



PRELIMINARY REPORT HIGHWAY HWY17MH009

The information in this report is preliminary and will be supplemented or corrected during the course of the investigation.

On Monday, November 21, 2016, about 3:20 p.m., a 2008 Thomas Built 84-passenger school bus, operated by Durham School Services LP, was traveling southbound on Talley Road in Chattanooga, Hamilton County, Tennessee, when it departed the roadway, collided with a utility pole, overturned, and collided with a tree. As a result of the crash, six student passengers died and 31 were injured. The bus driver received minor injuries.

The school bus—occupied by the 24-year-old driver and 37 student passengers—was transporting the children home from Woodmore Elementary School. While traveling southbound in the 300 block of Talley Road, the bus had departed the roadway to the left and collided with a utility pole. Following the collision, the bus overturned onto its right side and subsequently collided with a tree, which caused the roof of the bus to collapse inward.



Figure 1. Right side view of school bus showing impact damage.

At the location of the crash, Talley Road is a two-lane roadway comprised of one travel lane in each direction. A double yellow center line divides the lanes. The posted speed limit for Talley Road is 30 mph. Prior to the crash, the bus driver had encountered a horizontal curve to the left and then a horizontal curve to the right. The first curve has an advisory speed of 25 mph, and the second curve is preceded by a 30-mph speed limit sign. The driver lost control of the bus and departed the roadway to the left as he passed the second curve. Preliminary information suggests that, at the time of the crash, the driver had deviated from his normal route.



Figure 2. View from Talley Road looking south, showing the roadway’s right curve and posted speed limit of 30 mph.

Durham School Services LP, based in Warrenville, Illinois, is registered as a “for hire” interstate carrier with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. The transportation of school children to and from home is exempt from many federal regulations; and, in this instance, the state of Tennessee had primary oversight of the operation. The bus driver had been employed with Durham School Services since April 2016. At the time of the crash, he was licensed and had a current commercial driver medical certificate. His preliminary toxicology test results were negative for alcohol and illicit drugs. Since August 2016, the beginning of the current school year, the driver had had one reportable and one nonreportable crash—both while operating school buses.

The school bus was equipped with multiple systems capable of recording and transmitting event-related data. NTSB investigators continue to collect and analyze these data.

All aspects of the crash remain under investigation as the NTSB seeks to determine the probable cause, with the intent of issuing safety recommendations to prevent similar crashes.