



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration



State of Bus Safety in the U.S.: Summary of Federal and State Regulations

Background

Bus Safety Study: A Report to Congress analyzed the safety of public transit buses and over-the-road buses (OTRBs) based on a review of accidents that resulted in injuries and fatalities when public transit buses were traveling on “highway routes” (routes on which 50% or more of the route is provided on a roadway with a speed limit of greater than 45 mph).

This report, *State of Bus Safety in the U.S.: Summary of Federal and State Regulations*, specifically builds upon Conclusion 2 of the bus safety study: “Based on the examination of state laws and regulations, an expanded, comprehensive review of regulations and standards developed by all states is warranted. The findings of this examination should be used in the development of national transit bus safety standards and vehicle safety performance measures.”

Objectives

The primary objective of this study was to provide a comprehensive overview of transit bus safety regulations and standards developed by all 50 states, as well as information on how state departments of transportation (DOTs) regulate the maintenance or operation of transit/paratransit vehicles operated by public transit agencies.

Findings and Conclusions

While the existence of laws and regulations may impact public transit bus safety, it cannot be concluded that there is a direct correlation between the existence of these laws and regulations and the relative safety of bus transit; however, in states without transit safety-related laws and regulations, transit agencies may be exposed to more transit safety risk.

The study includes the results of a search of state legislative websites for statutes, rules, or regulations related to public transit, and collected bus standards relating to (1) bus operators, including screening, training, testing, licensure, background reporting, and other personnel related regulations or requirements, and (2) vehicle operations, equipment, maintenance, and procurement standards and guidelines, including frequency of vehicle inspections, maintenance inspection thresholds, pre-trip inspections, and procurement standards and vehicle specifications. These rules and regulations are separated into categories, including Incorporation of Federal Regulations, Power to Enforce or Regulate, Vehicles, Operations, Personnel, and Workplace Policies.

There is wide variety across the states with regard to the extent and scope of transit bus safety legislation. While larger states have the most far-reaching bus safety laws and regulations, the legislation relating to bus safety is relatively limited in many states. This might be expected, given that the states with wider-ranging bus safety laws generally tend to contain more densely-populated, urban areas with a history of well-established transit systems. However, the range of transit bus safety legislation in most states falls somewhere in between these two extremes. Generally speaking, states with more extensive bus safety laws go into much greater detail with regard to vehicle equipment requirements and are more likely to specify requirements with regard to safe operating procedures, operator qualifications and training, and policies relating to safety and drug and alcohol testing, although states with more limited legislation sometimes prescribe requirements in these areas as well.

For quick reference, the report provides a link to a spreadsheet containing basic information on state DOT regulation of transit bus safety, state requirements for annual transit bus inspections, and a list of laws/regulations with hyperlinks to each statutory reference. The spreadsheet is located at www.transitsafetycenter.org.

Benefits

Knowledge of current transit safety-related state laws and standards can be a valuable resource to FTA, state governments, and public transit agencies in the establishment of new transit safety-related regulations.

Project Information

FTA Report No. 0078

This research project was conducted by Jennifer Flynn and Lisa Staes of the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida. For more information, contact FTA Project Manager Roy Chen at (202) 366-0462, royweishun.chen@dot.gov. All research reports can be found at www.fta.dot.gov/research.