



**National Association
of State Directors
of Pupil Transportation Services**

March 24, 2021

The Honorable Robert L. Sumwalt III
Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, DC 20594

Re: NTSB Safety Recommendations H-06-029, H-13-035, H-19-010, H-20-015, H-20-016,
H-20-017, and H-20-018

Dear Chairman Sumwalt:

This letter responds to currently open safety recommendations from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), issued to the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS).

The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services was founded in 1968. Our purpose is to provide leadership, assistance, and motivation to the nation's school transportation community and industry. The association works to ensure safe, secure, environmentally responsible, and cost-effective transportation to school children and to school and school related activities. NASDPTS represents a cross section of individuals and organizations involved in student transportation. As the association's name indicates, members include those individuals with the primary responsibility for school transportation in each state. In addition, school bus manufacturers and other industry suppliers, school transportation contractors, and a number of state associations, whose members include school transportation officials, drivers, trainers, and technicians, also are members of affiliated councils within the association. This diversity in membership, combined with the day-to-day involvement of the state directors in policy matters, creates a unique perspective on pupil transportation issues.

Our response to each specific safety recommendation follows. The related NTSB reports, safety recommendations, and this response can be found on the NASDPTS website at <https://nasdpts.org/NTSB-Reports-Recommendations>.

The Honorable Robert L. Sumwalt III
March 24, 2021
Page two

Response to NTSB Safety Recommendation H-06-29

On November 30, 2006, the NTSB issued a letter to NASDPTS and others containing Safety Recommendation H-06-029 from its [Highway Accident Report](#), “Motorcoach Collision With the Alexandria Avenue Bridge Overpass, George Washington Memorial Parkway, Alexandria, Virginia, November 14, 2004 (NTSB/HAR-06/04), concerning a crash involving a motorcoach that collided with the underside and side of an overpass.

The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of this accident was the bus driver’s failure to notice and respond to posted low-clearance warning signs and to the bridge itself due to cognitive distraction resulting from conversing on a hands-free cellular telephone while driving. Contributing to the accident was the low vertical clearance of the bridge, which did not meet then-current National Park Service road standards or American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials guidelines.

The above summary, paraphrased from the NTSB report, does not provide the full detail contained within the report, but is included to provide context to the agency’s safety recommendation and our response, discussed below.

The NTSB Safety Recommendation H-06-029, issued to NASDPTS and other groups, was to:

Develop formal policies prohibiting cellular telephone use by commercial driver’s license holders with a passenger-carrying or school bus endorsement, while driving under the authority of that endorsement, except in emergencies.

NASDPTS agrees with and supports this recommendation. Student transportation professionals and the parents and students we serve well understand the importance of maintaining the unparalleled, high level of safety provided by school bus transportation. NASDPTS, its members, and all the over one-half million professionals charged with driving, maintaining, and overseeing the nation’s school buses welcome and encourage any opportunity to further improve that record.

We are unable to reconstruct the complete history of the related safety guidance and training that NASDPTS has provided to state directors and other members since this safety recommendation was issued. However, we know policies prohibiting cellular telephone use by drivers of commercial motor vehicles, including school buses, are in place, both federally and within states’ laws and regulations, and we are confident that awareness is high among school bus drivers and others regarding the dangers of distracted driving.

On December 6, 2011, NASDPTS conveyed to its members notice of the adoption of a [Final Rule](#) by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (effective January 3, 2012) restricting the use of mobile communications devices by commercial drivers. In May 2012, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration issued a Fact Sheet, “New Mobile Phone Restriction Rule for Commercial Motor Vehicle Drivers.” The Fact Sheet is posted [here](#) on the NASDPTS website.

The Honorable Robert L. Sumwalt III
March 24, 2021
Page three

On October 1, 2015, in response to an inquiry by NASDPTS, the FMCSA confirmed that the rule does apply to intrastate and interstate school bus drivers, public and private.

