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## Experts say bus that crashed in Ky. may have been overloaded

By BRETT BARROQUERE, Associated Press Writer

LOUISVILLE -- A bus that crashed on a rural stretch of Interstate 65 in southern Kentucky, killing the driver and a passenger and injuring 65, was likely carrying more people than it was designed for, industry and safety experts said Tuesday.

The bus driver, Abraham Parker, 63, of Birmingham, Ala., died Tuesday at Vanderbilt University Hospital in Nashville, Tenn., hospital spokesman Jerry Jones said. A passenger, Carrie Walton, 71, died at the scene early Monday.

Kentucky State Police said a preliminary investigation indicated that the cause of the crash was that the driver apparently dozed off and ran off the road, striking an overpass support about 75 miles north of Nashville.

Trooper Steve Pavey said Tuesday the number of people on the bus as well as the vehicle's speed will be part of the investigation and reconstruction of the wreck.

Melissa Mazzella DeLaney, a spokeswoman for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, said the agency is conducting a "compliance review" of the company. The review will look at Parker's commercial driver's license and hours of service, company insurance records and the upkeep of the bus.

The 1987 model bus, made by Motor Coach Industries of Schaumburg, Ill., had 67 aboard when it crashed en route from Niagara Falls, N.Y., to Alabama. **Most motor coaches on the road today are designed to carry a maximum of 55 people, said Eron Shosteck, vice president of communications for the American Bus Association in Washington, D.C.**

**"That's the design that has through years of testing and research been shown to be the optimal," Shosteck said.**

A call to C&R Tours in Birmingham, Ala., was not immediately returned Tuesday. C&R had a satisfactory safety rating when it was last reviewed in March, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. It had not reported any accidents or injuries in the last two years.

Pat Plodzeen, a spokeswoman for Motor Coach Industries, would not comment about the capacity of the bus that crashed near Bowling Green early Monday.

"I can't comment on this specific coach," Plodzeen said. "It would be speculation."

A child, 7-year-old Kayalon Jackson, remained in critical condition Tuesday at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Jones said. Two other passengers were in stable condition, Jones said.

Ten people were in stable condition at The Medical Center in Bowling Green, spokeswoman Doris Thomas said. One person at Greenview Regional Hospital was transferred to a hospital in Demopolis, Ala., near Forkland, according to spokeswoman Kelly Wiseman.

The bus was carrying members of an extended family home to Alabama from a family reunion in Niagara Falls, N.Y., officials said. Most were from rural Forkland, Ala., about 100 miles southwest of Birmingham.

Forkland Mayor Eddie Woods said Tuesday that local churches sent buses to bring people home as they are released from the hospital and from a Red Cross shelter in Bowling Green.

State police said there were 42 adult passengers, 23 children and two drivers on the bus that crashed.

**Rather than put more passengers and luggage on a bus, the "safe thing to do is to use a second motor coach," Shosteck said.**

Plodzeen, of MCI, referred questions about the capacity of the bus to the company's Web site. MCI makes at least seven styles of bus, the largest of which is designed to carry 57 passengers, according to the company's Web page.

Gary Mattiacci, a transportation safety and reconstruction expert in Sterling Heights, Mich., said while most tour buses don't have seat belts, having more passengers than seating can lead to more injuries in a crash. That's because someone is more likely to be thrown from a passenger's lap or across the bus if they are sitting on a floor than if they were in a seat, which can serve as a cushion or barrier, he said.

"There's a lot of issues with a bus being overloaded," Mattiacci said. "It's a real problem."