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Chair

The Honourable Judy A. Sgro

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): I call to order this meeting of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. This is meeting 137.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are doing a study of bus passenger safety.

We will start with the witnesses we have with us for this section.

From DRL Coach Lines Ltd, we have Jason Roberts, chief executive officer. He is coming to us from Newfoundland and Labrador. From Parsons and Sons Transportation, we have Scott Parsons, president.

Mr. Roberts, perhaps you would like to lead off, please, for no more than five minutes.

Mr. Jason Roberts (Chief Executive Officer, DRL Coach Lines Ltd): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's a pleasure to be with you people today via teleconference to talk about the safety of our operation and of all operations within the country for motorcoaches and school buses. Specifically right now we are more in the operation of motorcoaches. We operate a line-run scheduled service from Port aux Basques to St. John's, and they're off every day of the year, 365 days a year.

We've been in the business for three years shy of a century. With DRL, it's been almost 25 years.

We have many decisions to make when it comes to safety. Of course you have to have a safe vehicle, and a competent and conscientious driver who meets the requirements. As the operator, we have to have confidence in the person operating the vehicle. For us, as the people who trust those people to operate safely, to feel very confident whom we're putting there, that's not an easy task, especially for us here in Newfoundland. A good driver can go to Alberta and probably make three times the money. We still have to be very dependent on whom we choose and whom we put behind the wheel.

As I stated, the safety record for motorcoaches... We can't be too sure of...our maintenance team before the bus goes on the road. But as a driver, it's your last-second or multi-second decision that decides where we are. Either we're on the road or we're in the rhubarb, in the ditch. We count on them very confidently to do that task for us.

When it comes to motorcoaches, there are many things.... I think a lot of people look at motorcoaches, and even school buses as a playground. We pick up charter groups. We pick up people. Passengers get on a motorcoach and they feel as if they're almost indispensable. We have seat belts in all our motorcoaches, but 40% or 50% are being used.

I think education for passengers on the importance of wearing seat belts is a critical factor. That comes with time. As education and as more and more discussions go on, people are going to make sure they wear those seat belts.

On the training of drivers—and I will come back to the operator of the school bus or motorcoach—my recommendation is that the more we can do to guarantee we have competent, careful and cautious drivers...that's where I feel that we should be going for the safety of the travelling public on motorcoaches and school buses in this country.

Thank you.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Roberts.

Mr. Parsons, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Scott Parsons (President, Parsons and Sons Transportation): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. I don't think I can say it all in five minutes. I'd love to be able to.

How do we achieve superior results in this industry? We employ superior people, we hire up, and we train, retrain, remedial train, we look for opportunities to be the best we can be for the passengers we carry.

In this country, I think we need more standardization of the way buses operate, and I think we need more standardization of the way our highways are marked. I'd like to know how many bus accidents were caused on ramps where the ramp speed was posted on the ramp and not before the ramp. I've seen this. I've seen buses where people were ejected from the bus and killed because the bus fell on them. Seat belts would definitely have prevented those deaths. We need better standardization of driver training. It just so happens that our company had the good fortune of joining forces with OMCA and Motor Coach Canada. We've been coming here for years. We've adopted every type of enhancement suggested to us by Brian Crow, Mr. Switzer, people in the OMCA, Dave Carroll—they've been our mentors. They've helped us to grow our business to be safe.

Training not only involves drivers, it involves mechanical staff. I'm lucky enough that I've been driving a bus and I've been a mechanic for 47 years. I've been to factory training at Prevost nine times, and Motor Coach Industries twice. I know the value of training, and I know that in our province today there are few places you can go where if you say MUX or DOC, DPF, DEF, that anyone in the garage would have a clue what you're talking about. This gives us a big problem when we're out on the road with a coach in Labrador or in the northern part of Newfoundland where I fix buses over the phone. It is a consideration. Manufacturers have stepped up. Prevost Car has Prevost Liaison. MCI has MCI ERSA, where now they can diagnose over a computer. It's fabulous. Technicians need to know how to do that. Companies have to invest in that.

Is there any minimal requirement for that? Would we be allowed to operate if the FAA was telling us how we should be conducting our business?

I've seen bad accidents caused by the way guardrails were posted on bridges. I wrote a letter to the Ministry of Transportation in Nova Scotia and had a bridge approach changed because of an accident involving one of our coaches. They tried to make it sound like it was the driver's inexperience on that bridge. A few years later, an Orléans Express bus went out into the water. Then I wrote the letter—two years too late. The bridge approach was changed and I received a letter from the Ministry of Transportation thanking me for my input.

We need more input like this. I consider this industry to be like a logic gate: more inputs, more outputs. We need more input from the industry.

I do think the seat belt rule is fabulous. I've retrofitted some MCI coaches with seat belts. It was costly but it was worth every penny. On safety announcements in coaches, I always do my safety announcement. I walk back through the bus and I make sure that people have their seat belts on. Whether they keep them on...how do we control that?

There's just too much to talk about, but I'm flattered that I'm here. I'm second generation. I filled up when I came here. I think you guys are onto something really good; I wish you the best of luck with it. If there's anything I can do, please let me know.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Parsons. I'm sure the committee will enjoy getting their questions answered from both of the gentlemen we have here.

Ms. Block, for five minutes.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): I want to thank our witnesses for joining us here this morning for this very important study.

I'm going to ask a question and either of you could feel free to answer it. I understand that the changes to the seat belt requirements on coach buses was in part an effort to harmonize Canada's regulations with the United States. In your view, was this a positive move by Transport Canada?

The Chair: Excuse me, can I just interrupt? The bells are going, which means a vote has been called. Do I have the permission of the committee to continue until five minutes before the vote?

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): What would be your plan, from a scheduling standpoint? Would we stay with questions until we vote and then let these guests go free?

The Chair: With the two gentlemen we have, we'll do five minutes for Ms. Block, five minutes here and five minutes over to Mr. Aubin.

By that time, I think we'd have to go for the vote, and then we would not have any further opportunity. We would go on to the next panel when we return from the vote.

Mr. Ron Liepert: As long as that's the schedule, yes.

The Chair: Is everybody good with that? Okay. Thank you.

My apologies in advance, Mr. Parsons and Mr. Roberts, but you know how it is.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Would you like me to re-ask that question?

Mr. Jason Roberts: No, I can answer.

Of course, I think it's a very positive move to bring the seat belt regulation forward. It's going to take some time to get there. As I stated in the beginning, I think even with regard to the users of coaches—especially when you get into charters and into younger groups, younger teams—a lot of them feel that it's a place where, on board, they're safe and don't need seat belts. So, it's going to take some input, some education, some training and some encouragement to really get results out of that.

There are accidents that happen where people get hurt with their seat belts on. I have been witness to that. Two years ago, I had a rollover with a coach. It tipped on its side. It didn't go on the roof. The only ones who were injured were the ones who didn't have their seat belts on, and the ones with no seat belt on fell on the people who had seat belts on, with an elbow in the groin or whatever. So, it still takes usage of this to really make it work.

