

# **Inquiry into National Road Safety**

Submission by the Bus Industry Confederation to the House of  
Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional  
Services into national road safety

**OCTOBER, 2003**

## **·Introduction**

The Bus Industry Confederation is Australia's peak organisation representing the interests of the bus industry, encompassing bus operators, suppliers and associated businesses. Its members carry about one billion passengers annually in Australia.

BIC is recognised as a leading proponent of growth in travel by public transport, as an effective way to reduce the economic, social and environmental costs associated with excessive use of the private car for personal and business travel.

## **·The Facts about Bus Safety**

Buses are the safest form of motor vehicle travel in Australia. While every serious injury or fatality that occurs on or around a bus is of concern; it is important to recognise these are relatively very few in number.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau Report on Bus Safety in 2001 found that bus passengers were a very low 0.6% of the 17,840 road fatalities to have occurred between 1990 and 1998. It is also interesting to note that this low number is trending down.

Indeed, out of the 300 bus-related fatalities to have occurred during this period, one third was pedestrians, one third was occupants in other vehicles and one third were bus occupants. This is an average of ten bus occupant related fatalities per year. Furthermore it is important to recognise that 42 out of these 100 bus occupants were killed in Queensland, where the age of the fleet is an important issue that needs immediate attention.

With more than one billion passenger trips being made on buses every year in Australia, the odds of a passenger suffering a fatal accident are currently a remote one in 100 million.

Because buses are the safest form of land transport, anything that increases bus modal share relative to other land transport modes will increase road safety outcomes. The Federal Government should therefore encourage bus use, compared to car use.

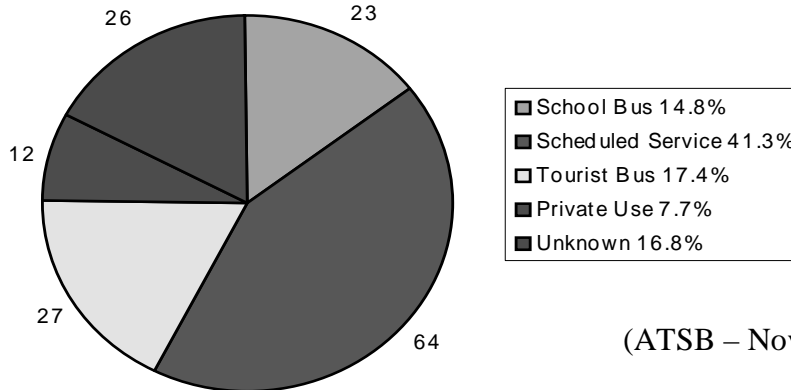
## **·How safe are School Buses?**

A study conducted by Institute of Transport Studies at the Sydney University shows that travel to and from school in a bus is 7 times safer than in the family car, 31 times safer than walking and 228 times safer than riding a bike. Indeed, students are most at risk around the vehicle rather than on the vehicle. For example, of the small number of school bus-related fatalities in Australia in recent years, less than one in ten involves a passenger on the bus. The behaviour of children, carers and other road users around bus stops is the key to a major improvement in safe travel to school. (ATSB – Nov 2001)

## •What Buses are involved in Accidents?

The majority of buses involved in fatal accidents were urban buses (58.7 per cent), and most of these urban buses were traveling short distances on scheduled routes. Of all fatal bus accidents, 14.8 per cent involved a designated school bus. However, 18 of 23 of these fatal accidents did not involve a school bus occupant fatality.

*Type of buses involved in fatal crashes  
by vehicle usage 1990 - 1998*



(ATSB – Nov 2001)

## •How do Most Bus Related Accidents Occur?

The most common accident event for fatal bus accidents involved a pedestrian (31 per cent). Most of the pedestrian accidents involved a pedestrian stepping off the kerb and being struck by the front of the bus. The second most common event involved one bus and another vehicle travelling in opposite directions before the collision (29 per cent). The majority of these accidents were head on collisions where neither vehicle was overtaking. Buses involved in frontal impacts were the causal effect for 59.4 per cent of fatalities in the six years of available data from 1990 to 1998. The majority of bus drivers involved in fatal accidents was driving, or had intended to drive, straight ahead at time of the accident (75.5 per cent), while stationary buses were seldom involved in fatal accidents). (ATSB – Nov 2001)

