



National School Transportation Association

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**Statement of the
NATIONAL SCHOOL
TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION**

for the record of the

**U. S. Senate
Committee on Commerce, Science and
Transportation**

Hearing on Surface Transportation Security

January 18, 2007

The National School Transportation Association is the membership organization for school bus companies that provide pupil transportation. Our members are private businesses engaged primarily in transporting public school students to and from school and school-related activities for the tens of thousands of school districts across the country that choose not to operate their own school buses. In addition, our member companies provide specialized transportation for students with disabilities, community transportation, charter service, emergency transportation in times of need, and other transportation services. NSTA members range from small family businesses serving one district to large corporations operating thousands of buses across many states, all committed to the safe, efficient and economical transportation of America's children.

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Statement on School Bus Security

The National School Transportation Association is concerned that the nation's largest mass transportation fleet has been overlooked in Congress' efforts to secure our transportation system.

Each weekday about 470,000 yellow school buses travel the nation's roads, about one third of which are privately owned. Our fleet is 2.5 times the size of all other forms of mass transportation—transit, intercity buses, commercial airlines and rail—combined. During the school year we make more than 50 million passenger trips daily carrying the country's most vulnerable passengers—our children. Our exposure is far greater than public transportation's at 32 million trips daily, yet the school bus industry has received little attention and no funding at all from the Federal government.

School Buses and Terrorism

School buses have been targets of terrorists not only in countries such as Israel, Thailand, Yemen, and African countries, but also in Canada and the United States. So far, the attacks in this country have been domestic, but they illustrate the concerns of the industry—and indeed of the country.

- The most notorious case occurred 30 years ago when a gang of armed men hijacked a school bus in California, taking 26 children hostage. The men forced the children and their driver into a buried van and kept them underground for 16 hours, demanding \$5 million ransom.
- In 1995, a man claiming to have a bomb hijacked a school bus with eleven special needs children in Miami. Police killed the hijacker, who turned out to be unarmed.
- In 1996, a 15-year-old boy commandeered a school bus in Salt Lake City and killed the driver. He later killed himself after crashing into a home.
- In January 2002, a school bus driver in Pennsylvania abandoned his regular route and took thirteen children on an unauthorized trip to Washington DC. The driver, armed

with a rifle, eluded attempts to find the bus for six hours. Despite a massive search by police, the bus wasn't found until the hijacker turned himself in.

- In January 2006, an armed man hijacked a school bus in Los Angeles County, California, forcing the driver at gunpoint to drive 200 miles before the driver outwitted him and escaped.

As Congress knows, buses are a common target of terrorists worldwide. The Federal Bureau of Investigation estimates that 40% of attacks on transportation systems are aimed at buses. Additionally, schools in this country have been identified as potential terrorist targets, and TSA has issued warnings of potential terrorist interest in school buses. Buses carrying children are particularly popular targets, for there is little that human beings fear more than a threat to their children.

School buses are iconic symbols of America and of America's unique educational system. As President Bush said in his Homeland Security Presidential Directive #7, it is the policy of the United States to protect our Nation's critical resources against terrorist attacks that could have psychological and symbolic impact and undermine the public's morale and confidence in our national institutions. An attack on school buses would have a damaging psychological effect on this country and would destroy confidence in the nation's ability to protect our children. Despite the potential for devastating results if terrorists were systematically to target school buses in this country, the Federal government has not included school transportation in its efforts to provide a secure public transportation system.

School Buses and Security

Like public transit, school buses operate in an open environment. Routes are routinely published at the beginning of the school year and rarely change during the year. School buses make the same stops at the same time every day, making it very easy for anyone to intercept a bus. School bus stops are unprotected, and usually unattended by an adult.

School buses in most states cannot be locked when students are on board; therefore they are vulnerable to penetration by outsiders. School bus drivers have no shield, compartment, or other protection; since they, unlike public transit or intercity bus drivers, are responsible for their passengers, they cannot be isolated from them.

School bus operations vary greatly in their sophistication and their facilities, but the majority operate from unprotected bus yards, where prior to 9/11, the biggest concern was vandalism. Industry officials estimate that bus fleets are grounded on an average of once a week by vandals. While these incidents are usually the result of student pranks rather than serious attempts to cause death or injury, they show how easily a terrorist could access school buses either to use as mobile Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) or to implement a hijacking.

In many communities across the country, school buses are the only form of mass transportation available for evacuation of large populations. Security of the school transportation system is

important not only to protect the students who ride buses daily, but also to ensure that we are ready and able to respond to critical incidents elsewhere in our communities. Many fleets participate in emergency planning with local government for everything from police responses to nuclear plant evacuation planning. School buses from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut played an important role in both evacuating people from the impact area in Manhattan on 9/11 and transporting critical workers into the area during the search and recovery period. This is part of a long tradition of service in times of disaster, whether natural or manmade.

Officials in New Orleans have been criticized for not incorporating the school bus fleet into their emergency plans prior to and during Hurricane Katrina. Buses that could have been used to transport residents to safety were instead trapped under water. We all are aware of the consequences in that instance of the failure to recognize the importance of the local school bus fleet.