In October 2020, the National Conference of State Legislatures updated its [compendium](#) of state laws and regulations banning the use of hand held phones and texting by motorists. While NASDPTS does not maintain an inventory of all states' laws and regulations on this topic, we are confident state policies often exceed the stringency of those applying to general motorists and meet or exceed the federal ban on use of handheld communications and texting devices by school bus drivers while operating their buses.

To ensure reiteration of this important safety message, however, regarding the dangers of distracted driving, NASDPTS is copying this response concurrently to our state director members to remind them of the circumstances of the Alexandria crash and the NTSB's recommendation. We are also ensuring the NTSB receives a concurrent copy of our memorandum of transmittal to state directors.

Response to NTSB Safety Recommendation H-13-035

In 2013, the NTSB issued [Highway Accident Report](#) NTSB/HAR-13/01, School Bus and Truck Collision at Intersection Near Chesterfield, New Jersey, February 16, 2012. The report focused on a crash in which a school bus transporting 25 elementary age students pulled into the path of a large, fully loaded roll-off truck. One bus passenger was killed. Five bus passengers sustained serious injuries, 10 passengers and the bus driver received minor injuries, and nine passengers and the truck driver were uninjured. Contributing to the severity of passenger injuries were the nonuse or misuse of available school bus passenger lap belts; the lack of passenger protection from interior sidewalls, sidewall components, and seat frames; and the high lateral and rotational forces in the back portion of the bus. The NTSB noted that injuries to the fatally injured occupant and examination of the lap belts in her row indicated that she was likely unbelted. The NTSB concluded that some students on the school bus wore their lap belts improperly or not at all.

Included within the Chesterfield report were findings from a school bus crash in Port St. Lucie, Florida that occurred on March 26, 2012. A St. Lucie County School District bus turned left in front of a truck, which collided with the right side of the bus in the vicinity of the rear axle. As a result of the crash, one student passenger on the bus was fatally injured. The school bus driver and 19 other passengers received injuries of varying degrees. Like the school bus in the Chesterfield crash, the St. Lucie County Schools bus was also equipped with two-point lap belts. The NTSB concluded that in the Port St. Lucie crash, the combination of high forces, lack of upper body restraint, and loss of seating system integrity resulted in the fatal injuries to the one passenger who died.

In a 2014 Anaheim, California crash, occupant simulations conducted by the NTSB indicated that lap/shoulder belted occupants had the best retention in their seats with the lowest potential for occupant-to-occupant contacts and occupant-to-interior contacts, which are common in severe

The Honorable Robert L. Sumwalt III
March 24, 2021
Page four

lateral impacts involving unbelted school bus occupants. The simulations also indicated that while restrained with a lap/shoulder belt, the occupant seated nearest the area of intrusion (seat 8A) maintained a more upright position than that person would have maintained if restrained only by a lap belt. The NTSB concluded that the properly worn lap/shoulder belts of the two occupants of the row eight seats most likely reduced their injuries related to upper body flailing, which are commonly seen when occupants are restrained only by lap belts. Further, the NTSB concluded that the properly worn lap/shoulder belts reduced passenger motion toward the intruding tree, which probably reduced the severity of the injuries sustained, especially for the student in seat 8C.

In the summaries above we have included only very concise descriptions of the circumstances relating to Safety Recommendation H-13-035. In our February 6, 2017 [response](#) to the NTSB regarding related Safety Recommendation H-13-036, which was subsequently classified as “Closed, Acceptable Action,” we encouraged a thorough review of the referenced reports by interested parties.

The NTSB Safety Recommendation H-13-035 to NASDPTS was to:

Develop guidelines and include them in the next update of the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures to assist schools in training bus drivers, students, and parents on the importance and proper use of school bus seat belts, including manual lap belts, adjustable lap and shoulder belts, and flexible seating systems.

NASDPTS agrees with and strongly supports this recommendation. NASDPTS has a long history of providing comments and analysis relating to improved passenger crash protection in school buses. This history is outlined within our updated May 2020 [Position Paper](#), “Lap/Shoulder Belts in School Buses,” which supports the NTSB’s recommendations regarding the value of lap/shoulder belts in large school buses to augment compartmentalization. The paper also contains recommendations regarding the importance of training, policies, and enforcement of required, proper usage of lap/shoulder belts by all passengers and the driver in school buses that are so equipped.

