

Prairie Bus Passenger Safety Consultation

DRAFT

**Summary of the Stakeholder Discussion
Lloydminster, Alberta**

March 7, 2000

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Table of Contents

1.0	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.0	MAIN THEMES	3
3.0	SPECIFIC COMMENTS REGARDING SCHOOL BUSES.....	4
3.1	SEAT BELTS	4
3.2	PUBLIC EDUCATION	4
3.3	DRIVER TRAINING	5
3.4	RECRUITMENT	6
3.5	SCHOOL BUS DESIGN.....	6
3.5.1	<i>Mirrors.....</i>	7
3.5.2	<i>Accessibility</i>	7
3.5.3	<i>Communication</i>	8
3.6	REGULATIONS	8
4.0	SPECIFIC COMMENTS REGARDING MOTOR COACHES.....	9
4.1	CONCLUSION	10

Appendix A – Agenda

Appendix B – List of Participants

Appendix C – Consultation Improvement Report

1.0 Introduction

In June 1999, Transport Canada, assisted by the Institute On Governance, held a pilot session in Victoria, B.C. to discuss the issue of bus safety and identify actions which might further improve Canada's strong safety record. PricewaterhouseCoopers was contracted by Transport Canada to assist, in conjunction with the Institute on Governance, in the Bus Safety Consultation across Canada.

The Prairie workshop took place one week after the Maritime workshop held on February 29th, 2000. The Prairie session took place on March 7th, 2000 at the Lloydminster Tropical Inn, 5621 – 44th Street, Lloydminster, Alberta, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The facilitators were Ms. Nathalie Roy and Mr. Gary Robertson of PricewaterhouseCoopers. Session participants included a number of representatives from different stakeholder groups: bus operators, operators' associations, parent associations, bus manufacturers, representatives from the Department of Transport (federal and provincial), regulators, school boards and trustees.

Mr. Derek Sweet from Transport Canada made a presentation on the context in which the consultation is taking place. References to the information packages, the exemplary record on bus safety, the desire to touch base with the public and the special effort devoted to obtaining a fair representation of the industry and the stakeholders were made. Mr. Sweet elaborated on the need to discuss the seat belt issue given that Transport Canada receives a great deal of correspondence requesting either the installation of seat belts on school buses or an explanation of their absence. The questions raised by the general public made this item mandatory for discussion.

Mr. Sweet noted that following each consultation session, participants will receive, electronically or by mail, a copy of the report produced by PricewaterhouseCoopers. It was also mentioned that a consolidated report would be produced in the late summer or early fall. Participants and other interested parties were invited to review the consultation outcomes on the web site at http://www.policity.com/worksites_transport.htm. Mr. Phillip Haid from the Institute on Governance elaborated on the web site and provided participants with a document explaining the site.

Prior to entering into the discussion, facilitators proceeded with an ice-breaker exercise where participants were "matched" two by two. Participants had five minutes to get to know one another and find one interesting thing about that person to share with the group as a whole.

The discussion was designed to obtain input and feedback from the participants to better understand:

- their concerns regarding bus and motor coach safety;
- their views on putting seatbelts in school buses and motor coaches;
- their suggestions on how to prioritize these concerns; and
- their opinions regarding possible strategies to address these concerns.

To exchange ideas on the various issues, participants first met in a plenary session where they identified key issues related to school bus safety. They were then separated into two groups to discuss these issues. Groups were composed of a variety of stakeholders. They subsequently reconvened as a larger group to share highlights of their discussions. Safety issues related to motor coaches were also discussed by one group, and subsequently brought to the larger group in a plenary session. The main issues were as follows:

For school buses:

- Seat belts;
- Public education;
- Driver training;
- Recruitment;
- School bus design;
- Regulations; and
- Discipline.

The discussion on motor coaches was more of a general nature. It primarily focused on the differences and similarities with school buses.

2.0 Main Themes

This section presents the main themes that were highlighted throughout the day's discussion.

