

Transport Canada & Insurance Corporation of BC
Bus Safety Consultation
Summary Report
Victoria BC, June 28, 1999

Prepared by
The Institute On Governance

INTRODUCTION

Nicole Pageot, Transport Canada's Director General, Road Safety and Motor Vehicle Regulation opened the session by welcoming the participants and thanking the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia for hosting the meeting. She gave a brief background to the consultation. Bus passenger transport has an excellent safety record and bus passengers are very rarely injured (On average 5 bus passengers are killed per year compared with 3000 road fatalities each year in Canada). There is, however, a very occasional tragic bus accident involving fatalities or serious injury. Transport Canada and the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia seek to find the best ways of preventing such bus crashes and of preventing passenger injuries.

Ms. Pageot outlined how Transport Canada, with the help of the Institute On Governance, met with provincial and territorial governments to explore the type of issues that should be discussed. She explained that this workshop on bus safety was the first of several to be held across the country in order to solicit the ideas and concerns of multi-stakeholders on improving bus safety. Ms. Pageot concluded by challenging the participants to reflect on the question "how do we enhance a very good safety record?"

Tim Plumptre, Managing Director of the Institute On Governance, then introduced himself and Phillip Haid as the workshop leaders. He provided some background on the Institute, its interest in the area of citizen participation, and explained how Transport Canada had retained the IOG to design and provide strategic input for the session. Mr. Plumptre then outlined the agenda for the day (Annex A) and fielded some questions from the participants. In particular, some of the participants wanted to know:

- What types of buses are involved with the five people who die on average per year?
- If the bus fatalities do not involve school buses or motor coaches, will the workshop look at other types of buses?
- How is the workshop defining a bus?
- How is the workshop categorizing the fatality statistics? (Because fatality numbers are highly dependent on the way in which vehicles are placed in categories)

In response, Nicole Pageot explained that part of the reason for this consultation is the interest expressed to Transport Canada in reaction to recent bus crashes. 43 persons were killed in the 1997 motor coach tragedy at Les Eboulements, Quebec and there have been fatal school bus crashes this school year in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. The two kinds of bus identified in these crashes are motor coaches and school buses. Transport Canada recognizes, however, that there are other kinds of buses and that their uses can be interchangeable. Mr. Plumptre explained that even though the consultation will focus on

school buses in Part 1 and motor coaches in Part 2, the discussion would not be confined so that other type of buses could be discussed.

Transport Canada response to the questions (following the workshop):

- Bus accident statistics for Canada identify school buses but do not reliably categorize other buses.
- Of the average 5 passenger fatalities per year in all kinds of bus, one is on a school bus and one is specifically identified as being an “intercity bus” or motor coach.
- There are very few fatalities on transit buses so that the remaining average 3 passenger fatalities per year are in unspecified kinds of buses.
- Federal motor vehicle safety standards do not differentiate between kinds of buses except that there are specific standards for school buses.
- The consultation, for clarity, concentrates on school buses and motor coaches where specific issues have been raised, but does not exclude other types of bus.
- A bus is defined variously but normally means a vehicle for hire and, in the federal motor vehicle safety standards, means a vehicle with ten seats or more.
- With the small number of injury accidents and uncertain data categories, Transport Canada cannot currently provide reliable data for individual categories of bus.

Ice Breaker Exercise – See Annex B

PART 1 – SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

1. Concerns & Ideas

The purpose of this exercise was to develop a list of concerns around school bus safety and a list of ideas to address those concerns.

Concerns (in order of being mentioned)

- Bully supervision
- Condition of vehicle
- Loading/unloading students
- Development of regulations without adequate consultation (i.e. mirrors)
- Lack of good statistics
- Inadequate rates for operators
- Lack of data on causal factors over the years
- School yard/entrance design for loading/unloading students
- Driver qualification and maintenance standards for buses used on field trips
- Visibility for children when loading/unloading (i.e. design for children)
- Penalties for passing motorists in school zones versus high penalties in work zones
- “Nailing” the passing motorists
- Conventional school buses versus “flat nosed” school buses
- Safety compromises because of inability to pay adequately

- Driver training in traffic
- Use of part-time drivers (extra hours because of other jobs = fatigue)
- Need to educate parents about school bus safety
- Variations in enforcement across country and within province – driver and equipment
- Children killed outside the bus
- Lack of public education explaining the current safety design of buses
- Too much emotion, lack of public understanding of school bus safety issues
- School children being transported by means other than school bus
- Lack of public awareness
- Lack of resources
- Routing
- Data for different kinds of bus
- 2 or 3 children per seat
- Personal responsibility – balance between parents, child, operator
- Cooperation from parents on kids behavior
- Signage (re. school bus stops) on main highway and size of such signs
- Monitoring of children versus driving
- Private schools - lack of standardization re: maintenance
- National standards
- Lack of specific certification for companies operating school buses
- Advertising on school buses

Ideas (related to those concerns or separate)

