

MOTORCOACH OCCUPANT CRASH PROTECTION

ISSUE

Recently there has been increasing public focus on questions relating to bus passenger safety because of several highly publicized crashes and proposed legislation. Much of the attention continues to turn on the matter of whether or not motorcoaches should be equipped with passenger seat restraints.

BACKGROUND

Motorcoach Safety is a high priority for ABA and the motorcoach industry. The government's own data show that bus travel is the safest form of surface transportation. Motorcoaches are buses that carry 30 to 55 passengers with an elevated passenger deck over luggage bays. Motorcoaches carry 631 million passenger trips annually¹ and over the last decade the fatality rate on motorcoaches was less than half that of all other intercity passenger modes.²

Existing passenger safety relies on compartmentalization, motorcoach seats are designed to protect passengers in the event of a crash by compartmentalizing and absorbing the crash impact through collapsing the into a soft cushion. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is undertaking scientific studies to determine the most appropriate means of occupant protection.

The motorcoach tour and travel industry stand ready to work constructively with NHTSA to ensure that any safety proposals include the scientific review required to produce credible and authoritative research. To enhance to body of knowledge regarding motorcoach safety and insure that any changes improve passenger safety; it is necessary to conduct dynamic testing using accepted research test protocols and engage experts in the field to review and analyze the resulting data.

Scientific research must guide policy. The government needs to fund and conduct rigorous research focused on motorcoach engineering and crash scenarios. Without rigorous testing and replicable findings changes in engineering and design of motorcoach safety systems could do more harm than benefit.

Changes to motorcoach glazing, roof structure, passenger safety, and emergency egress need to be looked at in relation to each other. Any change in one area can impact the safety systems in each risk area. Therefore any change in one safety system needs to be made in reference to the other systems.

Safety equipment cannot be bolted onto a motorcoach. Careful research and engineering specific to the vehicle is necessary before changes are made in existing safety systems.

ABA POSITION

ABA believes we must be certain that in trying to enhance existing occupant protection that we do not interfere with or detract from the excellent and effective protections currently provided to passengers. We urge that the recommended testing be conducted and that the program be fully

¹ *Motorcoach Census Update 2006*, Nathan (2006) p. 1

² *Federal Subsidies for Passenger Transportation, 1960-2005*, Nathan (2007) p.11

federally funded. We support and have provided technical assistance to NHTSA in this effort. Further as we implement testing and standards ABA would ask that Canadian and European testing and standards be incorporated into the review, testing, and development process for NHTSA. (*February 2008*)