Mr. Scott Parsons: Seat belts are a very positive thing, yes, by all means. Younger people today... My children, when they got on board a bus without seat belts, they were looking for them. They were shocked that there were no seat belts on the bus.

It's interesting. I drive a school bus from time to time, and the small children, when they get aboard, they turn around and say, "Mom, there's no seat belt." They're not allowed to be in the car unless they have their seat belt on. I think we're heading towards a culture where children are going to want to put them on as they grow older. I think we should have a mandate to put seat belts there.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay.

We've heard from previous witnesses, certainly, around the issue of seat belts on school buses in terms of compliance and enforcement. Who will be responsible to not only ensure that children do up their seat belts, but make sure that they stay done up during the duration of the time they are on the bus?

Who enforces the wearing of seat belts on a coach, and if right now it's not mandatory, how would you say coach companies would address that issue in terms of ensuring that people are complying with any sort of seat belt law?

• (1115)

Mr. Scott Parsons: Go ahead, Jason.

Mr. Jason Roberts: For me, it's going to be very difficult to enforce. On my scheduled service, actually, I have an on-board attendant, like a flight attendant. It's probably something I can give them or the government can give them: the autonomy to make sure that people have their seat belt on or at the next stop they're going to be asked to get off—"Take bags. See you. Goodbye. You're in violation of the act." I can make that happen there very well. But, of course, that comes with a cost. I'm already incurring the cost, so I can make it happen relatively simply.

I don't think you're going to find that anywhere else in Canada, where there's an on-board attendant. Realistically, it's difficult.

I'll give you an example. I have coaches that take very professional men and women to job sites. Am I going to be called probably twice a week and asked if I can check and see if the men and women who are going to work on the coach are in compliance with wearing seat belts? I mean, come on. In my world, you're an adult lady. You're going to get on the coach. You have a seat belt. You know that you should have it on.

With school buses, it's a little different. Again, it's probably going to come back to a chaperone. I think the driver has enough stress and pressure to make sure he's driving the way he should, with due care and attention, to maintain his coach or school bus where it should be. He should not really have to make sure that the kids have seat belts on, or have some kid screeching that one kid has his seat belt off, you know?

It's going to be very difficult. It's going to have some sort of monitoring in order to get it to work. However, I think with time—and as Mr. Parsons stated—with the education of the kids, they will get on, and probably within five or six years, 95% of them will have their seat belts on. Again, it's not the driver's responsibility in a passenger car to make sure that the passengers have seat belts on, if they're of age. As for younger passengers, they are responsible.

Thank you.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Parsons and Mr. Roberts, one thing you could consider, if your coaches are equipped with safety belts, is to have some kind of document or notice on the ticket about contributory liability. If they're not wearing a safety belt and they are injured, that reduces the damages they're entitled to, because they have contributed to their own difficulty by not wearing the seat belt.

It becomes a little more difficult with kids, of course; normally a child isn't travelling alone, but then it should be the responsibility of the parent or guardian to make sure that happens.

Looking at your fleet, the focus of this study is to talk about survivability in the event of a crash. Obviously, anything you can do to prevent the crash in the first place is absolutely golden, but once a crash takes place, that's where the safety equipment on the vehicle makes a big difference.

Do either of you do a mid-life refit on your buses? Would you have an opportunity in that case of retrofitting seat belts, or is that a

dead letter as far as you're concerned because you already have seat belts on all your coaches?

Go ahead, Scott.

Mr. Scott Parsons: We had two MCI coaches retrofitted two years ago. We sent them to Montreal, and they did them to factory spec, I'm told. It cost around \$40,000 per coach. They removed the old seats.

I was told the frame of the coach when it was built was sturdy enough to support the three-point seat belt in the case of a collision. It's been a resounding success.

Mr. Ken Hardie: How often do you replace your fleet?

Mr. Scott Parsons: As often as we can afford to, sir. We've been fortunate the past few years. I just purchased a new 2019 coach a few days ago. It's in Winnipeg. I purchased a new coach last year, two the year before and one the year before that. They all had three-point seat belts.

Everything we buy now has seat belts, plus we have had those two sent back to the factory. I'm planning on sending three more like it back to the factory. It's expensive, but it's worth it.

The bonuses—

• (1120)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Sir, I'll have to interrupt you right there because we're short of time.

Mr. Roberts, the integrity of the actual coach itself... We certainly witnessed horrific damage in the case of the Humboldt crash, and we've heard so far that there don't necessarily seem to be very strong standards with respect to the frame and the integrity of a coach in the event of a crash.

What have you noticed?

Mr. Jason Roberts: That's a difficult one.

If it's a slight crash, I think the flexibility of the unit gives you less impact. You don't have as much ejection and so much sudden, abrupt stop-standing. The coach absorbs some of the energy of the impact.

It all depends how significant it is. If you have a 65,000-pound tractor-trailer coming toward you, let's be fair, it's not going to withstand it. I don't know what you can make that would withstand that. It's horrific. It's very dangerous and nasty.

Mr. Ken Hardie: It's difficult for sure. Thank you.

I'm going to turn over the rest of my time to Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today, Jason by video, and Scott.

Scott, I know your busing system; you've been transporting school children to events across the province. From your perspective, what are the challenges you would see in requiring all school buses, or any buses, to have seat belts for the children you transport?

Mr. Scott Parsons: One of the things we see in our area is that all school routes are double routes, and you have a limited time to operate those routes. When a school bus gets to the end of one school route, it has to turn around and go back to the end of the district and start a second route. Time is of the essence.

There are areas in St. John's where a bus can do a loop quite quickly. In my view, Mr. Rogers, I think compartmentalization has been a resounding success when the speed of the bus doesn't exceed 50 kilometres an hour.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Beyond that...?

Mr. Scott Parsons: The thing about a low-speed bus is there's less chance of a bus being involved in a rollover where children are being tossed around inside the bus. If anything happens, it's probably going to be a frontal impact where the children will come ahead and compartmentalization will contain the children.

In an issue of Bus & Motor Coach News there was an operator in the United States that actually fitted seats with two-point seat belts and it was involved in a collision. Children who weren't strapped in survived and children who were strapped in were killed because of the upper body trauma caused by the seat belts. We have to be careful with that.

Over 50 kilometres an hour on secondary highways where the speed is accelerated to 80 to 90 kilometres per hour, I think the kids should be strapped in and they should be three-point belts.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Rogers.

We'll go to Mr. Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us.

Since the launch of our study on the possibility of equipping buses with seatbelts, I would say that the discourse has changed, especially after Minister Garneau posted a tweet on April 6. I'll read it to you, in case you missed it:

Our thoughts continue to be with the families of those who lost their lives in the Humboldt bus crash. We've taken measures to require new large & medium size intercity buses to be equipped with seatbelts.

Given this tweet, it seems that the minister's approach is clear and that his decision has been made. All new buses will be equipped with seatbelts. Since the issue is no longer being raised for new buses, we must now focus on the transition.

