

# Guide for Selecting a Vehicle for Your Next School Activity Trip

Introductory statement:

You have planned a school activity trip, and now you need to find the most appropriate means of transportation. Safety must be your first concern. According to a 2002 study by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, school children are safest in buses -- school buses or motorcoaches. Either of these is significantly safer than transporting school children in vans or other passenger motor vehicles.

There are a number of important points to consider in making your decision. While cost is an important issue, it should not be the primary consideration. We have listed some questions and information to help you decide the type of bus that could meet your needs. The transportation experts in your district -- your school bus fleet supervisor or your school bus contractor -- have additional information you may need to answer the questions, and are in the best position to advise you about your vehicle choice.

The decision as to whether you use a school bus or a motorcoach should be made after a full review and understanding of a wide variety of factors. This includes issues relating to time, distance, comfort, geography, and several other issues. What follows are specific questions and information about motorcoaches and school buses that you should consider.

#1. What are your current Federal/State/local regulations/policies/guidelines concerning the types of buses to be used for school activity trips?

Read, understand and follow any applicable regulations, policies or guidelines.

#2. How long is the trip in terms of hours? Will the driver be able to complete the trip within a normal workday (no more than 10 hours of driving or 15 hours of duty, including any non-driving responsibilities)? Will you need to arrange for relief drivers at locations along the trip?

If a trip is interstate commercial carriers are typically more familiar with shuttling drivers for longer distances.

#3. Will the trip require students to have baggage or equipment? Where will this baggage be stored during the trip? [It should not be kept in the aisles or stacked in empty seats -- both of those practices are unsafe.]

Many school buses have no external storage capacity. Motorcoaches generally have larger storage capacities for luggage and equipment than school buses. External storage capacity may, or may not, be better than transporting luggage or equipment in a separate vehicle.

#4. Is the trip of such a time length that plans need to be made for rest stops and meal stops? What is the range of motorcoaches and school buses? Will the bus have to refuel en route? Are safe/clean facilities available along the planned route for rest stops?

operation. School buses do not have such facilities.

In either type of vehicle, plans for meal stops may have to be considered. If a meal stop is necessary, passengers could use available rest room facilities, and school buses could also be refueled.

#5. Is the bus properly equipped for the intended trip? A highway trip over mountains requires different transmission ratios than local routes over flat terrain. A longer trip may suggest more comfortably designed passenger seats, air ride seat for the driver, and air ride suspension for the vehicle.

Generally, motorcoaches are more comfortable for drivers and passengers on long trips. The performance capacity (hill climbing and braking) of the vehicle must be appropriate for the terrain. Importantly, all safety equipment must be in proper operating condition.

#6. While at the destination, will the bus (and its contents) be in an area where it will be secure from theft or vandalism?

External storage areas on a motorcoach or on a school bus are usually lockable.

#7. Is the school adequately insured for this activity trip?

This question deals with the school, not the carrier. In the event of a crash, where the bus driver is "at fault", it is in your best interest to know you are adequately insured. If a district school bus is used, the school district will have insurance. For a motorcoach or school bus company, definitely determine their level of insurance coverage before being hired. Interstate motor carriers are required to maintain \$5 million of liability coverage.

If you choose a motorcoach, use the information in FMCSA's "Keeping Kids Safe" brochure. Please visit their website at [www.fmcsa.dot.gov](http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov).

If you choose a school bus, check with your local school transportation director to make arrangements. Be sure to raise all of the questions above.

## **Guide to Hiring Bus Companies for Student Extracurricular Activities**

Using a list of prequalified bus companies for transporting students to and from extracurricular activities is the simplest way to assure uniformity throughout a State, county, or school.

A. If no list of prequalified bus companies is available, request the bus company's USDOT number and log on to <http://www.safersys.org> for information, including:

- the bus company's current USDOT safety rating, if issued, and the date of the company's last compliance review (on-site inspection by motor carrier safety authorities);
- whether the company is authorized to transport passengers for hire;
- whether the company has current insurance in force;

- the company's record of regulatory violations and roadside out-of-service violations, with a comparison to national averages; and
- the company's highway crash history.

B. Whether or not you are working from a list of prequalified bus companies, ask the following questions:

- Does the driver have a current commercial driver's license (CDL) with a passenger endorsement?
- Does the driver possess a valid medical certificate?
- Does the company have a driver drug and alcohol testing program that complies with U.S. DOT regulations?
- Will your trip be completed within the legal limit of 10 driving hours? If not, will there be a second driver or overnight rest stop scheduled to legally complete the trip?
- Does the company have its buses inspected annually? By whom?
- Does the company have the required \$5 million of public liability insurance?
- Does the company subcontract with others for equipment and/or drivers? If so, what is the name of the second bus company and its USDOT number?
- Does the company have notification procedures for roadside emergencies and breakdowns? Is the driver equipped with a wireless communications device?

