



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

SP-20
Log H-86-63
438A

Date: September 2, 1986

In reply refer to: H-86-63

Honorable Ray A. Barnhart
Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20590

About 5:10 a.m. on October 20, 1984, a 1983 Ford pickup truck crossed the center line of U.S. Route 59, about 40 miles east of Laredo, Texas, and collided head-on with the left front of a westbound Transportation Enterprises, Inc., intercity charter tour bus. 1/ The bus, a 1982 Eagle Coach, was transporting a church group from Houston, Texas, to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and was following a second charter tour bus at an estimated 55 miles per hour. After impact, the bus continued about 140 feet before stopping, and the pickup truck caught fire. The busdriver, the pickup truck driver, and a truck passenger were killed. Toxicological tests of the truck driver's blood revealed a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .22 percent. Tests for the busdriver were negative. 2/

The Safety Board's investigation of this accident revealed a number of safety issues which have been addressed in the past by the Board and which indicate the need for action to improve passenger safety. The impact with the pickup truck destroyed the electrical circuits of the bus. As a result, the only light source for interior illumination for the bus passengers was burning fuel from the truck located to the left rear of the bus. Initially, some passengers escaped from the damaged bus through a fixed panel window that someone had kicked out. The main loading door was inoperative, and escape through the available side window emergency exits was delayed because the darkness made it difficult for passengers to locate the windows and to read the nearby emergency exit instructions. Several minutes after the collision, headlights from approaching vehicles provided intermittent illumination so passengers could identify and operate side window emergency exits.

1/ "Intercity bus" as referenced in this recommendation letter is defined as a for-hire bus that is more than 10,000 pounds gross vehicle weight rating and transports more than 20 passengers.

2/ Highway Field Report--"1982 Eagle Charter Coach Head-on Collision with 1983 Ford Pickup Truck, near Laredo, Texas, October 20, 1984" (NTSB FTW-85-H-FR02).

As a result of its investigation of a bus accident in Sacramento, California, in 1973, ^{3/} the Safety Board recommended that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA):

H-74-37

Establish regulations to facilitate evacuation of buses in an emergency. The incorporation of emergency lighting systems actuated through impact, and entry for rescuers should be included in the regulation. Attention is called to the Board's investigation of the interstate bus accident in Baker, California, in 1968, in which it was recommended that "No new type buses go into service which have not been tested to insure that all occupants can escape rapidly."

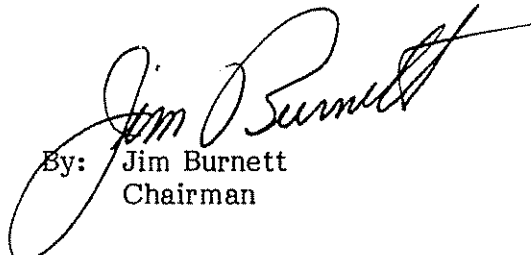
In a 1975 response to the Safety Board, the FHWA stated that in fiscal year 1976 the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety would study the emergency lighting proposal to determine if such systems are available and the potential benefits as compared to the cost. A 1978 study funded by the FHWA concluded that not enough detailed information was collected on the 14 intercity bus accidents studied to assess the extent to which escape was impeded by a dark environment. ^{4/} Because the FHWA has not taken any action on Safety Recommendation H-74-37, the Safety Board has placed the recommendation in a "Closed---Unacceptable Action" status. The Safety Board continues to believe that the capability for rapid evacuation of intercity-type buses in emergency situations is essential.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Highway Administration:

In conjunction with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, adopt standards to require emergency interior lighting for intercity-type buses that is of sufficient intensity and duration to aid occupants in identifying available exit routes and to aid rescuers in assisting injured occupants. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-86-63)

Also as a result of its investigation of this accident, the Safety Board made Safety Recommendations H-86-59 through -62 to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and H-86-64 to the American Bus Association.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER and NALL, Members, concurred in this recommendation.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman

^{3/} Highway Accident Report—"Greyhound Bus Collision with Concrete Overpass Support Column on I-80, San Juan Overpass, Sacramento, California, November 3, 1973" (NTSB-HAR-74-5).

^{4/} Evacuation of Intercity Buses, U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, January, 1978.