### RECOMMENDATION

**The BIC Recommends that a comprehensive Federal/State Education Campaign directed at primary and early secondary schools, the aged and carers about road safety around buses be implemented. This should be reinforced with an awareness campaign for all other road users.**

## •How can we make Buses even Safer?

Most Australian State Government Transport Departments and similar international transport agencies have formed the opinion that it is only through combining improvements in rollover strength, seat and seat anchorage strength and seat belts that significant inroads can be made into reducing bus fatalities and injuries. Seatbelts will not necessarily protect passengers traveling on a bus where its chassis, internal cage or seating structure is not designed to handle a rollover or head-on collision. The

reality is that the high mass of a bus protects the passengers in the event of a collision. This is why we have more fatalities among non-bus occupants when collisions do occur. The Australian bus industry recognizes that education campaigns and bus priority measures are very important in bus safety.

Current design standards for Australian buses require modern engineering techniques to ensure seats do not collapse or move away from their foundations following a collision or rollover. However the majority of buses operated on Australian roads today pre-date these requirements. The Australian bus industry considers the collapse of seats and/or body of an older vehicle during an accident poses a far greater danger to passengers than the lack of seatbelts. In any event retro-fitting all these older vehicles to current design specifications is estimated by both government and the bus industry to be a poor option.

The bus industry recommends a national strategy led by the Federal Government and endorsed by all State Governments for upgrading bus fleets to modern design requirements. This renewal strategy should occur via a phased timeline to align with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act Accessible Transport Standard Act introduced in October 2002 and Australian Design Rules related to emissions.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**The creation of a National Strategy to aid in reducing the age of the bus and coach fleet and improve road safety. In addition, buses and coaches 15 years of age or older should only be allowed to be imported for 'collectable' or vintage purposes.**

An issue that is current in this area is the review of Business asset depreciation laws and what is known as the 'Effective Life' depreciation rate for buses and coaches.

This review is part of the Business Tax Reform process. This will in effect see the current depreciation rate for buses and coaches, 6 2/3, years increased to 15 years if the Australian Taxation Office recommendation is adopted.

The result of this change is a huge disincentive to upgrade the fleet for bus and coach operators.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**A tax incentive in the form of a 5 year effective life depreciation rate. This will improve road safety performance and assist operators to meet the requirements of Disability Discrimination Accessible Transport Standards Act and new Emission Standard requirements.**

#### **·Seat Belts**

The issue of Seat Belts in buses is an ongoing concern to some in the community. Following is a brief overview of the BIC position on seat belts. BIC is able to provide further background material on this matter if required.

#### **Seatbelts – Only Part of the Solution**

The Australian bus industry supports the use of seat belts in buses to improve the safety of travel by passengers and drivers. The Bus Industry Confederation believes a holistic approach to addressing bus safety issues is required. This needs to take into account all the possible factors relating to bus accidents in order to deliver a set of measures to reduce the causes of accidents as well as improving the survivability of those involved in bus related accidents. In order to achieve this, the industry requires detailed research to be undertaken.

### **Bus Design--.**

Current Australian design standards for buses and coaches are focused on ensuring seats do not collapse or move away from their mountings following a collision or rollover. However the majority of buses operated on Australian roads today pre-date these requirements. This average age of the Australian bus fleet is recognised by the BIC as a major challenge for the industry and governments to overcome.

Based upon current fleet turnover rates and the allowable age of buses in different States, it will take up to 20 years before all buses and coaches operating in Australian meet current design requirements for safety. The BIC advocates the adoption of a national strategy of incentives to encourage private bus operators – particularly those servicing regional and remote areas – to fast track the purchase of new vehicles. Additional benefits of this move include accessible public transport for disabled passengers and greenhouse gas emission reductions.

### **Safety Comparisons on Small and Large Buses**

The Bus Industry Confederation believes that as a part of any comprehensive research, a comparison of the relative safety of small and large buses requires investigation. This should take into account the differences in mass and size of the vehicles.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

<b>Detailed research should be undertaken across Australia to better understand the causes of bus and coach related accidents.</b>
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<b>ATSB undertake a review of international bus design standards for safety, taking into account the technical, practical and financial applications of incorporating measures such as compartmentalisation and high backed seats into the Australian bus fleet.</b>
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#### **·Seating**

#### **·Large Buses - Coaches**

Investigations should be conducted into the benefits associated with the installation of well-padded higher backed seats for large buses with capacity for 27 seats or more, which AUSTROADS claims could reduce fatalities by between 0-20%. This should examine a more flexible regulation structure for vehicles used for multiple purposes;

The Federal Government should, as a priority, fund a national study to extend initial research conducted by the NSW Department of Transport. The research estimated that

the fitment of padding to seat tops and stanchions had the potential to save one serious injury and 75 minor injuries out of all the cases studied over a four year period. It was estimated that this would cost about \$7 million for the buses in NSW. For comparison, the Department estimated that fitment of lap/sash seat belts would cost over \$200 million and had the potential to save one fatality, two serious injuries and 100 minor injuries.