How can companies such as yours, which probably already operate a number of buses without seatbelts, make this transition? I suppose that passengers who are aware of this new standard or this desire expressed by the minister will prefer to board a bus equipped with seatbelts.

How much would it cost to convert a bus that doesn't have seatbelts to a bus that meets the standards? How many years would it take to convert your respective fleets?

Mr. Parsons, let's start with you.

•(1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Parsons: I don't know the answer to that question. I can give an opinion.

I have been in the school bus business and have been fixing them for over 47 years. I've seen the best and the worst. I remember when my dad started in the business. He rolled the chassis out from under the body and replaced the chassis to get another service life out of the body of the bus. That can't happen today. Manufacturers have reduced the wall thickness of the bodies and they've made the buses lighter. The chassis are lighter. It's interesting after a few years on the road, to put 63 high school students in a school bus and go out on Foxtrap Access Road and look in the mirror and watch the seats of the bus doing this as the bus is going down the road. The body of the bus today is made so light that it can't take the punishment that it did back in the 1950s and 1960s.

I can't see that it's possible to retrofit a school bus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Parsons.

Mr. Roberts, what do you think?

[*English*]

Mr. Jason Roberts: I have that opinion. Many of our provinces have a lifespan on coaches. In Newfoundland we have 12 years. There's a new bus this year, so if this happens two years from now, maybe with your 10-year integration plan everything will have evolved in time, so we'll be there.

Again, I agree with Mr. Parsons about the school bus that it's not feasible to get something that's at mid-life and do it. Motorcoaches are a little bit different again. Motorcoaches have different bodies and different lifespans. Most of them are stainless steel and fibreglass. It has a forever ongoing lifespan when it comes to the actual structure of the unit. I think it can be feasible to do this with motorcoaches going back to a certain year, providing someone is going to guarantee it, and the manufacturer is going to state that it meets the standard of what a three-point seat belt should be. For our fleet now, I think I might have two left that don't have seat belts. I have four 2019s. They all have seat belts. Everything since 2013 has had seat belts.

One of the things I will mention, as Mr. Parsons mentioned also, is Prevost. Since 2013, it's been mandatory...they won't manufacture a coach without seat belts. I think it's a liability thing. It's good to know that when you buy a coach, between me and you, I think that....

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I have a quick question, since I don't have much time left.

I fully understand the potential difficulties involved in this transition, especially for school buses. It seems that these vehicles will need to meet new safety standards. As a result, should school buses that can't be modified be prohibited from travelling at high speed? I'm thinking of school buses that travel at 90 kilometres an hour on highways during extracurricular activities. Do the buses pose a greater risk under these circumstances? Should we insist that these buses use only secondary roads?

[English]

Mr. Jason Roberts: I agree with you 100%. Normally, it comes down to how a lot of the schools and the school districts are looking for a cheaper way to travel. If they're going on a ski trip, they will take a school bus versus taking a coach because, of course, a coach is going to cost them more coin. It's on a highway. They're on a highway in winter conditions, in a school bus. They're playing a different game. It's much more risky.

Of course, for me, whenever I have a coach available, I'll send a coach, for my comfort zone, knowing I have a coach on the road, not a school bus—for the same cost.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We still have a few minutes if there are some additional questions from the committee members.

Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers: I just want to ask Mr. Roberts a question. You talked about it at the beginning of your presentation. You really focused on driver training, driver competence as a big factor in terms of how you're maintaining your safety record. You talked about how your buses travel over long stretches at high speeds, particularly in Newfoundland and Labrador, with some of the winter weather conditions and so on. What do you think is the best possible thing the government could do to ensure safe or safer bus travel? Are things being done to the national standards that Scott talked about? Are things being done at this stage that you see as enough? What else should government be doing?

• (1130)

Mr. Jason Roberts: Mr. Rogers, I don't know if there's really a lot you can do. The regulation of what's required, maybe for passenger transportation, is something I've talked about. You get a class 2 licence for Newfoundland and that allows you to operate a motorcoach or a school bus. If you're going on the highway, if you're doing higher speeds, if you're doing more intersections, I think there should be a certain amount of experience that's needed. I know that the new training out west is going, to my thinking, to 120 hours of service before you can actually obtain a full permit.

I think that a lot of it comes back to us as the carriers to know the background, to know the people, to know where they are. We're very compliant with alcohol and drug programs. We're doing all that. I think weather is a big factor in a lot of this for motorcoach safety; and unfortunately, Humboldt was probably not in one of those situations. To me, with the weather conditions, it should be someone who can know when to say when. At the next stop, if the conditions are too bad, stop.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Sikand has a question. It's okay. We still have five minutes on the clock if anybody has any further short questions they'd like to get some answers to.

Mr. Sikand.

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Parsons, I completely agree with what you said in your opening statement. My only concern is that since coaches and buses operate interprovincially, due to the divisions of power, there's a lot of legislation that is provincial and not federal. How do you incentivize the manufacturers to take this up and make the changes? There are dollar amounts associated with the retrofits and the seat belts. How do we incentivize the manufacturers?

Mr. Scott Parsons: I don't know how to answer that question; I really don't.

I know when the idea of seat belts came around, MCI started building their frames sturdier in 2003. I think, from unit number 68-300, Prevost can retrofit a bus with three-point seat belts quite easily. They just remove the old seats and put in the new seats with the three-point belts. Before that, they'd have to take the rail out of the floor, cut a piece of plywood from the bottom and strengthen the frame. The interior walls would have had to be removed, at a cost of \$82,000 per unit. I know, because I just had some buses that I wanted to send away to have it done, and I couldn't afford it. It puts a little bit of pressure on us.

What we've been doing to help ourselves deal with this is to make sure our drivers are very well trained. Our driver training with our company exceeds the norm by a long shot. Every pay period, if time sheets are handed in, drivers go inside and we talk about safety. We have committees within our organization that deal with risk and try to manage it as much as we can. Every one of our employees is charged with safety and making sure the operation is safe. The best way to manage that is to not be involved in an accident where seat belts would be required to save lives. We make sure we don't put ourselves in that position, as much as we can.

This is why I go back to dealing with the way that signage is put on ramps and the ways that guardrails and approaches to rivers and bridges are probably not adequate in some areas. At rock outcroppings with no guardrails, if drivers are inattentive for two seconds and lose the shoulder of the road, they hit a rock outcropping in our province; it's not like Saskatchewan. We have dangers in our province that are out of the norm. We deal with that internally. We constantly look inward. We self-analyze.

I think that's what we're doing here today. How we're doing...I think it's working.

The Chair: In a minute or two we'll go.

Mr. Jeneroux.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Madam Chair, I thought we gave some time.

I think because this motion was moved by the Liberal government House leader.... We certainly take our votes seriously. We would like to get there in enough time to make sure we're voting accordingly.

I think it's unfortunate that we have to cut these guys off, as they're both bringing a lot of value to this committee.

I would suggest respectfully that we leave the committee now to get to our votes.

• (1135)

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Roberts and Mr. Parsons, thank you very much for your testimony. It was extremely important. If you have anything in addition that you want to submit to the committee, please send it in to the clerk. We would certainly receive it very well.

