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Big Buses May Require Seat Belts

By Anna Prior

Bus travelers may eventually be able to buckle up if a proposal by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration making seat belts a requirement on all new motor coaches takes effect.

The proposed rule would not apply to transit buses used for local mass transportation. The NHTSA is seeking public comment on the proposal, including whether coaches now on the road should be retrofitted with lap-and-shoulder belts.

Coach accidents were responsible for 36 deaths in 2008, but traveling by coach remains one of the safest forms of transportation, says NHTSA spokesman Eric Bolton.

Still, wearing a lap-and-shoulder belt could reduce the risk of passengers of being killed in a roll-over crash by 77%, he says.

The number of coach passenger trips rose 1.5% to 762 million in 2008 compared to 2007, according to the most-recent data available from the American Bus Association—and that number is very likely to have risen, says the ABA's chief executive Peter Pantuso.

"We've seen a tremendous amount of growth with intercity buses" particularly in the Northeast, says Mr. Pantuso, referring to discount operators like British-owned Stagecoach Group PLC's Megabus or BoltBus (a joint venture between Greyhound Lines Inc. and Peter Pan Bus Lines Inc.). Some offer amenities like complimentary Wi-Fi.

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