- On the whole, participants felt that seat belts were not the key issue. They reported that many comments received from the public originate from a lack of understanding and awareness. It was predominantly perceived as an education issue.
- An education campaign was recommended to educate the public on school bus safety. It was felt that parents, students, school boards, principals, trustees and teachers should be targeted by the promotion campaign. The proposed methods for educating the public were as follows: pamphlets, posters, newsletters, videos, and television advertisement.
- Participants believed that the following elements should be included in the education campaign: statistics supporting the excellent safety record; an explanation of why school buses are safer without seat belts and the disadvantages associated with seat belts; the enforcement challenge; the required structure to support the installation and use of seat belts; the presentation of the current equipment protecting the children's safety; and the commitment to improve safety on a continuous basis.
- There was a general consensus surrounding the need for the provinces to work together to set a minimal bar (minimal requirements) for training. Some notions such as dealing with discipline, First Aid, discipline, and detecting mechanical problems were listed as important and perceived as being a must in the drivers' curriculum.
- Many concerns were reported on the school bus design. Preoccupations related to ergonomics and general accessibility were raised. Many criticisms were made on the mirrors that create serious blind spots.
- Participants agreed that school buses are the most heavily regulated and inspected vehicles, and that school bus drivers are the best trained, and most tested. Many participants asserted that the current standards are far from perfect. Some participants proposed that standards be more flexible.
- Participants agreed that school buses are the most heavily regulated and inspected vehicles, and that school bus drivers are the best trained, and most tested. The lack of regulative consistency was reported as problematic, especially for people crossing different jurisdictions. Jurisdictional variations in the definition of school buses were also perceived as problematic.
- Participants said that there is a general feeling among the public that motor coaches are safe and that users are willing to pay for luxury. Despite the excellent motor coach safety record, research and statistics should be made available on motor coach accidents. It was concluded that a number of the same issues exist for motor coaches as for school buses.

3.0 Specific Comments Regarding School Buses

This section presents a summary of the specific comments provided by participants during the plenary and break-out sessions on safety issues related to school buses.

As presented below, participants identified a total of 18 issues related to school buses.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Public education | 2. Mirrors |
| 3. Monitoring | 4. Funding |
| 5. Liability | 6. Standards |
| 7. Cost for change implementation | 8. Higher costs for older fleets |
| 9. Driver certification | 10. Development of new regulations |
| 11. Need for more flexible standards | 12. Driver certification |
| 13. Testing | 14. Ergonomics |
| 15. Modification to standards | 16. Regulations - implementation approaches |
| 17. Driver training including maintenance of vehicle | 18. Driver comfort (easy of use and adaptability for body type) |

3.1 Seat Belts

- The majority of the participants reiterated the excellent record of school bus safety. They also recognized that any accident involving a school bus receives major attention; it quickly becomes very high profile.
- On the whole, participants felt that seat belts were not the key issue. They reported that many comments received from the public originate from a lack of understanding and awareness. It was predominantly perceived as an education issue.
- Some concerns were raised regarding the use of seat belts for passengers. It covered topics such as consistency in the use of seat belts and the impact on seating capacity. The responsibility associated with the supervision of seat belts was also perceived as problematic. However, many participants agreed that seat belts should be mandatory for drivers, given that they do not benefit from the same protection as passengers.
- Some participants expressed frustration with the need to re-educate the public year after year, and to repeat the same exercise of informing parents and students as to the reasons for not installing seat belts on school buses. The need for a more proactive approach was expressed and both promotion and education appeared as keywords.

3.2 Public Education

- Public education was perceived as an important issue. A promotion campaign was proposed as a logical step by many attendees. It was suggested that Transport Canada, in conjunction with the

provinces, should undertake the education campaign. Pamphlets, posters, newsletters, videos, and television advertisement were mentioned as methods for reaching the target population. A 30-second message on prime time television in August and September would also be most beneficial. Despite the combined federal/provincial effort in planning and developing the education campaign, attendees felt that Transport Canada should fund the campaign. Public companies' involvement was also brought up as an option for funding.