In 2015, NASDPTS proposed updates to the [National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures](#) (NSTSP) that included 13 instances throughout the document of recommendations and graphical training materials for students and school bus drivers regarding proper wearing and use of both two-point lap belts and three-point lap/shoulder belts. The changes were adopted by the delegates and can be found within the published 2015 NSTSP. All members were notified of the publication of the NSTSP in October 2016.

NASDPTS is copying this response concurrently to its state director members. We are also ensuring the NTSB receives a concurrent copy of our memorandum of transmittal to state directors.

The Honorable Robert L. Sumwalt III
March 24, 2021
Page five

Response to NTSB Safety Recommendation H-19-010

In 2019, the NTSB issued [Highway Accident Report](#), “School Bus Run-Off-Road and Fire, Oakland, Iowa, December 12, 2017 (NTSB/HAR-19/01). On the morning of December 12, 2017, a school bus operated by the Riverside Community School District backed into a ditch on a rural road outside Oakland, Iowa, after picking up its first passenger, a 16-year-old female student. While the driver tried to drive the bus out of the ditch, a fire began in the engine compartment and spread throughout the bus. The driver and passenger died in the fire. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigation focused on school bus driver fitness for duty, school bus fire safety, and school bus emergency training, including evacuation drills and equipment.

The above summary, paraphrased from the NTSB report, does not provide the full detail contained within the report, but is included to provide context to the agency’s safety recommendation and our response, discussed below.

The NTSB Safety Recommendation H-19-010 to NASDPTS and other associations was to:

Recommend that your members verify that students are educated on how to operate the manual release handle for front loading doors on school buses during evacuation training and drills. (H-19-10) (See section 2.5.3.)

NASDPTS agrees with and supports this recommendation, including its implied recommendation that student transportation providers document and maintain records of the timing, content, and participation in the drills. We also support expansion of the recommendation to include instructing students on how to operate the air-operated front loading (service) doors with which most new large school buses are equipped, and the electrically operated doors commonly found in smaller, Type A school buses. Such instruction should be provided as part of the regular school bus evacuation drills that states, local school districts, contractors, and charter schools require for all transported students.

Furthermore, in workshops at our conferences and for other groups, we have promoted the adoption of Federal Aviation Administration style pre-trip briefings for passengers by the drivers of buses before every field and activity trip. Some passengers on field and activity trips, both adult chaperones and students, are not regular school bus riders and otherwise might not receive the regularly scheduled school bus evacuation instruction and drills. Such briefings should include a review of the location and use of the emergency exit doors, windows, and hatches, and the service entrance door, as well as the proper use and unbuckling of equipped two-point lap belts or three-point lap/shoulder belts.

The 2015 National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures, published in October 2016, includes guidance and several recommendations regarding the frequency and content of emergency evacuation procedures. We encourage all school transportation providers to review these recommendations. NASDPTS has notified its members of the publication and availability of the 2015 NSTSP as both a bound hard-copy and a free PDF download, and we have encouraged

its use by states and local school districts when developing their bus specifications and operational procedures.

NASDPTS is copying this response concurrently to our state director members. We are also ensuring the NTSB receives a concurrent copy of our memorandum of transmittal to state directors.

Response to NTSB Safety Recommendations H-20-015, H-20-016, H-20-017, and H-20-018