Thank you both for what you do. Thank you for trying to keep our children safe, especially.

We will suspend. We will return to our next panel after the vote.

• (1135)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1155)

The Chair: We'll call the meeting back to order.

On this part of our meeting, from Motor Coach Canada, we have Doug Switzer, president and chief executive officer, Ontario Motor Coach Association; and from Motor Coach Industries, we have John-Paul Pelletier, vice-president, engineering, by video conference. For Teamsters Canada, we have Phil Benson.

Welcome to all of you. We appreciate your being here.

Mr. Switzer, would you like to lead off, please, for five minutes only.

Mr. Doug Switzer (President and Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Motor Coach Association, Motor Coach Canada): Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important dialogue around motorcoach safety.

At the outset, I think it's important to remind ourselves that on the whole, motorcoaches are the safest mode of surface transportation, and second only to airlines in incidents per distance travelled.

That being said, no means of travel, in fact one could argue no human activity is ever perfectly safe. No matter how good your record, there is always more that can be done.

One thing I have learned about safety in over 20 years' experience in both government and industry is that there is no such thing as "safe". There is no magic end point; you're never done and there is always something more that you can do next.

Briefly, these are the areas where industry and government can work together now to have the greatest impact on improving motorcoach safety: increasing seat belt use, finally moving forward on electronic logs, improving enforcement, and doing a better job of collecting and analyzing motorcoach safety data. I look forward to discussing these points further during your questions

There has been a lot of talk about seat belts lately. First, with regard to seat belts, let me be clear that the industry unequivocally

supports them. We have been calling for a federal manufacturing standard and requirement for over a decade, lobbying which has, frankly, been largely ignored.

But despite the lack of interest by governments, around 2009, the industry and manufacturers moved to make seat belts standard equipment even without a regulatory mandate. And so, for almost the past decade, most new buses have come with three-point belts installed, although there are noticeable exceptions due to the lack of manufacturing requirement. We are moving forward as quickly as possible to ensure all coaches are equipped with belts, but because the lifespan of a motorcoach is 18 to 20 years—and I think that question came up earlier—it will still take a few more years before we get 100% adoption.

With respect to retrofitting, it's complicated and possibly dangerous if done incorrectly, and there was a bit of discussion with the previous panel about that. It's not as simple as just changing the seats, or worse, just adding belts on to existing seats. To be done properly, you need to anchor the seat to the body of the coach, which usually requires the coach to be ripped open and modified, potentially changing the structure of the coach, depending on how old the coach is and what it was originally manufactured with. And if the belts are improperly installed, they are a much greater safety risk than no belts at all because the belts themselves can become the safety hazard. It is frankly a difficult option for most coaches, unfortunately.

There is also an important issue regarding provincial laws creating driver liability for ensuring minors wear belts. Despite CCMTA agreeing many years ago that the provinces needed to remove the liability for bus drivers, only Quebec has done anything about it. The issue here is that the liability exists only if the coach has belts. If there are no belts, there is no liability. Thus it's been a very real disincentive for operators to install belts—a disincentive that most have ignored, but not all. This needs to be addressed.

But at the end of the day, the fact that a majority of coaches now have three-point belts means that given the very low usage rate, that's really where the problem lies. This is one area where we could all do a better job by getting people to wear their belts. We don't need a new law, as some have suggested. It's already the law in all provinces that you have to wear a belt if you're on a moving vehicle. It's just not enforced and it's not culturally done. So, we as an industry are looking at what we can do to increase usage.

Improving coach safety, however, goes beyond simply the issue of seat belt use.

We need the government to get on with mandating electronic logging devices, ELDs. Again, the industry has supported making these mandatory for some time. We accepted grudgingly that the Canadian government would not act until it saw what the U.S. government did for the sake of harmonization. But the U.S. law was announced years ago and has been in effect since 2017, yet we still don't have a clear path forward on Canadian regulations.

The existing "hours of service" regulations are adequate, and while some will pick at the details, liking this aspect and wanting to change that, remember that the current rules are the result of years of consultation, study and debate. They were not arrived at lightly, and there's no evidence that the rules themselves contribute to fatigue. But cheating does. And that's why we need ELDs now to make sure that drivers don't exceed the regulations.

And speaking of better enforcement of existing rules, little or nothing ever seems to happen to get unscrupulous operators off the road. For the most part, the safety regulatory regime is in fact sound. We have enough laws, but what we need is better targeted enforcement at the provincial level on those bad actors who ignore the good laws.

Finally, one of the frustrations that I think everyone trying to improve motor coach safety experiences is trying to find accurate motorcoach safety stats. In most road safety stats, we are categorized as commercial vehicles, lumping us in with trucks; or we are deemed buses, but that includes transit vehicles and school buses. Transport Canada and the provinces need to break out and make available the specific collision data for motorcoaches so that we can all do a better job of understanding the trends and the real causes of fatalities and injuries. Then we can all figure out what the next step forward is, because there should always be a next step forward.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go on to Mr. Pelletier, by video conference.

Mr. John-Paul Pelletier (Vice-President, Engineering and Quality, Motor Coach Industries): Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee on bus passenger safety.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to join the committee to speak on bus passenger safety. New Flyer Industries on the transit bus side and Motor Coach Industries of the coach business, both members of the New Flyer Group based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, value passenger safety as our highest priority.

Motor Coach Industries is committed to working with the motorcoach industry stakeholders to make its vehicles as safe as reasonably possible. This includes working with motorcoach operators, key industry associations, regulators and government, both in Canada and the United States, including Transport Canada, the Transportation Safety Board, NHTSA, the NTSB and the FMCSA.

Bus and motorcoach travel remains among the safest modes of transportation. Studies have been published along with data collected annually by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration in the U.S. supporting this.

MCI has a history of implementing safety systems and working regulators in both the U.S. and Canada. When proven reliable and fit for service, MCI has implemented new technologies and collaborated with regulatory bodies on proposed and final rule making. All MCI motorcoaches are designed with an integrated semi-monocoque stainless steel and high-strength steel structure for safety, reliability and corrosion resistance.

Some examples of the safety systems and technologies that have been made standard on MCI coaches include high-mount stop lights; laminated side glazing; electronic stability control, going back to 2008; automatic traction control, going back to 2008; fire suppression, going back to 2009; tire pressure monitoring, going back to 2009; and digital wheel end monitoring, going back to 2010.

Some additional safety systems that we've made available on coaches include seat belts, going back to late 2008 and becoming standard on MCI coaches in 2016; forward collision warning, collision mitigation and adaptive cruise control in 2015; and then, finally, enhanced advanced emergency braking and lane departure warning in late 2018, as well as 360° bird's-eye view cameras in 2016.

There are also several recent regulations that will positively impact the overall safety of motorcoaches by improving both occupant and driver safety. These include requiring seat belts on coaches in the United States in November 2016, and then in Canada in 2020; electronic stability control in June 2018 in the United States, and then also coming to Canada; as well as the electronic logging devices made standard in December 2017 in the United States.

