



Guide for Selecting a Vehicle for Your Next School Activity Trip

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

You have planned a school activity trip, and now you need to find the most appropriate means of transportation. Safety must be your first concern. According to a 2002 study by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, schoolchildren are safest in buses – school buses or motorcoaches. Either of these is significantly safer than transporting schoolchildren in vans or other passenger motor vehicles.

There are a number of important points to consider in making your decision. While cost is an important issue, it should not be the primary consideration. We have listed some questions and information to help you decide the type of bus that could meet your needs. The transportation experts in your district – your school bus fleet supervisor or your school bus contractor – have additional information you may need to answer the questions, and are in the best position to advise you about your vehicle choice.

The decision as to whether you use a school bus or a motorcoach should be made after a full review and understanding of a wide variety of factors. These include issues relating to time, distance, comfort, geography, and several other issues. What follows are specific questions and information about motorcoaches and school buses that you should consider.

1. What are your current Federal/State/local regulations/policies/guidelines concerning the types of buses to be used for school activity trips?

Read, understand and follow any applicable regulations, policies or guidelines.

2. How long is the trip in terms of hours? Will the driver be able to complete the trip within a normal work-day (no more than 10 hours of driving or 15 hours of duty, including any non-driving responsibilities)? Will you need to arrange for relief drivers at locations along the trip?

If a trip is interstate commercial, carriers are typically more familiar with shuttling drivers for longer distances.

3. Will the trip require students to have baggage or equipment? Where will this baggage be stored during the trip? [It should not be kept in the aisles or stacked in empty seats – both of those practices are unsafe.]

Many school buses have no external storage capacity. Motorcoaches generally have larger storage capacities for luggage and equipment than school buses. External storage capacity may, or may not, be better than transporting luggage or equipment in a separate vehicle.

4. Is the trip of such a time length that plans need to be made for rest stops and meal stops? What is the range of motorcoaches and school buses? Will the bus have to refuel en route? Are safe/clean facilities available along the planned route for rest stops?

Many motorcoaches are equipped with restroom facilities that can be used while the vehicle is in operation. The majority of school buses do not have such facilities. In either type of vehicle, plans for meal stops may have to be considered. If a meal stop is necessary, passengers could use available restroom facilities, and school buses could also be refueled.



- 5. Is the bus properly equipped for the intended trip? A highway trip over mountains requires different transmission ratios than local routes over flat terrain. A longer trip may suggest more comfortably designed passenger seats, air ride seat for the driver, and air ride suspension for the vehicle.**

Generally, motorcoaches are more comfortable for drivers and passengers on long trips. The performance capacity (hill climbing and braking) of the vehicle must be appropriate for the terrain. Importantly, all safety equipment must be in proper operating condition.

- 6. While at the destination, will the bus (and its contents) be in an area where it will be secure from theft or vandalism?**

External storage areas on a motorcoach or on a school bus are usually equipped with locks.

- 7. Is the school adequately insured for this activity trip?**

This question deals with the school, not the carrier. In the event of a crash, where the bus driver is "at fault", it is in your best interest to know you are adequately insured. If a district school bus is used, the school district will have insurance. For a motorcoach or school bus company, definitely determine their level of insurance coverage before being hired. Interstate motor carriers are required to maintain \$5 million of liability coverage.

If you choose a motorcoach, use the information in FMCSA's "Keeping Kids Safe" brochure. Please visit their website at www.fmcsa.dot.gov.

If you choose a school bus, check with your local school transportation director to make arrangements. Be sure to raise all of the questions above.