- Driver education
- Supervision on buses
- Student education (around and on the bus)
- Implementing stricter bus maintenance
- Driver qualifications and mandatory standards (esp. private schools)
- Understanding the difference between categories of bus
- Penalties for passing motorists re: safety around buses
- Better ways to capture passing motorists (spot checks, radar gun)
- Better consultation during standards development
- Better statistics and analysis re: transport environment
- Better rates for operators
- Better school yard/entrance designs re: loading/unloading
- Education for general drivers re: interacting with school buses
- High maintenance standards for contracted buses
- Better sight lines for drivers around bus and better equipment to deal with it
- Get rid of conventional buses (as opposed to “flat nosed” school buses)
- Provide more funding – no financial limit on safety
- Better driver training in traffic
- Parental education re: cooperation when children misbehave on the bus
- Better and consistent enforcement for drivers and equipment
- Better public education of facts to make informed decisions
- School children should only be transported in school buses
- Better routing for safety
- Video camera on buses
- Better, bigger and approved signage at highway school bus stops

- Better education of teachers re. bus safety (esp. on school trips)
- Bus monitors
- Seatbelts for passengers
- National standards should be national standards (not adjusted in each province)
- Increased driver certification re: standards between school buses and motor coaches
- Eliminate advertising on school buses

2. Preferences

Based on the lists developed in the preceding exercise, participants were asked to vote for what they considered the top three ideas to improve bus safety. The following are the ideas which garnered the most votes:

1. Driver qualifications and mandatory standards
2. Driver education
3. Better and more consistent enforcement re: drivers and equipment
4. Supervision on buses
5. Student education about bus safety (on and around the bus)
6. Ensure national standards are truly national standards (avoid provincial differences)

3. Group Discussion

Upon completing the individualized voting exercise, participants were then placed into groups to share and further examine:

1. The pros and cons of the concerns and ideas listed
2. What they as a group deemed the best ideas to improve school bus safety
3. Criteria for governments to prioritize such ideas

The following is a summary of the groups' views and ideas on # 2 and #3: (note: not all groups responded to the three stated objectives and therefore the responses are not all equally complete)

Group 1

Best Ideas

- Improve public awareness re: driver interaction with school buses
- Parent education
- Supervision of children on school buses
- Stricter licensing practices for operators

Recommendations

- Do pre-employment driver screening
- Mandatory re-testing
- Operators to file periodic safety plans

Public Education

- Better signage re: passing buses and related issues e.g. school area, enforcement, penalties, etc.
- Brochure or other information for parents re: seatbelts and other safety issues

Criteria

- Stress prevention over mitigation
- Consider cost effectiveness of solutions

Group 2

Best Ideas

- General public awareness (students, parents, public at large) re: current safety record
- Start with driver: qualifications, use of equipment, etc.
- Recognize that kids are kids
- Loading/unloading

Group 3

Best Ideas

- Seatbelts are not a priority, may make things worse
- Standardize and raise bus driver qualifications and standards - limit license to school buses only (school bus driving is different from driving other kinds of bus)
- Institute federal regulations re: requirements for safety
- Stress parents role – explain to them their responsibilities
- Make judicial enforcement tougher

Criteria

- Government agencies should endorse safety ideas without financial limitation

Group 4

Best Ideas

- Driver education
 - Knowing and understanding your kids
 - Possibility of monitors (not across the board implementation)
 - Educate on rules & regulations
 - Re-certify, upgrade
 - Set minimum levels
 - Provide information to public that supports driver
 - Set realistic expectations
- Driver qualifications
 - Provincial minimum standards
 - Current, timely enforcement
 - Training up to date
 - Re-certification
- Standardized enforcement: drivers, equipment
 - Training BC examiners
 - Minimum provincial standards
 - Equipment to meet national standards

Group 5

Best Ideas

- Enforce present laws
- Standardization and enforcement at the national level
- Update the crash test video for parents and children to watch

4. Synthesis; Actions needed

Tim Plumptre concluded the discussion on ways to improve school bus safety by synthesizing some of the key results:

- The ideas tend to concentrate on operational and maintenance safety questions (the “software” - training, maintenance, enforcement, education)
- Seatbelts are not high on the list of issues
- Who does what?
 - Governments (federal, provincial, municipal) – are highly active (regulations, standards)
 - Manufacturers - are highly regulated by government
 - Operators - highly involved (driver standards, maintenance)
 - School boards (signage, loading/unloading, parental/student education)
 - Parents, general driving public - what can they do?

Actions/Recommendations for Transport Canada included:

- Educational pamphlet with a contract for parents and students to sign
- Update crash test video

5. Transport Canada information re: seatbelts in school buses

Malcolm McHattie of Transport Canada concluded Part 1 of the consultation by providing stakeholders with some current information on the issue of seatbelts in school buses and motor coaches.