Advanced driver assistance systems, autonomous vehicles and connected vehicles are advancing rapidly in the automotive and commercial vehicle spaces. The development of passive ADAS currently available is significant for occupant and vehicle safety. It includes adaptive cruise control, forward collision warning, collision mitigation with advanced emergency braking, traffic sign recognition and overspeed alerts, as well as lane departure warning.

There is continued development needed for both passive and active driver assistance systems, which include pedestrian and object detection warning, driver fatigue and drowsy driver systems, lane-keeping assist, automatic lane changing and lane-change assist, vehicle-to-vehicle communication, vehicle-to-infrastructure communication, as well as the journey to levels 2, 3 and 4 automated driving.

While bus and motorcoach travel remain among the safest modes of transportation, the industry needs to continue to enhance passenger safety by collaborating with its key stakeholders, including regulators and government, in both Canada and the United States, including Transport Canada and the United States Department of Transportation; vehicle manufacturers and our key supplier partners; vehicle owners and operators; and industry associations such as the OMCA, the American Bus Association, the United Motorcoach Association and the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance.

I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to present to the committee, and I look forward to your questions.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Pelletier.

We move on to Mr. Benson.

Mr. Phil Benson (Lobbyist, Teamsters Canada): Good morning.

Teamsters Canada represents more than 125,000 workers in all sectors of the economy. Teamsters Canada is Canada's supply chain and transportation union. Teamsters Canada represents drivers in the coach and school bus sectors.

In preparing our submission, Teamsters Canada sought opinions and thoughts directly from the shop floor of the members, and the experience of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters in states where seat belts are mandated on school buses.

A decade or more ago, I took part in school bus seat belt discussions. The science was clear: the egg-crate passive system was inadequate; it did nothing for higher-speed collisions, T-bones and rollovers. Seat belts were needed, but there would be no seat belts until the U.S. got on board. As U.S. children would never wear seat belts, it wouldn't happen, and the cost of implementation...just don't go there.

We heard from the members about the need for strong, mandated maintenance schedules rigorously enforced by governmental agencies. Technology has advanced. All buses should have ABS emergency braking, anti-roll prevention, newer technologies, pre-collision pedestrian detection and blind-side warnings. These stay-in-lane features should just be part of every bus.

In the charter and tourist sector, our members told us the new buses are equipped with seat belts. In the industrial setting, transporting workers to and from the job, there are two experiences. In some provincially regulated workspaces, for example the oil sands, seat belts are mandatory health and safety equipment. In the federally regulated workspace, no seat belts are used. There appears to be no issue surrounding seat belt use when they're available on those forms of coach transportation.

School buses often travel on highways. The expectation is the best safety equipment should be available to all children, starting with well-paid professional drivers behind the wheel. The teamsters place safety of the public and the members at the forefront. We believe some issues will have to be addressed if the government moves forward on implementing the mandatory use of seat belts on school buses.

We represent more than 1,000 school bus drivers in Quebec alone. We transport hundreds of thousands of children every day. The members made it very clear that drivers must always remain at the wheel to maintain full control of the vehicle while conducting safety-critical functions. They must also maintain visual contact with vehicular traffic and with children, outside and inside the bus, while preparing to move safely to the next stop. Drivers cannot leave their station, cannot be responsible for buckling and unbuckling children, and must not be held liable if children are not buckled in. Vehicles cannot move until all passengers in a vehicle are securely buckled in.

Complying with a seat belt rule may not be an issue for older students, but it is foreseeable that it will be for kindergarten and elementary students, or for unruly students of any age. Parents and teachers are not allowed to go on a school bus to buckle and unbuckle children. Drivers are not allowed to touch students or leave their place behind the wheel. Delays in completing a route in these circumstances are foreseeable.

The members are very concerned over the safety of the students when an accident does occur. If evacuation of students is required, the driver would be, of course, assisting in unbuckling children. What if the driver is incapacitated? This foreseeable scenario would be especially difficult if the trip involved junior-age children.

In our discussion with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, we found that where states mandate the use of seat belts on school buses, a monitor is on the school bus to buckle and unbuckle children, if needed, and to manage unruly students. Children with special needs are transported separately on the school bus system. Our investigation in Canada showed that some school board monitors are currently on school buses, and further, that children with special needs are transported separately from the school bus system.

We heard that retrofitting of seat belts in school buses was given up to \$20,000; on a 50-seat bus, that's \$400 amortized over the life of the bus. It works out to a cup of coffee a trip, or perhaps a few pennies. A monitor is a cappuccino. The mandate of Transport Canada puts costs and profits of industry first, passes light through public safety and ignores all else. It cannot look at the cost of accidents, treating serious injuries, the health costs nor the social-moral costs to individuals, boards and politicians. This mandate must change.

Even if it is only a cup of coffee a trip, we expect companies and boards to try to recover incremental increases in costs. Teamsters Canada will fight to ensure the costs are not borne by drivers through decreased wages. School bus drivers earn no more than \$25,000 to \$30,000 a year. They work split shifts, with two or three trips in the morning and two or three trips in the afternoon. They can't get another job. Just like everywhere else, they have stagnant wage growth.

Shortages of workers, school bus drivers, truckers...well, it seems every time a commodity price increases, prices go up, except for labour.

● (1210)

Workers in this sector earned 8.5% less on average in 2015 than comparable jobs in the private transportation sector, and the gap is widening.

We're also concerned that if it's not done right, there will be delays and drivers being disciplined for being late and perhaps feeling forced to go faster, defeating the purpose of doing it.

I'm almost wrapped up.

The Chair: Give a closing comment, Mr. Benson.

Mr. Phil Benson: The feds regulate; the provinces implement. If seat belts are to be mandatory, it must be done right or the introduction of regulations will lengthen the working day, fail to achieve safety goals for our children and complicate the lives of drivers.

I do want to recognize Minister Garneau for having the courage to take this on. It is a difficult area with a lot of complications, and it does take courage.

I'll be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Jeneroux, you have five minutes.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, everybody, for appearing before us here today.

I want to start with Mr. Switzer.

We understand that the changes to seat belt requirements on coach buses were, in part, an effort to harmonize the Canadian and U.S. regulations. In your view, was this a good move by Transport Canada?

Mr. Doug Switzer: It's an overdue move. My frustration as a lobbyist—and I suppose everyone's frustration—was that I understood that the government's attitude was that it couldn't bring in a

different law than what the Americans have, that that was fine, that it would wait until the Americans did what they were going to do, and that then it would copy and paste from their regulation. Our frustration was that the Americans brought in their regulation and that for several years thereafter, the answer was that the government was studying the U.S. regulation. Are we just copying and pasting to harmonize? If we're going to have a different rule, why didn't we have a different rule in the first place?

Yes, it's an excellent move, but it's overdue. Frankly, it's a little bit irrelevant at this point, since most coaches already have three-point seat belts as standard equipment. It's important because some people do take the belts off, so we do have to have that rule there, but it's less relevant than it would have been, say, 10 years ago.

● (1215)

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Yes.

