

H-267

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: March 24, 1981

Forwarded to:

Mr. Kenneth L. Pierson
Director
Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety
Federal Highway Administration
400 Seventh Street, S. W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-81-13 through -15

On June 5, 1980, about 12:47 a.m., a northbound Central Texas Bus Lines, Inc., charter bus, occupied by the driver and 32 passengers, accelerated out of control while descending a long, curved, steep grade on State Route 7 about 1 mile south of Jasper, Arkansas. The bus failed to negotiate a left curve and ran off the right pavement edge into a drainage channel. The bus continued for 280 feet, impacted a berm at a concrete culvert, was redirected across the highway, and vaulted down a steep embankment. Twenty bus occupants, including the driver, were killed and 13 passengers were injured. 1/

The bus had departed its domiciled terminal in Dallas, Texas, about 7:05 a.m. on June 4, 1980, en route to Branson, Missouri, with a charter group of 32 persons, primarily senior citizens. Between noon and 12:30 p.m., the fuel pump failed, and the bus was stopped at the roadside about 15 miles outside Tahihina, Oklahoma. Because a standard replacement fuel pump was not available locally, the Vice President and General Manager of Central Texas Bus Lines at the company headquarters in Waco, Texas, reportedly authorized the installation of a nonstandard fuel pump and allowed the bus to continue to Branson where a standard pump was to be installed. The nonstandard pump was installed and the trip was resumed, after a delay of 4 to 4.5 hours.

About 7 p.m., the bus stopped at the Queen Wilhelmina Campground near Mena, Arkansas, for dinner. The busdriver and a number of passengers wanted to spend the night at the campground, but the tour director decided to continue to Branson, where the group had confirmed motel reservations. The bus departed the campground at about 8:25 p.m.

The day the charter trip began was the busdriver's eighth consecutive day on duty. He had previously logged 63.4 on-duty hours. Branson was more than 500 miles from Dallas. There was no way he could have made the trip in the 10-hour driving time authorized by Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulation (FMCSR) 395.3, Driver Hours of Duty, much less in the 6.6 hours available until he exceeded the 70 hours authorized for 8 consecutive days on duty. Furthermore, FMCSR 392.6, Schedules to Conform with

1/ For more detailed information read "Central Texas Bus Lines, Inc., Charter Bus, State Route 7, near Jasper, Arkansas, June 5, 1980" (NTSB-HAR-81-1).

Speed Limits, states that "no motor carrier shall schedule a run or permit or require the operation of any motor vehicle between points in such a period of time as would necessitate the vehicle being operated at speeds greater than those prescribed by the jurisdiction in or through which the vehicle is being operated." Since the adoption of the national speed limit of 55 mph, the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety (BMCS) has interpreted this to set a limitation of about 450 miles per day. Both the dispatcher and the busdriver should have known that the busdriver could not complete his trip within the legal hours available. The busdriver should not have been dispatched for this 544-mile trip.

When the tour group stopped for dinner at 7 p.m., the busdriver, realizing that he was already in excess of his total hours on duty and that he could not reach Branson before being in excess of his 15 hours on duty and 10 hours driving time, should have refused to continue to Branson. If the tour group had remained overnight as the busdriver and some passengers wanted, the busdriver would have been refreshed and would have traversed the steep winding hills in the daylight on the following day. This may have prevented the accident.

The safety compliance survey of the Central Texas Bus Lines facility conducted on June 24, 1980, by the BMCS revealed that the bus company was marginal in its attention to FMCSR's relating to vehicle maintenance, driver hours of service, and the safe operation of motor vehicles. The record of driver complaints and sporadic repairs indicate that the accident bus was probably subjected to maintenance only when required by a breakdown. The discrepancies in the bus brake system--improperly adjusted slack adjusters, contaminated brake linings, and substantial air leaks from wheel chambers--should have been detected and repaired during routine inspection and maintenance. While it is possible that one or more of the discrepancies may have occurred shortly before or during the charter trip, others were of a longer term nature and should have cued maintenance personnel to the need for a thorough inspection of the brake system. The BMCS compliance survey has called these failures to the attention of the Central Texas Bus Lines management and elicited verbal commitments toward stricter compliance. The Safety Board agrees with the BMCS that a followup survey is indicated and encourages the BMCS to ensure that management, maintenance personnel, and drivers employed by Central Texas Bus Lines fully comprehend and come into full compliance with all facets of the FMCSR's.

The management decision to replace the fuel pump with a nonstandard fuel pump and for the bus to continue to its destination was ill-advised because it was made without all of the facts being considered. The bus was domiciled and chartered out of Dallas, but the Vice President and General Manager making the decision was headquartered in Waco. He was not aware of the driver's hours of service limitations nor did he know the route the bus was going to follow to reach its destination. Both the Vice President and General Manager and the busdriver either neglected to consider or ignored the impact the delay caused by the repairs would have on the busdriver's already extended hours on duty and the adverse effect the long hours on the road before reaching the destination would have on the busdriver's physical alertness and driving ability. At the time the bus broke down, the busdriver had already been on duty 5 1/2 hours and driving for 5 hours. He had only

1 hour available to complete his 70-hour aggregate time on duty for an 8-day period and 5 hours to complete the 10-hour driving limitation as established by the FMCSR's. By the time the repairs were completed, the busdriver had been on duty 10 hours. Seven hours later, he was still on duty and driving when the accident occurred.

It could not be determined if either the Vice President and General Manager in Waco or the busdriver were technically capable of anticipating the effect the nonstandard fuel pump would have on the operational efficiency of the bus traveling in the mountainous terrain. The Vice President and General Manager was not aware of the route the bus would travel nor did he inquire. Management has this responsibility and should have considered all aspects of the operation before making such a decision. The decision ultimately contributed to the busdriver's fatigue and reduced attention to his driving tasks which resulted in the circumstances causing the accident.

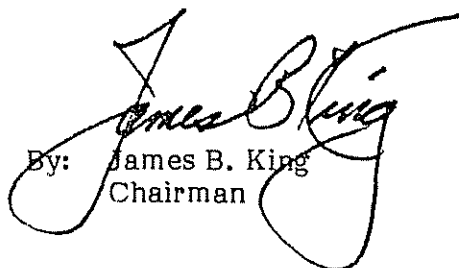
Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety:

Maintain strict surveillance of the Central Texas Bus Lines, Inc., operations and maintenance procedures to ensure that all facility survey deficiencies are corrected. (Class I, Urgent Action) (H-81-13)

Issue an ON GUARD Bulletin, with emphasis on distribution to charter bus companies, outlining the particulars of this accident relating to drivers' hours of service and other safety-related matters, and recommending that charter bus contracts include a statement that all tours will be restricted on a daily basis to the mileage that can be safely traveled at legal speeds and within the authorized 10-hour driving time. (Class I, Urgent Action) (H-81-14)

Give appropriate consideration to the identification of violations and enforcement of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations pertaining to Hours of Service of Drivers, Maintenance of Vehicles, and other carrier safety matters in developing the annual BMCS Work Schedule. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-81-15)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, and McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: James B. King
Chairman

