



## Motorcoach Safety

---

Motorcoaches are intercity passenger buses that carry a driver and up to 55 passengers. Nearly 605 million motor coach trips were taken in 2013.<sup>1</sup> Students (21%) and senior citizens (28.3%) account for nearly half of all journeys taken on motorcoaches.<sup>2</sup>

### Motorcoach Crashes: A Serious Transportation Safety Problem

- The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has investigated numerous fatal crashes involving motorcoaches beginning with an incident in 1968 in Baker, California which resulted in 19 passenger fatalities.<sup>3</sup>
- In 1971, the NSTB recommended that all intercity buses be equipped with seat belts after concluding that the lack of basic occupant protection features contributes to the severity of crashes involving these vehicles.<sup>4</sup>
- Occupant ejection, especially in a rollover crash, is a major safety issue in motorcoaches. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), more than half of the deaths in motorcoach crashes are the result of occupant ejections.<sup>5</sup>
- Since 1990, when Advocates first started tracking this critical safety issue, there have been more than 200 crashes and fires resulting in at least 366 deaths and 3,746 injuries including notable crashes in New Orleans, Louisiana (1999), Atlanta, Georgia (2007), Mexican Hat, Utah (2008) and Orland, California (2014).<sup>6</sup>
- Advocates estimates that the cost of equipping new motorcoaches with lifesaving safety features is only about 10 cents per passenger per trip.<sup>7</sup>
- In response to catastrophic crashes resulting in unnecessary and unacceptable deaths and injuries across the country, bipartisan legislation was introduced in the 111th and 112th Congress, the Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act (MESA).<sup>8</sup> The lead sponsors of the bill were Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and Representatives John Lewis (D-GA) and Ted Poe (R-TX).
- Provisions of MESA were included in the surface transportation authorization bill, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act or MAP-21 that was enacted into law in July of 2012.<sup>9</sup>
- MAP-21 represented the first-ever comprehensive approach to address overdue and ignored NTSB safety recommendations on motorcoach occupant protection and operating safety.

- Included in the legislation were requirements to issue new safety standards mandating seatbelts and rollover crash avoidance technology in new motorcoaches as well as improvements in structural integrity for roof strength and passenger ejection prevention.
  - In November of 2013, NHTSA issued the final rule requiring seatbelts on all new motorcoaches by November of 2016.<sup>10</sup>
  - The final rules regarding rollover crash avoidance, structural integrity and passenger ejection prevention were due in October of 2014 but have yet to be issued by NHTSA.<sup>11</sup>
- Operating safety provisions contained in MAP-21 included the requirement that motorcoach companies be assigned safety fitness ratings and improved public access to those ratings.<sup>12</sup> The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has yet to issue a safety rating for all carriers but has launched a safer bus mobile application that can be found here: <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/lookbeforeyoubook>

---

<sup>1</sup> American Bus Association Foundation, *Motorcoach Census*, p. 9 (Mar. 12, 2014), available at: <http://www.buses.org/files/Foundation/Census2013data.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> National Transportation Safety Board, *Interstate Bus Automobile Collision on Interstate Route 15*, Report No.: SS-H-3 (Dec. 18, 1968), available at:

<https://ia600501.us.archive.org/14/items/interstatebusaut00netc/interstatebusaut00netc.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> National Transportation Safety Board, *Safety Recommendation H-71-9-12*, (Dec. 30, 1970), available at:

[http://www.nts.gov/doclib/reclatters/1971/H71\\_5\\_12.pdf](http://www.nts.gov/doclib/reclatters/1971/H71_5_12.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards; Occupant Crash Protection; Final Rule, NHTSA, Nov. 25, 2013, 78 Federal Register 70416.

<sup>6</sup> National Transportation Safety Board, *Motorcoach Run-Off-The-Road, New Orleans, Louisiana, May 9, 1999*, Report No. HAR-01-01 (Aug. 28, 2001) available at: <https://www.nts.gov/doclib/reports/2001/HAR0101.pdf>;

National Transportation Safety Board, *Motorcoach Override of Elevated Exit Ramp Interstate 75*, Report No.: HAR-08/01 (July 8, 2008), available at: <https://www.nts.gov/doclib/reports/2008/HAR0801.pdf>;

National Transportation Safety Board, *Motorcoach Run-Off-the-Road and Rollover U.S. Route 163 Mexican Hat, Utah January 6, 2008*, Report No.: HAR-09-01 (Apr. 21, 2009), available at: <https://www.nts.gov/doclib/reports/2009/HAR0901.pdf>;

Ian Lovett, *In an Instant, a Bus to College Was a Fiery Trap*, N.Y. Times, Apr. 11, 2014, available at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/12/us/orland-california-bus-crash.html>

<sup>7</sup> Gillan, Jacqueline, Statement to the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure, *How Best To Improve Bus Safety On Our Nation's Highways*, Hearing, June 13, 2011, available at:

<http://www.saferoads.org/files/file/T+I%20Motorcoach%20Testimony-%20June%202011.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> S. 554, 111<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d Session (2009); S. 453, 112<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess. (2011); H.R. 1396, 111<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., (2009); H.R. 873, 112<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Session (2011).

<sup>9</sup> Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), Public Law 112–141, Subtitle G (2012).

<sup>10</sup> Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards; Occupant Crash Protection; Final Rule, NHTSA, Nov. 25, 2013, 78 Federal Register 70416.

<sup>11</sup> Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), Public Law 112–141, Section 32703 (2012).

<sup>12</sup> Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), Public Law 112–141, Section 32707 (2012).