



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: March 17, 1987

In reply refer to: H-87-7

Honorable Diane K. Steed
 Administrator
 National Highway Traffic
 Safety Administration
 Washington, DC 20590

On the afternoon of August 25, 1985, a westbound intercity bus with 17 occupants was traveling on Interstate 70, a four-lane divided highway near Frederick, Maryland. It was cloudy with light rain and the pavement was wet. About 12:40 p.m., as the bus descended a hill with a slight curve to the right, the rear tires of the bus lost traction. The bus moved side to side out of control, crossing both travel lanes and the right paved shoulder, and struck the left side of a reinforced concrete bridge rail over the Monocacy River before coming to rest. Of the 17 occupants onboard, 14 were ejected from the bus during the collision sequence. The busdriver and 5 passengers were fatally injured; 11 other passengers sustained minor to serious injuries. 1/

The Safety Board has investigated four accidents (including this one) in which GMC Model PD-4106 buses have gone out of control on wet pavement. 2/ Although the four bus accidents do not represent the general population of bus accidents, the Safety Board was concerned that these buses appear to have lost rear wheel traction while negotiating shallow curves at highway speeds on marginal to slippery wet surfaces. None of the busdrivers regained control after the initial loss of control. Two of the bus drivers had limited driving experience and operated their buses at speeds too great for the weather conditions.

The Safety Board attempted to obtain data to determine if the GMC Model PD-4106 buses were overrepresented in accidents involving a loss of control on wet pavement. However, the Board was unable to evaluate this issue because of insufficient data. Only limited accident data was available by vehicle identification number (VIN).

1/ For more detailed information, read Highway Accident Report--"Intercity Bus Loss of Control and Collision with Bridge Rail on Interstate 70 Near Frederick, Maryland, August 25, 1985" (NTSB/HAR-86/1).

2/ Special Investigation Report--"Metropolitan Coach Corporation Charter Bus Accident, Bethesda, Maryland, October 11, 1975" (NTSB-HAR-76-6); Highway Accident Report--"East Side Church of Christ Bus Skid and Overturn, U.S. Route 183, Near Luling, Texas, November 16, 1980" (NTSB-HAR-81-4); and Highway Summary Accident/Incident Reports--"Near Ackerly, Texas, July 20, 1985; Eureka Springs, Arkansas, September 13, 1985, and Bramwell, West Virginia, October 13, 1985" (NTSB/HAR-87/01/SUM).

Further, data on vehicle miles traveled, as well as the number of various bus models, were not available to provide a measure of exposure to accidents. Thus, insufficient data precluded the Safety Board from determining whether the GMC Model PD-4106 bus is involved at a greater than expected frequency in loss of control accidents on wet pavement.

Although no conclusions could be reached concerning the representation of GMC Model PD-4106 buses in bus accidents, the survey revealed an important deficiency in the accident reporting system of some States. Sixteen States and the District of Columbia do not collect VIN or enter the VIN data into their accident reporting systems, especially for commercial vehicle accidents.

Highway Safety Program Standards (HSPS) No. 10, Traffic Records, and No. 18, Accident Investigation and Reporting, recommend that the State accident record agencies notify State motor vehicle agencies of accidents to update motor vehicle history and driver record files. Minimum information suggested by HSPS No. 18 for a driver reported motor vehicle accident includes vehicle make, model, year, body type, model name, and VIN for all vehicles.

The Highway Safety Act of 1966 established the framework for the present motor vehicle registration safety program. Two of the specific objectives of the program are to:

- (1) Provide a system for cross-referencing and linking vehicle and ownership information for highway traffic safety studies to research highway accidents and injury causation investigations.
- (2) Develop and maintain registration data bases to assist the vehicle inspection program and the manufacturer's recall campaigns for defective vehicles.

The Safety Board believes that VIN data should be a required data element for all accidents in the NHTSA Fatal Accident Reporting System FARS file. The collection of VIN data is consistent with the objectives of HSPS No. 10 and No. 18.

Therefore, as a result of its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

Require that vehicle identification number data be collected and reported for all accidents in the Fatal Accident Reporting System data files. (Class II, Priority, Action) (H-87-7)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendation H-87-6 to the States of California, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wyoming, and the District of Columbia, and Safety Recommendations H-87-8 and -9 to the American Medical Association.

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

By: 
Chairman