In 2020, the NTSB issued [Highway Accident Report](#), “Vehicle Collision With Student Pedestrians Crossing High-Speed Roadway to Board School Bus, Rochester, Indiana, October 30, 2018” (NTSB/HAR-20/02). About 7:12 a.m. (local time) on Tuesday, October 30, 2018, a 2014 Thomas Built school bus traveling north in the 4600 block of State Route 25 (SR-25) in Rochester, Fulton County, Indiana, stopped to pick up students at the designated school bus stop location. The driver of the school bus waited before signaling to the students to cross. At the same time, a 2017 Toyota Tacoma pickup truck, occupied by a 24-year-old driver and three passengers, was traveling south on SR-25. The pickup truck struck four children who were crossing the roadway in the early morning darkness. The school bus, operated by the Tippecanoe Valley School Corporation, had its warning lights on, and the driver had deployed the stop arm. In the area of the crash, SR-25 is a two-lane highway with north and southbound travel lanes divided by a double yellow centerline. A mobile home park is located on the west side of the roadway, and an agricultural field is located on the east side. In a post-crash interview, the driver of the pick-up truck reported seeing the flashing lights in the roadway ahead of her but believed that they were from a piece of farm equipment. There is no roadway lighting at this location. The posted speed limit for the roadway is 55 miles per hour. As a result of the crash, a 9-year-old female and two 6-year-old males were fatally injured. An 11-year-old male was transported by air ambulance to a medical facility in Fort Wayne, Indiana with serious injuries. The occupants of the school bus and the pickup truck were not injured in the crash. The weather conditions were clear and dry.

The above summary, paraphrased from the NTSB report, does not provide the full detail contained within the report, but is included to provide context to the agency’s safety recommendations and our response, discussed below.

The NTSB Safety Recommendations H-20-015, H-20-016, H-20-017, and H-20-018, to NASDPTS and other associations were to:

Inform your members of the circumstances of the Rochester, Indiana; Baldwyn, Mississippi; and Hartsfield, Georgia, crashes, and urge them to minimize the use of school bus stops that require students to cross a roadway (especially a high-speed roadway) and to, at least annually, and also whenever a route hazard is identified, evaluate the safety of their school bus routes and stops. (H-20-15) (See section 2.3.1.)

Remind your members to ensure that school transportation directors and others involved in evaluating school bus routes and stops complete training on how to assess the safety of school bus routes and stops, according to best industry practices. (H-20-16) (See section 2.3.1.)

The Honorable Robert L. Sumwalt III
March 24, 2021
Page seven

Advise your members to train their school bus drivers and students on crossing procedures, including the crossing hand signal and the danger signal, which are to be used when a student roadway crossing cannot be avoided. (H-20-17) (See section 2.3.2.)

Urge your members to continue to coordinate with local law enforcement agencies to conduct educational and enforcement activities aimed at reducing illegal school bus passings. (H-20-18) (See section 2.4.2.)

To aid you in implementing these recommendations, we are also attaching an article regarding our investigations of these crashes that you may use, either in its entirety or modified to fit the length and style considerations of your publication and/or website. We ask that you publish it, or similar content, in the next issue of your newsletter and/or website, and that you send us a copy of the newsletter or a link to the website article once it has been published.

NASDPTS agrees with and supports these recommendations. While the unparalleled safety record of school buses is well documented, as an association we work toward continual improvement. We share the common goal of all student transportation associations and professionals to achieve zero serious injuries or fatalities to students whenever they are in our custody as pedestrians at school bus stops, in the loading/unloading zone, and while riding inside the bus.

NASDPTS has a long history of guidance, training, and positions that support that goal, including, in part, the following actions:

- On April 22, 2020, we transmitted NTSB/HAR-20/02 to all state student transportation directors, along with the following message:

We encourage all of our members to review the report and inform state associations, school districts, charter schools, tribal entities, and contractors regarding the circumstances of the crash and the safety recommendations within the report addressed to various parties. Please encourage student transportation professionals to pay particular attention to the Safety Recommendations on pages 49 and 50 addressed to the listed 29 states' governors, the Indiana Department of Education, and to the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, National Association for Pupil Transportation, and National School Transportation Association.