- It was mentioned that parents, students, school boards, principals, trustees and teachers should be targeted by the promotion campaign. Participants believed that the following elements should be included in the message: statistics supporting the excellent safety record; an explanation of why school buses are safer without seat belts and the disadvantages associated with seat belts; the enforcement challenge; the required structure to support the installation and use of seat belts; the presentation of the current equipment protecting the children's safety; and the commitment to improve safety on a continuous basis. There is a need to make people understand and one thing was clear: the message should be the same across the country. Participants also asserted the need to stay current with the information.
- Many representatives talked about education initiatives that were undertaken in their community and the challenges they faced. They recognized that they would benefit from the lessons learned from others and that they should implement a way of sharing the information and the products. They emphasized the need to not reinvent the wheel, and to use the existing materials.
- Attendees acknowledged that they have to start small and grow; gaining momentum is important. They also talked about leveraging their points of contact. The use of school bus committees and organizations to develop real partnership and attending local events were proposed.
- Given that school buses are already safe, one participant questioned the need to invest in a multi-million dollar campaign for such limited benefits. Participants felt that stakeholders, especially parents, would not welcome the notion of costs when discussing their children's safety.

3.3 Driver Training

- The stakeholders raised the notion of driver training and testing as important concerns. Formal training as well as informal training was reported as beneficial. For example, one participant referred to a 1-day seminar offered to his employees.
- There was a general consensus surrounding the need for the provinces to work together to set a minimal bar (minimal requirements) for training. Some notions such as dealing with discipline, First Aid and detecting mechanical problems were listed as important and perceived as being a must in the drivers' curriculum. It was also felt that evacuation practices should be discussed, but there was a risk of "scaring the drivers away". Attendees talked about the need for drivers to be trained on the type of vehicle they drive. Of particular importance, more in depth exam for first time school bus drivers was seen as critical.
- Participants expressed the need for drivers to be trained on passenger management. However, parents' support was reported as critical to ensure discipline on school buses. Many real life

examples were reported on the indifference of parents in front of their child's misbehavior. Some participants insisted that students be trained on safety and discipline on school buses.

- The driver certification and re-certification programs were reported as positive initiatives. Drivers are usually re-certified every 3 to 5 years. Some stakeholders talked about the different conditions in which drivers perform their duties. It was perceived that special training should be provided for highway driving as well as for rural driving.
- It was recommended that all stakeholders, including politicians, be involved in driver training and that a coordinated approach to training be developed. However, it was felt that actions should be taken to ensure that funding is available and stakeholders expressed the need to "push the right buttons".
- It was proposed that an inventory of products available for driver training be created, and a process for sharing information among all stakeholders be established.

3.4 Recruitment

- The possibility of failing the driver's examination test was reported as an element that could further complicate driver recruitment. Costs associated with training, the environment (i.e. working with a large number of children), as well as compensation were identified as other factors making recruitment difficult.
- There were various views on the turnover rate. Some operators and school boards reported high turnover, whereas others reported low turnover rates. One participant explained that they have to spend more to recruit suitable candidates. Another participant mentioned that his organization has offered a bonus of up to \$1,000 for drivers who agreed to stay with the operator for a specific amount of time.
- The gathering of personal information on candidates was raised as a very sensitive issue. For example, the transfer of driver abstracts from one jurisdiction to another was not reported as being impossible but very difficult. At the most, general information is usually provided. Some organizations have criminal record checks and drug testing. However, there are serious issues related to the use of the results.

3.5 School Bus Design

- The notion of consistency in school bus design was brought up, and it was suggested that this would help drivers locate commonly used features such as defrost, flashers and washers more easily.
- Two participants mentioned the restricted area in which they operate their vehicle. They reported that being so constrained might increase the chances of accidents. Some specific problems included: a driver's seat that was not easily adjustable, and access to the door control and dash board. Operators and manufacturers encouraged drivers to provide feedback on the design. It was

felt that a feedback process from the industry to the regulators should be put into place and be used on an on-going basis.

- Other participants proposed to write directly to the manufacturers to ensure that they are aware of the problems and, consequently, can make modifications.

