
New Proposed Seatbelt Rule for Motorcoaches



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American Bus Association Webinar Series

Context for a Seatbelt Rule

- High profile motorcoach accidents with passenger ejections and fatalities in recent years.
 - Unmet NTSB recommendations.
 - Pending Congressional legislation.
 - Ongoing Motorcoach Safety Action Plan regulations:
 - Roof crush
 - Window glazing
 - Passenger egress
 - Fire suppression systems
 - Stability control
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NHTSA Notice of Proposed Rulemaking Released August 18, 2010

- Proposed to require lap/shoulder seatbelts on all new motorcoaches by 3 years after effective date of final rule.
- No retrofit proposed at this time.
- Also proposed, a definition of motorcoach.
- Goal of rulemaking is to reduce passenger ejections; first phase of rulemakings in U.S. DOT's Motorcoach Safety Action Plan.
- Comments are due **October 18, 2010.**

Definition of Motorcoach

- NHTSA already defines a “bus” as a vehicle designed to carry more than 10 persons.
- Proposed definition of “motorcoach” would include a bus of at least 26,000 pounds GVWR with 16 or more designated seating positions (including the driver).
- With at least 2 forward facing seating rows rearward of driver.

Amendments to FMVSS 208: Occupant Crash Protection

- Would require lap/shoulder belts at all passenger seating locations on new motorcoaches.
- Would require lap/shoulder belts at driver's seat on new motorcoaches and large school buses.
- Would require lap/shoulder belt anchorage integrated into seat structure; anchorage and attachment hardware at all locations for new motorcoaches to meet FMVSS 210 seat belt assembly anchorage standards.

Additional Amendments, FMVSS 208

- Anchorages must withstand force of 3,000 pounds applied simultaneously at lap and torso.
- Belt system must meet current rules so that belts can fit a 6-year old child & a 95th percentile adult male (6'2", 223 lbs).
- Must be lockable for use with child restraint system and releasable at a single point with pushbutton action.



NHTSA Rejected 2-Point Belts for New Motorcoaches

- Agency claims testing shows 3-point belts more effective in reducing injuries and fatalities than lap belts.
- Cost-benefit break even point for 2-point belts is 17% usage; for 3-point belts it is 24% usage.
- NHTSA requests comments on whether states would adopt mandatory belt use laws for motorcoach passengers, or require “buckle up” signs in motorcoaches.

No Proposed Retrofit Requirement

- NHTSA seeks comments on technical and economic feasibility of retrofit.
- Based on 20-year lifespan, retrofits require strengthening the motorcoach structure.
- Each existing coach would need an individual structural assessment.

Cost Assessments

- NHTSA suggests that cost of adding seats with lap/shoulder belt and anchorages on **NEW** 54-passenger coaches is \$12,900 per vehicle.
- Estimate does not include increased fuel usage due to added weight.
- Total fleet costs estimated at \$25.8 million/year for 2,000 new vehicles.
- NHTSA estimates new mandate would save 1-8 lives per year.

Retrofit Cost Assessment

- NHTSA estimates costs of retrofit at \$6,000 to \$34,000, per vehicle, for lap belts. Up to \$40,000 cost per vehicle for lap/shoulder belts, and reinforced structure.
- Fleet cost of lap belt retrofit is \$175 to \$997 million (based on 29,325 vehicles).
- Fleet cost of lap/shoulder belt retrofit is \$1.173 billion.

Preemption

- State requirements for seat belts on coaches would be preempted by federal law if the state rules are not identical to NHTSA requirements.
- State tort liability law might be preempted by NHTSA standards if there is a conflict between federal and state requirements (state courts could not hold manufacturers or operators to a higher standards than NHTSA rules).
- Upcoming case at U.S. Supreme Court will clarify tort preemption standards.