- The 2015 National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures, published in October 2016, contains guidance and recommendations for loading and unloading zone safety, including, in part, recommendations to:

Provide supervision of loading and unloading areas at or near the school or Head Start Centers and provide ongoing evaluation of route pick-up and drop-off locations for safety;

Ensure students are aware of the dangers involved walking to and from, in and around the loading and unloading zone. Students should be trained to cross the road safely at the bus stop and should be taught to avoid retrieving articles dropped in the danger zone of the bus during loading and unloading activities, or otherwise when they are in the area around the bus, without explicit directions from the driver. Students should also be taught to move away from the bus (out of the danger zones) after unloading;

Refer to graphics within the NSTSP entitled, "Here's How to Cross the Road SAFELY." These safety training diagrams show a 12-foot minimum walk distance in front of the bus;

Include in the pre-service training of school bus drivers recommended student loading and unloading procedures;

Include behind-the-wheel procedures for loading and unloading students at bus stops, including moving the bus only after all children are safely seated after loading and out of the danger zones, are at least 12 feet from the sides of the bus, are at least 12 feet from the rear of the bus and cross roadways at least 12 feet in front of the bus;

Provide student training, at least once each semester, in loading and unloading procedures;

Adopt state procedures for providing loading and unloading zones off the main traveled part of highways, whenever it is practical to do so;

Use the sample reporting form within the NSTSP for bus loading and unloading incidents;

Review and follow the guidance within the NASDPTS publication, "Identification and Evaluation of School Bus Route and Hazard Marking Systems," developed under a grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration;

Follow the step-by-step recommended loading and unloading procedures at school bus stops included within the NSTSP.

NASDPTS has notified its members of the publication and availability of the 2015 NSTSP containing the above guidelines as both a bound hard-copy and a free PDF download, and we have encouraged its use by states and local school districts when developing their bus specifications and operational procedures.

- Between 2010 and 2019, NASDPTS coordinated an annual survey of illegal passing incidents (stop arm violations) by motorists to document and highlight the number of such incidents and the basic circumstances. The surveys required a one-day snapshot by school bus drivers of the number of violations by motorists. Over the nine years of the survey, an average of 107,044 school bus drivers (about 21 percent of the nation's public school bus drivers) reported that 81,841 motorists passed their school buses. The data, if extrapolated, represents an estimated 69 million illegal passing incidents during a normal 180-day school year. Awareness of this shockingly high potential for harm to children has precipitated increased education and enforcement within several states, and increased interest in technologies like on-bus photo/video recording equipment for securing citations, including authorizing legislation. In January 2021, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration announced a study of motorists' comprehension of state school bus stopping laws and other related initiatives to address the prevalence of illegal passing.

The Honorable Robert L. Sumwalt III
March 24, 2021
Page nine

- Based on the continuing incidence of illegal passing of school buses, and to support the NTSB's recommended areas of improvement, NASDPTS supports additional, new initiatives. We welcome the opportunity to work with NTSB and others to promote and achieve the following:

Congressional approval and federal implementation of a nationally uniform law for when, where, how, and under what conditions motorists must stop for school buses that are stopped, with student loading and unloading lights activated and stop arm(s) deployed, while picking up or discharging students;

Adoption of a nationally uniform requirement for the specific, step-by-step procedures that students and school bus drivers must follow during loading and unloading, to include a uniform procedure for school bus drivers to signal students when it is safe to cross and to warn them of hazards;

Approval of state laws to authorize the use of photo/video enforcement and other technologies to mitigate illegal passing of school buses, based on studies conducted by NHTSA or other agencies.

Funding for targeted enforcement and awareness campaigns by state and local law enforcement agencies to reduce the incidence of illegal passing.

- NASDPTS has published on our website the associated NTSB [document](#), released concurrently with HAR-20/02, "Keeping Students Safe from Motorists Who Pass School Buses," and we encourage our members to review it.

We encourage all school transportation providers to review these recommendations. NASDPTS is copying this response concurrently to our state director members. We are also ensuring the NTSB receives a concurrent copy of our memorandum of transmittal to state directors.

We greatly value the important safety work of the National Transportation Safety Board and appreciate this opportunity to respond to the safety recommendations. We trust the above actions will address the listed recommendations satisfactorily. As always, NASDPTS remains available to assist the Safety Board.

Sincerely,



Charlie Hood, Executive Director
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