Could all or some of your current fleet accommodate seat belts?

Mr. Doug Switzer: That's complicated. The issue of retrofitting is easier with more recent equipment. I think Mr. Parsons addressed that issue. Some coaches that were built, say, in the last 10 years already have the structural integrity to take belted seats. They already have the rails in them. However, if you're looking at a much older coach, one that's near the end of its lifespan, a 15-, 16- or 18-year-old coach, it probably doesn't have the structural integrity. It would be worse to slap down a couple of strips of nylon and staple gun them onto the seats. That would be worse than not putting anything on. So, whether retrofitting is viable or not depends on the coach and the age of the coach.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Yes. I think one of the issues when thinking about this particular motion before us is this: Who's ultimately responsible for making sure that people, whether they be kids or adults, are putting their seat belts on? Is it the coach company? Is it the Teamsters? Is it the individual? Who is it at the end of the day? I think that's something that successive governments have also had to struggle with.

I'll open it up to all of three of you at this point. Could you provide some insight on what you think in terms of who is ultimately responsible for making sure that seat belts end up getting buckled?

Mr. Doug Switzer: That's a really complicated issue. Like a lot of things you're looking at, there isn't one industry here that you're talking about. There are all kinds of different facets of people who operate motorcoaches, school buses, scheduled services versus charters. On scheduled service, so the Greyhound bus, there's unlikely to be another person on there to check out whether people are wearing their belts or not. As for school buses, yes, you can put a monitor on, as Phil suggested, and that's a great idea. It's easy to do—again it's a different market—because you only have one payer, the government. The government is the client for school bus services, so it can say, “Look, we're the client. We want this.” The school bus company will say, “Fine. The cost is x .” You negotiate, and then you can add it. So, it's easier to do because you're the client.

With regard to a charter service, you would have coaches for hockey teams and teachers for school trips, so on a lot of charters, there actually probably is another person or a tour guide.

The answer to that question depends a lot on what that bus is being used for. Is it a scheduled service? Is it a charter? Is it a school bus? Who's operating it? On most charters, I would say that it's probably the responsibility of the tour guide or the coach or whoever arranged the tour. On the 2 a.m. Greyhound from Saskatoon, there's just the driver.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Benson.

Mr. Phil Benson: Clearly our position is that the driver can't be liable. The driver's job is to sit at the wheel and take care of the vehicle.

From our experience—from members who do charter coaches for tourism, etc.—people put their seat belts on. Though I took part in those studies, my daughter was six and got on a bus, then got off the bus the first time, and said, “Daddy, I can't go on the bus. There's no seat belt.” I had to lie to her—I'm sorry, honey, if you're listening to this—but I said, “No, it's safe.” It was a short haul. “It should be okay.”

In the IBT experience in the States where seat belts are on, this was not an issue. As I said, when the study came in, part of the reason we weren't doing it was this whole harmonization issue. I totally agree with Mr. Switzer that we have lots of agreements on this in other regulatory bodies. Sometimes, we have to be courageous and move forward without the Americans. There are other times we do. With the fleets coming forward, and the structure they have, it makes it easier now to move forward than it was 10, 12 or 15 years ago.

At the end of the day, the driver can't be liable, but we have to look at the situation of monitors on school buses—people being responsible. There has to be something in law, provincially or federally, saying that if you don't wear a seat belt and something happens, then you're on your own.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Benson. Sorry, your time is up.

Mr. Hardie.

•(1220)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you all for being here.

Mr. Pelletier, your company has really deep experience with both New Flyer and MCI. I used to work for TransLink, the Metro

Vancouver transportation authority—a very good customer of yours, in fact, on the New Flyer side.

I recall that there had been some crashes when BC Transit was operating the system. A standard block-stop bus was put out on the highway. There could have been people standing, etc., and there were fatalities as a result of the crash.

Would you recommend that there be a difference in design between a standard transit bus and a bus that's going to go at highway speeds—a different design, a different configuration and regulations to stipulate that a different bus has to be used?

Mr. John-Paul Pelletier: My expertise lies on the motorcoach side, although we're part of New Flyer. I've worked on the coach side of the business for the majority of my career, so while I am somewhat familiar with transit buses. I'm much more familiar with motorcoaches. I would agree that there are different design requirements for a transit bus used for, say, seven to 11 stops per mile, at typically low speeds.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'm sorry, I'll need to move on if you don't really have that experience. I'll go to Mr. Switzer and ask him that question. Should we mandate different buses for higher-speed use?

Mr. Doug Switzer: To be honest, I'll take your advice. I don't have a good answer to that.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay, fair enough.

Mr. Doug Switzer: Again, it depends on whether it's being operated by a transit system, a coach or school bus company.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes. Okay.

What we heard is that for speeds above 50 kilometres an hour, a three-point hitch is definitely needed. If you're looking particularly at school bus operations, you would perhaps be looking at a requirement for different configurations.

Going back to you, Mr. Pelletier—looking at your motorcoach experience specifically—what kind of research and development is your company doing, with respect to improving compartmentalization? Here, I'm thinking of those wings that you can have on seatbacks to prevent side-to-side head movement in the event of a crash. Even something a little more... My colleague, Mr. Badawey, mentioned this to me, so I'm going to steal his question—what about active restraints, such as those on carnival rides, where something comes down and fits you in? It doesn't matter what size you are: it works.

Mr. John-Paul Pelletier: Well, at this point in time, we've focused on three-point restraints. That's what has been regulated in the U.S., and is coming in Canada. I can't say that we've taken a look at anything beyond that, in terms of an active restraint. We focused on the three-point restraints and seat belts, and we've tested them both to meet the static requirement. We have also done dynamic sled testing, to determine the behaviour of an occupant in a forward-type crash.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Would there be a possibility of integrated booster seats for younger passengers on a motorcoach? I used to have them in a Dodge Caravan I had years ago. Again, a safety belt on a small youngster is very dangerous.

Mr. John-Paul Pelletier: Potentially, yes. At this point in time, we haven't had a requirement or a need to develop a specific seat for a toddler or infant. I think the challenge with that would be that you deal, as Mr. Switzer mentioned, with a wide range of occupants using the same vehicle. We haven't gone to having several dedicated seats for those types of positions or those people in the vehicle at this point in time.

Mr. Ken Hardie: What I would suggest is you look at Chrysler's design because it was integrated. You could actually pull out a piece of the high back and it would become the booster seat.

Mr. Benson, what information, either official or anecdotal, are you picking up from your members with respect to crashes where ejection is an issue or entrapment is an issue? What can you tell us about that?

•(1225)

Mr. Phil Benson: I think it's more their concerns about the public safety of the children. They care about the children they're carrying. When they were talking about seat belts—

Mr. Ken Hardie: No, I want to know what the bigger problem is—ejection or entrapment.

Mr. Phil Benson: I think entrapment was the one they were more concerned about.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay.