Federal and State Governments should continue to encourage the purchasing of low floor vehicles, which, because of their modern design, are far safer than older vehicles.

As an interim measure, State Governments should commit to the installation of appropriate padding in older buses that fail to meet current design specifications.

### **·Small Buses**

Small buses used to convey students either by normal route or designated school services with a seating capacity of 27 or less should be equipped with lap or lap / shoulder belts at all designated seating positions. Since the sizes and operating weights of these smaller buses are closer to those of passenger cars seat belts will help provide better occupant protection with comparatively low costs of installation.

There should be no provisions in the Australian Design Rules that make small buses with less than 27 seats exempt from any requirements for fitting seat belts for all seating positions;

### **·Standing**

With official research finding the comparative risks of standing on large city buses is very low; passengers should be allowed to stand on urban buses when all (other) available seats are taken and hand support rails/hand-straps are in place. Standing is not sensible in coaches. Subject to mass limits!

### **·Speed Limits**

In NSW, there is a policy of restricting the speed of school buses carrying standees to 80 kilometres per hour. In Queensland, all buses weighing more than 14.5 tonnes are mechanically or electronically speed limited to 100 kilometres per hour. A Queensland Transport study conducted around the Jimboomba area in 2001 saw buses restricted to a maximum speed of 80 kilometres per hour. It found that a reduction in speed did not affect driver schedules and that there was no concern with restricting the speed of buses to 80 kilometres per hour when carrying standees. Based upon this research, the Federal Government should move to legislate in co-operation with all State Government and bus industry bodies for limiting buses carrying standing passengers to 80 kilometres per hour.

### **·Driver Health**

State Government transport agencies should provide funding for all bus drivers to receive annual health checks in areas specifically relating to their ability to drive buses such as heart attacks or stroke.

## **·Informal Passenger Transport Industry**

An emerging concern is the emergence of an informal passenger transport industry that operates outside the regulated passenger transport industry, (buses and taxis etc).

The informal industry is made up of free-lance passenger vehicles ranging from 'people mover' type of vehicles (8 seats –Taragos etc) through to coaches.

These vehicles operate tours including school charter, and tout for tourism businesses in competition to operators subject to a range of regulatory requirements (some of which relate to safety)

The informal industry is also made up of 'community transport' vehicles, many funded by Health and Community Care funding to address specific community transport need for the aged.

These vehicles are similarly not subject to the same regulatory or accreditation requirements in the States and are usually driven by voluntary drivers with inadequate training.

BIC is concerned about the emergence of the 'informal' industry and in particular the associated road safety and public liability implications and lack of control.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The BIC calls for an investigation into the informal passenger transport industry and propose that a national approach to the regulation of passenger vehicles should be agreed between the Commonwealth and States. Security issues also need to be considered in this context.**

**State based bus accreditation Programs and compliance frameworks should include all vehicles above 8 seats involved in transporting people for commercial or community service reasons.**

## **·National Accreditation**

The issue of accreditation within the bus and coach sector is currently subject to a range of State Requirements which share some common standards and are enforced to varying levels.

The BIC believes there is a need to see developed common State based Bus and Coach Accreditation programs for all vehicles with 8 seats or more which are involved in transporting people for commercial or community service reasons.

Accreditation would be focussed on the safety issues related to;

- The Vehicle – Roadworthiness/ Maintenance practices
- The Driver – Training/ Fatigue Management etc
- The Operator – Policy, Procedures, Records etc.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Consistent and Common State Based Accreditation Schemes for the bus and coach industry for all vehicles with 8 passengers or more involved in transporting people for commercial or community service purposes be implemented.**

**The Federal Government provide financial support to assist industry develop 'Core Industry' Standards for the;**

- School**
- Route**
- Charter and Tour**

**Sectors of the bus and coach sector for vehicles with 8 seats or more.**