The best defense against a life-endangering incident is a well-qualified, healthy, and rested driver. Take the time to check out the company and driver you hire. For more information on ensuring a safe trip, visit [www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safetyprogs/bus.htm](http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safetyprogs/bus.htm). Your students, and their parents, will greatly appreciate it.

## **Moving Kids Safely**

### **A guide to hiring charter transportation**

#### **Is your school up to speed on safety?**

Nothing is more rewarding than providing students with the opportunity to travel, be it for a field trip, a recreational outing, a school event or another activity. Thousands of students are on the road and most of the time, they travel safely. But ask yourself one simple question: What would happen if there were an accident?

What if your charter bus skidded off the highway? What if your driver fell asleep? These types of accidents occur. Public outcry is immediate and media coverage is extensive. We can help you reduce the risk to your students through more careful selection of bus companies. And while we understand that price is an important consideration – it is second to the safety of your students.

## **Exactly how safe is your bus company?**

Whether you're relying on an existing vendor or choosing a new charter transportation company, it's a good idea to make sure their safety record is satisfactory and compliant with federal motor carrier safety regulations. The United States Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) keeps records on every bus company that operates in more than one state. To access this information, all you need is the company's U.S. DOT number. With it, you can use our "SAFER SYSTEM" at [www.safersys.org](http://www.safersys.org). There, you'll find an up-to-date history on the company including:

- Whether the company has authority to transport passengers in interstate commerce
- The company's accident history, safety rating and insurance status
- Performance during roadside inspections
- Whether the company has been examined by a law enforcement or regulatory professional

Beware that some bus companies offering interstate service have not registered for a U.S. DOT number as required. If you are offered interstate service from a bus company without a U.S. DOT number, report it to your Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) field office. The telephone numbers are listed on the back of this brochure. A FMCSA staff person can also provide you with guidance and assistance in hiring a safe bus company.

## **Don't be afraid to ask questions.**

To hire a safe bus company, you need information. It is important to know if your driver is qualified, well-rested and drug- and alcohol-free. You also need to know if the bus has been properly maintained and is in good operating condition. Make sure any company you choose is willing to answer questions about safety and security:

- What is the company's U.S. DOT number?
- Does your driver have a current Commercial Driver's License with a "passenger" endorsement?
- Does your driver have a valid medical certificate?
- Does the company have a driver drug- and alcohol-testing program that complies with U.S. DOT regulations?
- Will your trip be completed within the legal limit of 10 driving hours? If not, will a second driver or overnight rest stop be necessary to perform the trip legally?
- Are the buses inspected annually? By whom?
- Does the bus company have the required \$5 million of public liability insurance?
- Does the bus company subcontract for equipment and/or drivers? If so, what is the name of the second bus company and its U.S. DOT number?
- What company procedures exist for roadside emergencies and breakdowns?

Asking questions is a great start, but it's not enough. To make sure your trip is safe, you need to enlist the help of someone who understands the answers. The more you know, the better your chances of preventing an accident.

**Not all bus companies are equally safe.**

It's important to know that there are many federal regulations in place – from the number of hours a driver can operate a bus to medical standards for bus drivers – because not all bus companies are safe. As part of the U.S. DOT, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is the "Truck and Bus Safety Agency." We establish and enforce minimum standards that interstate bus companies must follow for their equipment and their drivers. We also fund states to perform safety inspections on buses.

If you experience an unsafe trip in which students are injured or, you believe, endangered by the actions of the bus company, call 1-888-DOT-SAFT (1-888-368-7238).

**Start safe. Stay safe.**

All it takes to keep kids safe is a little extra effort. Simply follow the guidelines listed here, and call your local FMCSA field office. We'll gladly assist you with any questions about the safety record of a bus company. All of the phone numbers and web addresses you need are listed in this brochure. With your help, we can make sure that safety is everybody's highest priority.

**FMCSA and safety-related websites**

Visit the FMCSA website for additional safety information and to check on a company's safety rating by using the SAFER System.

