



Pocatello

Concerns Over Bus Safety for Students

Dec 4, 2009 08:40 PM EST

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Riding a bus is one of the safest ways to travel, but after a charter bus crash in Bannock County two months ago, some are still raising concerns about which type of bus travel is safest.

School buses carry some of our most precious cargo—our children, and they are statistically shown to be safe for travelers. Fewer than 30 people are killed each year in the United States in bus crashes, and that includes both school buses and motorcoaches. Despite this small number of fatalities, the recent accident in our area continues to bring up questions.

Two months ago a tragic bus accident near McCammon claimed the life of a school teacher from Utah who was traveling with students on a band trip.

Following that accident Newschannel 6 checked with local school districts to see their bus policy. and what they were doing to promote student safety.

In an interview on October 12, School District 25 told us that they had modified older school buses to resemble charter buses. The district was using the altered school buses for long-distance trips.

Warren Ferguson, District 25 Transportation Supervisor: "Not quite as comfortable, but you're going to be a lot safer when you get there."

According to some, that statement might not be entirely accurate.

In a letter from the National Transportation Safety Board, they distinguished the differences between school buses and motorcoaches.

That letter states: "School buses are designed to transport children to and from school and school-related activities..."

The letter goes on to read: "Motorcoaches are primarily designed to transport... on longer trips that involve interstate and high speed conditions."

The NTSB goes on to say that both types of buses are safe when used as they are intended.

The president of the American Bus Association agrees with the established guidelines of the transportation safety board.

Peter Pantuso, President A.B.A.: "No question that a school bus is very safe vehicle for transporting students back and forth to school and on short distances--typically low speeds. School buses are not designed for long travel over interstate highways at high speeds."

Brad Lott is the owner of Holiday Motorcoach in Idaho Falls and worries about districts altering school buses to save money.

Brad Lott: "They're trying to compare a safety issue by saying they only go 65 (miles per hour), so that makes it safer. That's not how it is designed. I wouldn't want my child in a vehicle that wasn't safe."

Brad says motorcoaches are designed to travel on interstates, and because of their structural design will better handle high speed crashes.

The American Bus Association says that anytime you alter the structure of a school bus by changing out seats or adding luggage cages on the inside, you are impacting the transit's integrity.

Peter Pantuso: "When you don't know the structure, you don't know the infrastructure or the understructure of the bus you really start to tinker with the safety aspect of the bus."

The transportation director in School District 25 commented Friday on the NTSB guidelines. He stated that in his opinion, both types of buses are statistically shown to be safe and comparable in crashes. He also says that the district will continue to use both school buses and motorcoaches for future trips.



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