3.5.1 Mirrors

There was general agreement on the low quality of new mirrors, as well as the blind spots they create. More precisely, participants mentioned that mirrors vibrate and that brackets are too far ahead. It was perceived that there was insufficient testing prior to recommending and implementing these mirrors. One participant mentioned the mirrors should be splitted into two to improve the blind spots.

The following comments were provided by a Safety Officer. They cover the mirror issue as well as other issues:

Front cross over convex mirror. Some problems associated with the mounting system:

- a) vibrations;
- b) mounted so far ahead that head lamp glare; and
- c) braking out fender mount.

Left and right sides rear view mirrors:

- a) major vibrations causing glass breakage;
- b) sail inwards unable to secure;
- c) creates blind vision to either direction on upcoming intersections; and
- d) mounted on a large unneeded C bracket.

3.5.2 Accessibility

Driver seat and vehicle controls should be easily accessible to vehicle operator.

- a) short legged drivers are unable to reach the clutch or brake pedals properly. Push seat up to ensure that operators can reach the brake and/or clutch pedal. In some cases, it is the opposite: the operators' stomach is rubbing on the steering wheel; and
- b) drivers seat up/down adjustment unable to do with ease. As a result, the driver operates the vehicle in an uncomfortable position, increasing the probability of accidents.

Vehicle body operation controls.

- a) overhead safety lamp switch controls – participants questioned the reason for not having the same location on the switch panels; and
- b) Same for heater, fresh air, defroster, in fact all switches.

Operator vision to dash gauges.

- a) mounting of gauges, fuel temp, oil pressure, speedometer etc.
 - i) operators experience difficulty in reading the instruments because of the position of the dash sets in the vehicle; and
 - ii) on one particular model, the dash is hidden by the steering wheel and the column.

3.5.3 *Communication*

To improve the safety on school buses, it was felt that vehicles should be equipped of either radios or cell phones.

3.6 **Regulations**

- Participants agreed that school buses are the most heavily regulated and inspected vehicles, and that school bus drivers are the best trained, and most tested. Many participants asserted that the current standards are far from perfect. Some participants proposed that standards be more flexible.
- The lack of regulative consistency was reported as problematic, especially for people crossing different jurisdictions. However, it was also asserted that a single set of regulations would inhibit the further improvement of standards. The time required to change the standard was also presented as problematic. For example, participants asserted that it would take 4 to 5 years to modify the Canadian Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (CMVSS); such a period was perceived as being too long.
- One advantage associated with a single set of regulations is bulk purchases; at this point, they are not always possible.
- Participants also brought up the issue of retrofitting vehicles; they questioned the costs and the liability associated with retrofit.
- Jurisdictional variations in the definition of school buses were perceived as problematic by many attendees. Questions were raised as whether the definition of a school bus was exclusively reserved for yellow and black buses or should mini-vans driven by parents also be covered? Participants reiterated the need for one definition because, in many instances, children are taken off the safest mode of transportation.
- Some references were made to the Partners in Compliance (PIC) program, where organizations voluntarily agree to improve their standards and be audited according to those standards.

4.0 Specific Comments Regarding Motor Coaches

This section presents a summary of the specific comments provided by participants during a break out session and a plenary session on safety issues related to motor coaches. A summary of participants' issues is provided below.