- Of the 5 bus passengers killed per year (on average)- 1 is in a school bus
- The majority of buses registered are the many small buses used for shuttles, activities, airport transfer etc.
- Individual motor coach crashes can take many lives. 43 were killed in 1997 at Les Eboulements, Quebec. This explains the concurrent emphasis on motor coaches.
- Transport Canada often cannot tell whether seatbelts would have helped prevent death or serious injury
- In collisions involving buses, it is usually a driver or passenger in another lighter vehicle that is killed or injured, very rarely is a bus passenger seriously injured.
- Seatbelts often could not prevent loss of life
- Where a seatbelt could be effective, it must be worn to do its job. Not all passengers will wear seat belts.
- Experience where belts have been installed on school buses (Etobicoke, New York, New Jersey) suggests that 50% of older children may not wear the seat belts.

- A Transport Canada test program in the mid 1980s suggests that seat belts could increase injury in certain kinds of collision.
- The Canadian federal standard for school bus seats provide “compartmentalization”. Specifically spaced, high back seats are designed with strength and energy absorbing (padding) characteristics to provide passive protection in the event of collision.
- The design works very well according to crash data. If seatbelts were to be installed the compartmentalization would need to be changed for the same safety performance.

PART 2 – MOTOR COACH SAFETY

1. Discussion on Motor Coaches

Factors Affecting Safety of Motor Coaches:

1. Coach record safe (not many accidents) - well designed coaches
2. Passengers high - above impact
3. Drivers hours of service- fatigue
4. Bus maintenance
5. Driver training
6. No rigid chassis
7. Entry into the industry is very easy - deregulation
8. Lack of enforcement officers to keep up with growth of the number of carriers
9. Use of old coaches for school, church trips - demonstrates a lack of enforcement
10. Braking systems

2. Synthesis

- * Need to be clear regarding the difference between prevention and accountability (i.e. who is responsible for an accident).
- * Transport Canada needs meaningful statistics and an analytical database (including exposure data) to help stakeholders make informed decisions.
- * Consensus is that the main issues tend to be on the operational and maintenance side, rather than problems with the design of motor coaches.

WRAP-UP

The workshop concluded with a discussion on future consultations. Transport Canada explained that there will be further consultations taking place in other parts of Canada in the fall (time and place has yet to be determined). Mr. Plumpre outlined some of the dilemmas involved with designing a consultation (whom to talk with and what information to provide in advance). He explained that a mix of stakeholders helped to keep the

discussion less technical, while choosing not to send information in advance was intended to avoid biasing the process.

Participants were then asked to provide feedback on the following questions:

1. *How should we improve future consultations?*

- ◆ Keep school bus and motor coach sessions separate, or, divide the day more evenly and invite stakeholders to attend one or both
- ◆ The invitation and session should be less seatbelt focused, more on general bus safety
- ◆ Provide factual information in advance (avoids feeding into emotional reactions)
- ◆ Seatbelt questions should not be included in the package sent out in advance- came across as a “loaded gun”
- ◆ Consider reducing the number of consultations - manufacturers want to attend them all but must consider issue of cost and time
- ◆ Include seniors, students and independent schools as stakeholders
- ◆ Should maintain multi-stakeholder approach - workshop is educational in itself
- ◆ E-mail minutes from every consultation - build a distribution list
- ◆ Expand agenda length by an hour or two
- ◆ Stakeholder list should not get too large, must be targeted
- ◆ Be sensitive to manufacturers
- ◆ Be clear on the agenda for the day
- ◆ Set up tables closer together and pre-arrange seating to avoid confrontation and adversarial positions
- ◆ Be more concise and clear about the recording - too many shortcuts can lead to frustration

2. *Should we build on what we have learnt today - i.e. by presenting future workshops with some strategies and views already identified?*

- ◆ Yes. Need to give participants more information ahead of time
- ◆ Yes. Be clear on the purpose and strategies being developed

The session ended by thanking everyone for attending and indicating that they will receive:

- ◆ A summary report by the end of July
- ◆ Summaries of the other consultations
- ◆ A final report after the Fall consultations

ANNEX A

AGENDA

Part 1

1. Introduction - context, agenda review, ice breaker
2. Concerns & Ideas re: School Bus Safety
3. Preferences (dot voting exercise) - most important ideas to address school bus safety
4. Group discussion & reporting back
 - understanding
 - best ideas
 - criteria
5. Synthesis; Actions needed
6. Answers re: seatbelts (current situation)

Part 2

7. Similar discussion re: motor coaches
 - best ideas
 - recommendations
 - implications/summary
7. Wrap-up
 - participants' comments, remarks
 - how to improve consultation process
 - follow-up steps
 - close

ANNEX B

Ice Breaker Exercise

The purpose of the ice breaker exercise was to loosen up the participants and have them interact with one another in an informal manner.

Step 1:

Write down on paper:

- what you do
- one thing you like most about where you live
- one thing you are proud of

Step 2:

Find 3 new people with different hair colour, length, style, quantity

- share what you wrote down
- decide on most interesting thing you found out

Step 3:

Share with the group