For the past four years, the three national school transportation associations, the National Association of Pupil Transportation (NAPT) which represents primarily public school officials who operate or oversee student transportation in local districts; the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS) which represents primarily state government officials responsible for school transportation; and the National School Transportation Association (NSTA) which represents primarily school bus companies that provide student transportation under contract to public school districts, have worked with the Transportation Security Administration in trying to determine the security needs of the school bus industry. Despite our frequent requests, the agency has been unable to provide a comprehensive vulnerability assessment of school bus operations, as they have done for other modes. The industry has produced some materials, such as the National School Transportation Association's "Top 25 Security Action Items for School Bus Operations" and the National Association for Pupil Transportation's "Security Assessment Tool," and all three associations have posted security information on their websites. In addition, many individual operators have attended security forums at their own expense, and most are involved in their local emergency response planning activities.

Last year the American Trucking Associations and the three national school bus associations collaborated to develop "School Bus Watch," a training program derived from "Highway Watch." In addition, we worked with Consolidated Safety Services, Inc. on a security awareness and training program funded by the Transportation Security Administration. While these programs provide welcome training to school transportation personnel, our industry still lags behind all other modes in asset protection. Fewer than ten percent of school buses have global positioning systems (GPS) or other vehicle locator systems, fewer than half have surveillance cameras on board, and almost none have redundant or integrated communication systems.

School Buses and Funding

School transportation is funded almost entirely by state and local government. The Federal government provides no funding source for routine home-to-school transportation or school

activity transportation. (In fiscal year 2003, the first federal funds became available for school buses when the Environmental Protection Agency provided \$5 million for grants to reduce diesel emissions as part of their Clean School Bus USA program.)

As state governments are decreasing expenditures, a larger burden falls on municipalities to support school transportation. Some school districts have turned to parents to pay part of the cost of busing their children, and some have wrestled with the possibility of discontinuing school bus transportation entirely—knowing that such a move would not only present a hardship for many families and increase traffic and pollution around schools, but more importantly, would put students at much greater risk as they find less safe ways to get to school.

In this economic climate, finding the means to make significant security improvements to school transportation systems is difficult if not impossible.

Congress acknowledged the importance of school transportation in the U.S.A. Patriot Act, by specifically including school buses in the definition of mass transportation. But even though all other forms of mass transportation—airlines, rail, transit and intercity buses—have received Federal funding for security improvements, school transportation has received none.

In the past three years, school bus operators have spent almost \$12 million annually on increased security training. But if we are to make significant improvements in school transportation security, we must go beyond training to capitol investments in facilities and equipment. Some of the priorities of the industry are:

- 1) Electronic security devices for the bus, such as vehicle tracking, secure communications, and video monitoring that allow the driver to signal trouble, and allow sources outside the bus to locate the vehicle and assess the nature of the harmful activity.
- 2) Robust and interoperable communications systems that allow drivers and supervisors to signal and communicate with other agencies, such as law enforcement, on a regional or state level.
- 3) Security for bus storage areas, including fencing, electronic gates, lighting, and monitoring systems that restrict access to buses and bus facilities and alert operators to intruders.

These are needs that neither school bus operators nor local boards of education can fund alone. If we are to provide security for the 25 million children transported on school buses daily, we must have help from the Federal government. In the past four years, Congress has provided security funding of \$22 billion for commercial aviation, \$876 million for ports and shipping, \$387 million for public transit bus and rail, \$51 million for trucking, \$49 million for intercity bus, and \$15.5 million for Amtrak. The largest transportation system in the country, carrying its future, has received nothing. Our children deserve better.

Fiscal Notes – School Bus Security

Assumptions:

470,000 school buses nationwide
 15,000 school bus facilities nationwide
 7% of school buses currently have GPS or other vehicle locating systems
 2% of school buses currently have electronic student tracking systems
 42% of school buses currently have video surveillance systems
 14% of school buses currently have door locks
 85% of school buses currently have two-way communication, generally radios
 15% of communication systems are interoperable with other agencies
 49% of school bus parking facilities are fenced and lighted
 16% of school bus parking facilities have video monitoring
 8% of school bus parking facilities are monitored by a guard

Costs:

GPS: \$900/bus for hardware plus \$30/month communication expense		
	437,000 buses x \$900	\$393.3 million
	437,000 x 30 x 12	\$157.3 million annually
Bus video surveillance: \$2,500/bus		
	272,600 buses x \$2500	\$681.5 million
Two-way radios: \$900/bus plus \$3000/base station		
	70,500 buses x \$900	\$63.5 million
	2,250 stations x \$3000	\$6.75 million
Facility fencing, lighting, gates: \$100,000/25-bus facility		
	7,650 facilities x \$100,000	\$765 million
Electronic monitoring of facilities: \$6,000/facility (hardware)		
	12,600 facilities x \$6,000	\$75.6 million
	Total	\$2 billion capital expense