- Participants said that there is a general feeling among the public that motor coaches are safe and that users are willing to pay for luxury. Despite the excellent motor coach safety record, research and statistics should be made available on motor coach accidents.
- A concern was raised that because of the variability of services provided (e.g., luxury coaches versus seniors home shuttles) it was difficult to accurately define what motor coaches were.
- A number of the same issues exist for motor coaches as for school buses but there are variations. An example is the visibility concerns related to mirrors. Another example is the ergonomic "friendliness" of the driver's seat and controls. In many school buses it is quite bad while in the higher end motor coaches it is quite a bit better, other motor coaches fall somewhere in between.
- There were also serious concerns related to the retrofitting of old school buses. New owners should be obliged to repaint the buses and remove all decals to ensure that people do not believe that they are still school buses. This can cause problems for young children who may board buses believing that they are school operated or for the public who may be concerned that the school buses were not observing policy (e.g., stopping at railroad crossings).
- As in the school bus sub-sector, motor coach-related accidents are often high profile. Overall it was believed that motor coach transportation is quite safe and existing transportation statistics seem to support this position.
- There was a belief that a few bad apples will always slip through any system and that they should not reflect poorly on the system. This is not an excuse to be lax, but if the system is working well stakeholders should not be concerned about saying so. It was also noted that the public had a high degree of trust in the motor coach sub-sector, a situation paralleled to a large degree in the airline industry.
- Maintenance is typically not an issue because the users are usually more demanding. The national safety code is in place and audits are performed. Pre-trip inspections are believed to increase safety and the group noted that there is a national committee (CCRTA) that is currently looking at making these inspections mandatory.
- Accurate statistics often influence decision-makers and it was perceived that motor coach statistics did not always receive the same degree of focus as school bus statistics.
- Regional variations were also seen as playing a key role in determining the issues. For example, shuttle services at the Toronto Airport operate in a very different environment than a shuttle service in rural Saskatchewan. As a result, different responses may be required.

- It was noted that driving hours of service and bus speed are important safety considerations and that the existing guidelines should be followed.
- There was a feeling of potential benefit when looking at other countries and learn from their experiences; it was mentioned that Canada learns from Europe and Europe learns from Canada.

4.1 Conclusion

Participants concluded that funding will drive many decisions regarding the above mentioned issues. They also reported having provided sufficient input and content to provide directions to Transport Canada and the provinces.

Appendix A - Agenda

The purpose of the consultation session is to capture the views of the participants on the issue of bus passenger safety, including seatbelts in school buses and motor coaches.

More precisely, we seek to understand what are:

- your concerns regarding bus and motor coach safety;
- your views on putting seatbelts in school buses and motor coaches;
- your suggestions on how you would prioritize these concerns;
- your opinions regarding possible strategies to address these concerns.

9:00 - 9:30	Continental Breakfast
9:30 - 9:50	Introduction <i>opening remarks by Mr. Derek Sweet from Transport Canada, workshop objectives, participants' expectations</i>
9:50 - 10:00	Presentation of Context by Transport Canada
10:00 - 10:30	General Views on Bus Passenger Protection discussion of participants' views on bus passenger protection identification of areas of concern
10:30 - 11:00	School Buses: Safety Factors and Related Concerns <i>exploration of the issue of seatbelts</i> <i>discussion on areas of concern</i>
11:00 - 11:15	Refreshment Break
11:15 - 12:15	School Buses: Safety Factors and Related Concerns (con'd) further discussion on areas of concern prioritization of issues
12:15 - 12:45	Lunch <i>salads, sandwiches and beverages will be provided in the meeting room</i>
12:45 - 1:15	School Buses: Action Scenario(s) potential initiatives to address safety issues

1:15 - 3:00
Concerns

Motor Coaches: Safety Factors and Related

identification of areas of concern
exploration of the issue of seatbelts
discussion on areas of concern
prioritization of issues

3:00 - 3:15

Refreshment Break

3:15 - 3:45

Motor Coaches: Action Scenario(s)

potential initiatives to address safety issues
next steps

3:45 - 4:00

Synthesis

review of overall discussions on school buses and motor coaches
wrap up and evaluation
closing remarks by Mr. Derek Sweet

4:00

End of Session

Appendix B

List of Participants - Lloydminster

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Transportation Supervisor
Lloydminster Roman Catholic Separate School Division
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Motor Coaches:

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Operators' Association - None were present

Parents/Parent-Teacher Associations

Ron Oliver
Parent Representative
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Ron Bannister
Meadow Lake School Division
Trustee, Bussing Committee
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Bonnie O'Grady
Trustee, Battle River School Division
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Seniors

None were present.

Students

None were present.

