior and the exterior.

We will conduct wheel-well mockup studies to

examine wheel-well fire propagation, tenability, fire detection, and evaluate countermeasures such as fire hardening, fire detection, and fire suppression. We expect this research program to be completed in September.

And, in the area of Event Data Recorders, NHTSA is monitoring the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) Truck and Bus Event Data Recorder Subcommittee in the development of SAE Recommended Practice J2728, “Heavy Vehicle Event Data Recorder (HVEDR).” This standard is being developed to define specifications and requirements for HVEDRs

for the reliable and accurate recording of the crash parameters relevant to heavy vehicles.

NHTSA is on the record as a great believer in the promise of advanced technologies as a tool for improving safety on our highways. Motorcoach safety is no exception. We are studying the application of Forward Crash Warning (FCW) systems for Truck Tractors, and we recently expanded our evaluation to include motorcoaches. In particular we are focusing on the interfaces that would be used to provide warning information to a driver. We are looking at this in particular because in the past, some members

of the ABA had installed this technology on their buses but ended up removing the equipment due to driver acceptance issues.

As users of our nation's roadways, motorcoach drivers must also be aware of the growing momentum against Distracted Driving. Technology is a fantastic tool. But technology can work against us, as well.

Distracted Driving is dangerous – almost 6000 lives lost in 2008 alone – and we are determined to put an end to it.

In fact, the Secretary of Transportation is on a rampage about Distracted Driving. Last fall, the Department held a summit on Distracted Driving. It was the first in the Nation to call Federal attention to this dangerous problem, and propose a range of realistic solutions.

We recently unveiled sample legislation that States can use as a starting point to craft laws prohibiting texting while driving. Hopefully, this will help all the State legislatures currently considering such laws to move forward.

So far, 26 States plus D.C. have texting laws covering all drivers – Kansas became the 26th State earlier this year, pending final signature on the bill by Governor Mark Parkinson. That’s a good start, but we’ve got to do better. I know lawmakers around the country are studying this seriously.

On the outreach side, we’re sponsoring a website, distraction.gov, which acts as a national clearinghouse for information on distracted driving. It also makes our position on Distracted Driving clear, and it details our commitment to work across the spectrum with

private and public entities as well as advocacy groups to tackle Distracted Driving.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has issued guidance and initiated rulemaking to prohibit commercial truck and bus drivers from texting while driving.

These actions have far-reaching implications for inter-state drivers who carry cargo or passengers for a living. The guidance is effective now. It applies to inter-state truck drivers. It also applies generally to commercial bus or van drivers who carry more than 8 passengers.

To put this dangerous behavior in perspective, researchers at Virginia Tech found that truck drivers who send text messages on a cell phone are about 23 times more likely to get into some type of crash or near-miss than drivers who keep their eyes on the road.

Distracted driving laws must depend in part on drivers using their own good judgment and common sense, in order for the laws to be effective. But penalties are an effective deterrent.

Therefore, any truck or bus driver who violates the Federal regulations mentioned in the guidance is subject to a civil and/or criminal penalty of up to \$2,750 dollars.

In the months ahead, the Department will take further steps, including the development of new tools that will help us work alongside the law enforcement community, safety advocates, researchers, and others, to find new ways to raise awareness and bring an end to the dangers posed by distracted driving.

And in Syracuse, New York and Hartford, Connecticut, we recently kicked off a two-year federally funded pilot program to test the effectiveness of highly publicized law enforcement efforts to change driver's behaviors and get drivers to put down their cell phones.

We look forward to constructive engagement with all of you as we collectively move to address the safety challenges for motorcoaches on our nation's highways.

As I said at the beginning, I believe in NHTSA's safety mission. To fulfill that mission, I expect us to be active and pro-active. And I believe we are putting the right

framework in place to strengthen our Nation and our industry and protect the American consumer. Thank you.