Mr. Phil Benson: The ejection at low speed would not be a concern; it would have to be quite catastrophic. They were concerned that even in a low-speed accident, if the child is incapacitated—fire, or something happens—they want to make sure.... The reason for a monitor is to make sure that smaller children especially.... If they're high-school age, one could assume they can unbuckle their seat belts and help each other. The issue is that they did not want the safety of the children compromised by even a low-speed accident.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Benson.

We go on to Mr. Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for joining us this morning.

Mr. Benson, I'll start with you, since you've been studying this issue for a long time.

I'm pleased to see a very broad consensus, even unanimity, with regard to the importance of seatbelt use. A few years ago, we wouldn't have imagined that the Americans would adopt this measure before us.

Can you summarize how the Americans transitioned, after they had accepted the regulations? Can we draw any inspiration for our own transition?

[*English*]

Mr. Phil Benson: That is something, in our conversations, that we did not talk about, to be honest about it. We were more concerned about the day-to-day impact on workers. It is something I will make inquiries about and I'll be happy to get back to the committee on that topic.

Mr. Doug Switzer: If I can address it, the transition was, more or less, what Transport Canada is doing now—no retrofit but a manufacturing standard that all new coaches sold must be equipped with, and it's illegal to remove them. What we're doing now is exactly what the Americans did.

Mr. Phil Benson: I was referring to the drivers, not the equipment. I agree with you on the equipment, yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I want to hear your opinion, and especially the opinion of bus owners.

If, tomorrow morning, we were to learn that seatbelts are recommended in the industry, I imagine that this would also become an area of customer demand. Customers would then want to travel in buses equipped with seatbelts.

Do you really believe that the transition should be based on the life span of the buses? In other words, when a bus is replaced, the next one must be equipped with seatbelts. Should the government instead implement measures to help with the transition, so that it can be done as quickly as possible?

[*English*]

Mr. Phil Benson: There's a problem over the lifespan of the bus. For example, in a province where the buses have an eight- or 10-year lifespan, they sell those buses to other provinces where they have a longer lifespan. Theoretically, you could end up with children starting JK now and never seeing a seat belt in their life. As you bring it in, I think Mr. Switzer talked about, perhaps, buses that can be retrofitted and have a long life. That makes sense. But at the same time, you have to start phasing out those buses over regulated periods so that they're off the road—and not just off the road there. School buses end up with churches; they end up at other places; they end up on work sites where they should not be. Clearly, it's a matter of replacing them, not just forwarding them on to somewhere else. Hopefully, we won't sell them overseas to some third world country that doesn't do it either—that's just a personal comment. Yes, grandfathering is important.

Mr. Doug Switzer: You hit the nail very much on the head. The market forces have played a huge factor in this.

When the industry started lobbying for seat belts back in the early 2000s, it was because we were getting a lot of pressure from our customers to have coaches with belts and they wanted to know what the standard should be. That's why we wanted the government to adopt a standard: we wanted to know what to build.

A seat belt is more complicated than just a couple of strips of nylon. It has to fit a certain engineering standard for how many Gs of force it can withstand and all that, and nobody wanted to put in 10G belts when the government was going to come along later and mandate 12G belts.

That's why we wanted the manufacturing standard and also why coaches started being built and bought with belts on them already, even though there was no government regulation. It was because of those market forces.

That's accelerating now. For many of our members, it's not a regulatory issue, it's a marketplace issue. Particularly because of Humboldt, there's a lot more attention around it. Whether you're a hockey team, a school board or a church group, there's a lot more attention around people saying, no, they want the coach with belts.

As Mr. Parsons mentioned and he has been doing, some operators have been retrofitting where it's possible. In a sense, the committee's job is being done for it when it comes to seat belt use, because people are demanding them now, and those operators who have belts will get customers and those who don't won't.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: When Canadians travel on a charter bus to the United States, for example, would crossing the border in a bus that isn't equipped with seatbelts pose a problem?

[English]

Mr. Doug Switzer: It's a manufacturing standard, not a use. The U.S. rule isn't that you have to have seat belts, it's that you have to manufacture a coach with seat belts. It's a manufacturing standard issue.

A coach without belts would still be legal to operate in the U.S. if it was manufactured prior to the regulation date.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Switzer, in the MCC fact sheet dated November 2018, there's a quite interesting paragraph. I'll read it in full:

Despite the current attention on belts, they are not a cure-all for all accidents. They are helpful in certain circumstances and in certain kinds of accidents, but simply having belts does not automatically guarantee passenger safety. Therefore, not having belts does not really endanger passenger safety.

In a previous panel, we heard totally opposite conclusions where they were saying seat belts are a must.

Can you elaborate more on that?

Also, as my colleague was suggesting to me, what happens in terms of passenger-to-passenger collision?

When there's an accident, there are passengers with no seat belts who will end up crashing into each other. Right?

Mr. Doug Switzer: Right.

To address the fact sheet, what I was trying to say there is that seat belts are not the only safety issue. As I said in my opening remarks, the issue of coach safety goes beyond just having seat belts. Seat belts are important and no one would suggest otherwise, and we certainly don't suggest otherwise, but they are not a panacea for all incidents.

In many accidents where people die on coaches, they could be wearing their seat belts and they will die anyway, because let's face it, when a fully loaded tractor trailer slams into the side of a coach, whether you're wearing a belt or not isn't really going to make a difference. In many other incidents, if a coach doesn't roll over, if it's just a head-on collision, the old compartmentalization theory will also apply.

The point there is that while seat belts are important, and we absolutely support seat belts and everybody should have seat belts and they should all wear their seat belts, we're suggesting that there is more to coach safety than just seat belts. They are not the be-all and end-all of safety.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Then what is?

Mr. Doug Switzer: Anything as complicated as safety is a whole tapestry of issues. It's enforcement on bad operators. We heard a lot from the previous panel about driver training and the importance of having good drivers. It's about having structural integrity of the coaches. It's about having seat belts.

The issue of safety is a broad one: the manufacturing of the coach and the training of the driver and everything that happens in between, such as not being distracted by using a cellphone, as well as better highway construction, and so on.

Mr. Parsons didn't quite get into it, but one of his major concerns is that there are a lot of highways that he thinks are unsafe, not just the issue of the posting of the speeds on the ramps.

It's everything from ramp speed signs to driver training to seat belts.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll give the rest of my time to Mr. Sikand.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Thank you.

My question is for Mr. Pelletier.

You were saying that in 2008, reflectors were added and other modifications were made. Earlier in this committee, we heard that a lot of the accidents that happen where children are killed are actually not inside the compartment, but outside, so those safety arms and reflectors do help quite a bit. Have you seen a marked difference, or do you have any numbers to substantiate that claim?

Mr. John-Paul Pelletier: I think perhaps you are referring to my comment on high-mounted stoplights.

•(1235)

Mr. Gagan Sikand: I think you said the safety arm as well.

Mr. John-Paul Pelletier: No, I didn't make a comment on safety arms on motorcoaches. We are currently in the practice of installing safety arms on our vehicles. I'm familiar with that on a school bus, but I haven't seen that on a motorcoach—certainly not, from our side, being delivered out of the factory that way. Perhaps there have been some aftermarket or post-build installations. I don't have any numbers on arm safety in terms of school buses that I can comment on.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Okay. You said that, in 2016, you had the bird's-eye view cameras.

