

INFORMATION BRIEF ON BUS VEHICLE SAFETY



as at 16 August 2005

The Facts About Bus Safety

Buses are the safest form of motor vehicle travel in Australia. While every serious injury or fatality that occurs on or around a bus is tragic; it is important to recognise they are relatively very few in number.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau Report on Bus Safety in 2001 found that of the 17,840 road fatalities to have occurred between 1990 and 1998, buses were involved in less than one percent of these.

Indeed, out of approximately 300 bus-related fatalities to have occurred during this period, 100 were pedestrians, 100 were occupants in other vehicles and 100 were bus occupants. This is an average of ten bus occupant related fatalities per year. Furthermore it is important to recognise that 42 out of these 100 bus occupants were killed in Queensland, where the age of the fleet is an important issue that will not be fully understood until comprehensive research is undertaken.

With more than one billion passenger trips being made on buses every year in Australia, the odds of a passenger suffering a fatal accident are currently a remote one in 800 million.

Any debate relating to safety on school buses should also recognise a study conducted by Institute of Transport Studies at the Sydney University showing travel on a school bus is 7 times safer than in the family car, 31 times safer than walking and 228 times safer than a bike.

The BIC is Australia's peak industry public transport body representing the interests of 3,500 bus & coach companies employing over 30,000 people who carry 1 Billion passengers a year. The BIC this year established its National Secretariat in Canberra

Seatbelts – Only Part of the Solution

The Australian bus industry supports the use of seat belts in buses to improve the safety of travel by passengers and drivers. The Bus Industry Confederation believes a holistic approach to addressing bus safety issues is required. This needs to take into account all the possible factors relating to bus accidents in order to deliver a set of priorities to put in place effective measures to reduce bus related accidents. In order to achieve this, the industry requires detailed research to be undertaken.

Bus Design– A New Approach For an Aging Issue

Current Australian design standards for buses and coaches are focused on ensuring seats do not collapse or move away from their mountings following a collision or rollover. However the majority of buses operated on Australian roads today pre-date these requirements. This average age of the Australian bus fleet is recognised by the BIC as a major challenge for the industry and governments to overcome.

Based upon current fleet turnover rates and the allowable age of buses in different States, it will take up to 20 years before all buses and coaches operating in Australian meet current design requirements for safety. The BIC advocates the adoption of a national strategy of incentives to encourage private bus operators – particularly those servicing regional and remote areas – to fast track the purchase of new vehicles. Additional benefits of this move include accessible public transport for disabled passengers and greenhouse gas emission reductions.

Safety Comparisons on Small and Large Buses

The Bus Industry Confederation believes that as a part of any comprehensive research, a comparison of the relative safety of small and large buses requires investigation. This should take into account the differences in mass and size of the vehicles.

KEY INDUSTRY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Detailed research should be undertaken across Australia to better understand the causes of bus and coach related accidents.
- That the NRTC undertake a review of international bus design standards for safety, taking into account the technical, practical, financial and safety applications of incorporating requirements such as compartmentalisation and high backed seats into the Australian bus fleet.
- A national driver health and welfare initiative be implemented;
- That a national public transport summit be convened in the second half of this year as outlined in a letter sent to you on 6 May to focus on the broader public transport and bus and coach safety issues.
- A greater focus be provided to public transport and bus and coaches through the NTC to 2006.

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