The Institute on Governance

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Appendix C
Consultation Improvement Report

5.0 1. Introduction

This report presents a brief summary of the participants' reaction to the workshop held in Lloydminster on March 7, 2000 and includes recommendation for improvements to the remaining stakeholder consultations. This document is based on participants' evaluation comments, PwC experience and Transport Canada/Institute on Governance debrief information.

6.0 2. Participants' Reaction

The facilitators requested that the participants list, on a "recipe card", 3 things they liked about the workshop (or worked well) and 3 things they did not like (or would recommend be improved). This section presents a summary of the comments received.

- Overall, participants reported that the workshop was well organized and conducted. The agenda was perceived as flowing well and issues were dealt with in an orderly matter. One participant, who attended all three sessions, commented that the Prairie session was by far the best.
- Positive comments were made on the choice of the ice breaker exercise. The exercise was perceived as a good way of meeting people.
- Some concerns were expressed regarding the outcome of the consultation. Some participants felt that the consultation will only be valuable if a follow up takes place. Three participants also raised concerns about the need for Transport Canada to address the major issues identified during the workshop.
- Some participants reported that the workshop was an excellent opportunity to voice and discuss various issues and perspectives. Participants' freedom to express their ideas was appreciated. One participant reported being impressed with hearing that other people shared his concerns. Many reported having learned a great deal.
- Very few comments were made about the actual topics discussed. Only one participant felt that the seat belt issue was informative. In general, the topics were perceived as being timely, but also as being "beat to death".
- One school bus operator felt the discussion on motor coaches did not apply to him.
- Several positive comments were made about the facilitators' skills and knowledge. It was perceived that the process kept participants interested and involved.
- Many participants appreciated the wide spectrum of stakeholder representation. The presence of both industry and government at the table to discuss and identify issues was reported as a positive component of the day. However, some participants wished that more student, parent

and motor coach representatives had attended the workshop, and that all attendees actively participated.

- One participant commented on the absence of information on collision statistics, and indicated that this may have been a source of stimulation for discussion.
- One participant suggested that it might have been beneficial for participants to arrive at a position, decision, or set of recommendations to hold as the session accomplishment.

7.0 3. Recommendations

This section presents some recommendations to improve the next consultation sessions. Most recommendations were discussed with representatives from Transport Canada and the Institute on Governance.

- Keep the icebreaker exercise done in Lloydminster, where participants (two by two) introduced each other.
- Increase the general public representation to include more parents, seniors, youth and motor coach representatives.
- The client felt that the Lloydminster session went well, and thus the structure will remain similar for the Winnipeg workshop. It was recommended that the workshop begin with a plenary session on general views regarding bus safety. Participants will then break out to discuss the seat belt issue, and subsequently reconvene to share their results with the larger group. Further group discussions will take place in the morning on other concerns related to school bus safety. In the afternoon, motor coach-related safety issues will be discussed, and following more group discussions, participants will make presentations. No summaries will be required at the end of the day. In the event of few motor coach representatives, discussions on the motor coach safety may take place with overall participants.
- If discussions last until 4:00, it was suggested that a second break be added in the afternoon - around 2:00 p.m.
- It was recommended that participants be allowed to rest for the half-hour lunch break, and that there be no working lunch.
- While facilitators must raise the issue of seat belts, some up-front explanation by Mr. Derek Sweet helped the Lloydminster participants understand the need to discuss this topic. It is recommended to repeat the same presentation on the context of the consultation.
- Based on the sessions held in Moncton and Lloydminster, it was felt that facilitators must quickly re-direct the seat belt issue towards the public education issue and probe questions to obtain a framework for a public education campaign. Subjects to be covered include: the targeted audience, the best ways to inform people and the content of the message to be communicated.
- Concerns identified by the participants in Winnipeg are expected to be similar to concerns raised in Moncton and Lloydminster. Therefore, facilitators will go one step further to identify what measures can be taken regarding the concerns and who should be involved.

- As in Lloydminster, the Winnipeg facilitators should reiterate the status of the discussion and link the various discussions together; they should also clearly state where the discussions fit in the consultation session.
- Edit the Winnipeg agenda to reflect these recommendations.