

H-240

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: July 28, 1980

Forwarded to:

Mr. Henry Gray, Director
Arkansas State Highway and
Transportation Department
P.O. Box 2261
Little Rock, Arkansas 72203

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-80-45 and 46

On June 5, 1980, a chartered bus carrying 33 people accelerated out of control while descending a curved, steep, long grade on State Route 7, south of Jasper, Arkansas. The northbound bus ran off the road into a drainage ditch and traveled partially in the ditch until it struck a culvert, where the bus was redirected across the road. It left the road at a high rate of speed and plunged down an embankment. The front of the bus came rest 40 feet below the highway. Twenty people were killed.

As a result of previous accidents on this hill, an escape ramp is being constructed 1,000 feet south of the accident site. The estimated completion date for the ramp is mid-August. About 1 mile farther south, a brake check area has been completed but not signed or marked. The Safety Board believes that safety benefits could accrue immediately from utilizing the completed brake check area if all trucks, buses, and cars with trailers were required to pull off and check their vehicle's brakes.

The drivers of these vehicles should be confronted with a large advance warning sign directing them to check their brakes at the brake check area. Another sign at the brake check area should advise them to use low gear, maintain their braking capability, and drive at a safe speed while descending the hill. The latter sign could be enhanced by a diagrammatic depiction of the sharp curves ahead, the steep grades, and the length of the grades. When the escape ramp is completed, its location should be shown on the sign.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department:


Install signs on State Route 7 to require northbound trucks, buses, and cars with trailers to pull off and check their brakes at the brake check area south of Jasper. (Class I, Urgent Action)
(H-80-45)

HAR-81-1

3008

Install signs in the brake check area to inform the drivers of these vehicles of the roadway alignment ahead. The signs should include percentage of grades, length of grades, horizontal curvature, maximum safe speeds, and other pertinent information which will aid motorists to safely negotiate the roadway ahead. (Class I, Urgent Action) (H-80-46)

KING, Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in these recommendations. DRIVER, Vice Chairman, did not participate.


By: James P. King
Chairman