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA)

<http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov>

FMCSA SAFER System

<http://www.safersys.org>

**Other bus safety-related websites**

American Bus Association (ABA)

<http://www.buses.org>

Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA)

<http://www.cvsa.org>

National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT)

<http://www.napt.org>

National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS)

<http://www.nasdpts.org>

National School Transportation Association

<http://www.schooltrans.com>

North Carolina Safety Organization

<http://www.ncbussafety.org>

Pupil Transportation Safety Institute (PTSI)

<http://www.ptsi.org>

School Bus Information Council  
<http://www.schoolbusinfo.org>  
United Motorcoach Association (UMA)  
<http://www.uma.org>

**FMCSA field offices**

Alabama	334-223-7244
Alaska	907-271-4068
Arizona	602-379-6851
Arkansas	501-324-5050
California	916-498-5050
Colorado	303-969-6748
Connecticut	860-659-6700
Delaware	302-734-8173
District of Columbia	202-219-3553
Florida	850-942-9338
Georgia	404-562-3620
Hawaii	808-541-2700
Idaho	208-334-1842
Illinois	217-492-4608
Indiana	317-226-7474
Iowa	515-233-7400
Kansas	785-267-7288
Kentucky	502-223-6779
Louisiana	225-757-7640
Maine	207-622-8358
Maryland	410-962-2889
Massachusetts	617-494-2770
Michigan	517-377-1866
Minnesota	651-291-6150
Mississippi	601-965-4219
Missouri	573-636-3246
Montana	406-449-5304
Nebraska	402-437-5986
Nevada	775-687-5335
New Hampshire	603-228-3112
New Jersey	609-637-4222
New Mexico	505-346-7858
New York	518-431-4145
North Carolina	919-856-4378
North Dakota	701-250-4346
Ohio	614-280-5657
Oklahoma	405-605-6047
Oregon	717-221-4443
Pennsylvania	503-399-5775

Puerto Rico	787-766-5985
Rhode Island	401-528-4578
South Carolina	803-765-5414
South Dakota	605-224-8202
Tennessee	615-781-5781
Texas	512-536-5980
Utah	801-963-0096
Vermont	802-828-4480
Virginia	804-775-3322
Washington	360-753-9875
West Virginia	304-347-5935
Wisconsin	608-829-7530
Wyoming	307-772-2305

### **Check a bus company's safety record**

Visit [www.safersys.org](http://www.safersys.org) to check a bus company's safety record.

## **MOVING KIDS SAFELY**

### **National Student Transportation Safety Initiative**

**Goal:** To increase the use of safe bus companies for transporting schoolchildren to and from sporting events, field trips, and other extracurricular activities.

**Background:** In June 2002, drug use, fatigue and inattention contributed to a bus crash that killed the driver and four teenagers and injured dozens of people traveling to a church camp about 30 miles east of Dallas. The bus company, it was later found, was in violation of several Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations.

While there are extensive efforts to assure that safe bus companies are hired for home-to-school transportation, too often bus companies that transport schoolchildren to and from extracurricular activities are selected solely on the cost of transportation. We believe that people who arrange for extracurricular transportation would be more concerned with safety if they knew which companies are safe and which are unsafe. The purpose of this outreach initiative is to develop, and make publicly available in each State, a means of evaluating the safeness of each bus company.

**Objective:** To develop a coalition or core group of Federal, State and industry partners in every State to focus attention on the safe transportation of schoolchildren. The strategy is to obtain the support of State Departments of Education, and to develop a simplified means of providing the best safety information on each bus company operating in that State. Optimally, states will establish criteria for selecting safe bus companies and publish a list of approved carriers from which to choose.

At a minimum, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration will provide safety data on its Web site ([www.safersys.org](http://www.safersys.org)) regarding interstate bus companies. To develop safety information about bus companies not included on the Federal site, partnership coalitions will work to develop the

efficiently as possible.

The bottom line is that, even if only a limited number of carriers are identified in a given State, bus companies identified, as having poor safety records should not be used to transport our schoolchildren. Implementing this safety initiative down to the local decision-maker can take many different routes. For example, the State of North Carolina maintains a database that identifies approved bus companies available for use throughout the State. This centralized approach may not be practical for every State.

However, comparable centralized evaluation processes could be promoted at the county level, the school district level, or by individual schools.

Given our elevated concern for safety and security in the aftermath of September 11, this is a small but important step in looking out for the safety of our children.

- Moving Kids Safely - By Bus (Program Overview - Objective - Strategy)  
[PDF Version](#) - [HTML Version](#)
- Guide for Selecting a Vehicle for Your Next School Activity Trip  
[PDF Version](#) - [HTML Version](#)
- Guide To Hiring Bus Companies for Student Extracurricular Activities  
[PDF Version](#) - [HTML Version](#)
- Keeping Kids Safe - A Guide to Hiring Charter Transportation Brochure  
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