

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: May 15, 1979

Forwarded to:

The Governors of the
50 States

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-79-31

About 10:00 a.m., on April 11, 1978, a "schoolbus" type bus, occupied by 56 boys and 2 adults, was southbound on Interstate 75 near Tifton, Georgia, en route to Disney World, Florida, from Ypsilanti, Michigan. The bus was owned and operated by the Ypsilanti Boys Club. As the bus exited I-75 at a safety rest area, it went off the road while negotiating a right curve on the exit lane, overturned, and struck a tree. Three passengers were killed, and the driver and 25 passengers were injured. 1/

The evidence indicated that at or shortly before the exit ramp, the accelerator return spring failed and caused the accelerator to remain in a "wide open" position. Consequently, when the driver removed her foot from the accelerator to reduce speed, the engine did not slow and continued operating at its maximum governed speed. The driver applied the brakes but the bus did not decelerate normally because the braking action was working against an engine at full throttle. The Safety Board believes that the throttle condition was not detected by the driver because she was fatigued. The driver's reaction after she applied the brakes was that "nothing happened." However, in the 700 feet of roadway before the curve, the driver took no evasive action other than to apply the brakes which she already concluded had failed. The driver's evasive action could have included turning off the ignition, downshifting to a lower gear, or steering back onto the highway from the slower speed exit lane.

The 24-year-old driver involved in this accident was employed by the Ypsilanti Boys Club in 1975 as a Unit Director; her duties included driving a "schoolbus" type bus. She held a valid Michigan State chauffeur's license that authorized her to drive this type of vehicle; there were no restrictions. The driver had received no formal busdriver training. She was taught to drive the bus by another Boys Club employee.

1/ For more detailed information read "Highway Accident Report--Overturn of a Ypsilanti, Michigan, Boys Club Bus, I-75, Near Tifton, Georgia, April 11, 1978," (NTSB-HAR-79-2)

A postcrash examination of the bus revealed the following deficiencies:

1. Foot brake pedal travel, measured with the engine running, was 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches; 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches beyond the 4-inch manufacturer's recommended maximum.
2. The parking brake was out of adjustment and when tested provided no braking torque.
3. The right rear spring had three fractured leaves: leaves three, four, and five.
4. Tire air pressure was: Left front tire -- 36 psi, right front -- 34 psi, left rear tires -- 42 and 46 psi, and the right rears -- 52 and 64 psi. The tire pressure recommended for these tires was 75 psi for the front tires and 70 psi for the dual rear tires.
5. The accelerator return spring was missing from the carburetor and was found in the engine compartment with one end fractured.

Since the State of Michigan did not require that the bus be inspected, the responsibility for its mechanical condition rested solely with the driver and the Director of the Boys Club. Neither person maintained this bus properly, as evidenced by the lack of maintenance records, lack of a maintenance program, and a failure to recognize the most apparent discrepancies, such as the excessive brake pedal travel, inoperative parking brake, and improper tire inflation. Their maintenance policy consisted of repairing the bus when they realized something was wrong.

The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of this accident was the driver's loss of directional control of the bus on a curve because of excessive speed due to failure of the accelerator return spring, which resulted from improper maintenance. Contributing to the accident were severely underinflated tires, deteriorated suspension, excessive luggage on the roof, and driver fatigue.

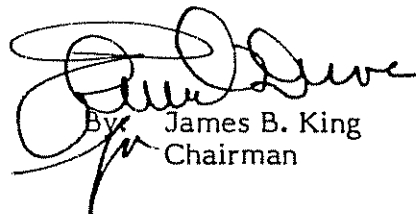
Many buses owned by church groups, clubs, and private organizations are used for the transportation of passengers, many of whom are schoolaged youths. Based on the Board's accident investigation experience, few if any of these organizations have the knowledge, experience, or facilities to operate and maintain their vehicles safely. Further, there are no regulations requiring them to do so. The drivers, most of whom are volunteers or part-time employees, need only possess a properly classified State driver's license. They are not required to complete a busdriver training course. The Safety Board believes that had this driver completed a busdriver training course, which includes maintenance practices, this accident may have been avoided.

Highway Safety Program Standard No. 17 established minimum requirements for a State highway safety program for pupil transportation safety; including the identification, operation, and maintenance of schoolbuses; training of personnel; and administration.

In order that passengers transported in this type of nonregulated bus be provided with an adequately trained driver and a properly maintained vehicle, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the each State:

Enact legislation to require that the driver of any motor vehicle with a seating capacity of more than 16 passengers, whether so employed or acting voluntarily, shall possess, in addition to a properly classified State driver's license, a certificate authenticating such driver's successful completion of a busdriver training course which conforms to Highway Safety Program Standard No. 17, Pupil Transportation Safety. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-79-31)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS and HOGUE, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.


By James B. King
Chairman

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