Mr. John-Paul Pelletier: That's correct.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Have you seen a difference with those?

Mr. John-Paul Pelletier: Where we've seen a difference with bird's-eye view cameras is... They're typically designed to aid in low-speed manoeuvring. As you can imagine, manoeuvring a 45-foot long, 102-inch wide motorcoach can be fairly challenging. We use the bird's-eye view camera particularly in and around parking lots and for low-speed manoeuvring. We can say that our operators who have purchased this equipment say that avoiding one minor collision—which would typically be a side-swipe of a pole in a parking lot or backing into a structure in a parking lot—is where it would be most effective and will more than pay for the cost. So, we have seen it to be quite effective in avoiding low-speed manoeuvring collisions.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we're on to Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Mr. Benson, I was just reading your your executive summary. You talk about how you're supportive, of course, of seat belts, but then you list 11 serious concerns that your membership has highlighted in terms of how we function with seat belts on school buses, the challenge of enforcement and so on.

Is it possible to address all of these concerns by using monitors? Would they be able to take care of most of that?

Mr. Phil Benson: I think the comment here, as I said, is this: federally regulated and provincially implemented. So, the experience in the IBT is, in fact, monitors, and we have them at some locations. Yes, it addresses most of the concerns. But with things like attempts of boards, depending on the province, wanting to cut education costs—not that any would want to do that recently—you end up going down the food chain, and you end up with our members and non-union drivers bearing the brunt of it. This is followed by driving issues: getting properly trained drivers, the retention of drivers, etc. All these issues flow from it.

It's easy to put seat belts on, but to ensure that the provinces do it and everybody does it correctly is something beyond your purview. So, we're putting it on the table for people to understand that the seat belts are, of course, a needed safety issue. However, at the same time, one just can't do that without understanding the other concerns that have to be addressed. We're addressing them from a labour perspective.

Mr. Churence Rogers: I appreciate where you're coming from.

Again, it says in your statement that, “Notwithstanding the statistics, the 'egg crate' method of protecting children in school buses is not sufficient for higher speed collisions, T-bone accidents and roll overs. Restrain[t] systems are the best solution....”

Most of the concerns—from the previous panellists, as well—were about high speed on the highway in terms of restraints. The lower speed doesn't seem to be the issue in terms of protecting children in school buses. So, from that perspective, do you think that school buses with safety belts in high-speed situations would be a positive step forward?

Mr. Phil Benson: Yes, but I'll address the low speed too, because since we've done the studies our science has changed. Let's just take concussions. A small five-mile-an-hour accident, with a small child hitting their head, on the egg-crate model, we know the damage that concussions can do today. Even a “minor” injury can be quite damning.

To respond to Mr. Hardie, if I may, about the issue of how we restrain small children, California moves more small children than we do in Canada every day. Clearly if the government or Transport Canada wants to find out how they do it it's pretty easy to do it. The issue becomes for us not the implementation; seat belts are always the easy things. I think Mr. Switzer and Mr. Pelletier have raised this, that it's the other issues that go around, everything from grand-fathering to equipment. For us drivers we've talked about the need for strong enforcement, which simply doesn't occur, to get the bad actors and even the good actors cleaned up. These are all things that are part and parcel of ensuring that our children are transported safely. Seat belts are not the only thing that must be addressed.

•(1240)

The Chair: We now got to Mr. Liepert, for three minutes.

Mr. Ron Liepert: One of the problems with being the last guy up is that all the good questions have been asked. I was sitting here thinking that our analysts were going to have their work cut out for them trying to come up with some concluding recommendations for our report because there has been a wide variety of views on all of these issues by our witnesses. The one, though, that keeps coming up consistently is that—and we heard it again today—motorcoach is the second-safest mode of transportation next to airlines. It raises the question that if it's already the second-safest mode of transportation, are we spinning our wheels by actually undertaking this study because it looks like this is, in the views of many of our witnesses, a committee looking for problems where there don't seem to be that many problems?

We had the head of pediatrics here, and, again, there was the whole question about school buses and seat belts, which prompted Mr. Sikand's question. The head of pediatrics responded that—and these are my words and not his—very few, if any, children are actually.... They don't deal with injuries and near-death injuries in the pediatrics ward from children inside the bus; it's outside the bus. So we spend an awful lot of our time on whether there should be seat belts in buses, or shouldn't be seat belts and back and forth.

I don't want to take up too much time, Madam Chair, because I want my colleague to have his full 15 minutes here.

Are there any closing comments that any of you would want to make relative to what I've just been blathering on about?

Mr. Doug Switzer: I appreciate you blathering on about that because I think that's very much my concern and my problem—and perhaps it came through in my comments—that we are the safest mode of highway transportation. To the point about whether you are unsafe on a coach without a seat belt, no, you are not unsafe on a coach without a seat belt. We've had coaches without seat belts for years and the number of fatalities is very small. Fortunately, we have very few accidents. One of my frustrations, given my problems with getting government attention on this, is humbly we only have these kinds of questions after Humboldt. Fortunately, we only have one every eight or 10 years. So it's in fits and starts.

But as I said in my opening remarks, there is always something you should be doing more. I always have a list of things I'm trying to go to the government with to say, you have to fix this, we have to do this, can we move forward on that? But it's not big, and it's not sexy and it's not part of a huge crisis. So, you're right, there isn't a crisis with motorcoach safety, but that is never an excuse for not always trying to find a way to do it better and safer. There's always something you could be tweaking to move forward.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I'd be curious to hear about them.

Mr. Phil Benson: I would agree, particularly on ELDs. We were before this committee with the CTA for 10 years fighting to get ELDs. We couldn't get them because America wasn't doing them. I think the answer is when you have.... We talk about the costs. You just need one catastrophic accident and we always come after; it doesn't matter if it's air, rail or roads, we come here and talk to you. After something happens like Lac-Mégantic, we come and talk to you about what should have happened and wasn't happening. The thing is, if you have just one catastrophic accident with small children and you take into account the cost to health care and everything else we're doing, it's not going to come to \$400 million when we're talking about the costs, but it would be significant and so the answer is I....

The Chair: Time is up. I do want to make sure that your colleague gets his 15 minutes.

Mr. Ron Liepert: Okay.

A voice: We'll talk later.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen, very much. We will suspend for a half minute, in order for you to leave the table.

•(1240) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1245)

The Chair: We're resuming discussion. We are not going in camera, as we decided at our last meeting, to discuss this motion. We will resume the debate on Mr. Kmiec's motion. Everybody has it before them.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll preface my comments by repeating what I said at the last meeting. Although we're tight on time, I don't want to lose this opportunity of time presented to the committee. Quite frankly, I think most people around the table agree with it. However, once again, time is a problem. We do have a set schedule, coming up to the end of our term in June.

What I would propose, Madam Chair, is agreeing to the motion. The only thing I would amend for now—because depending on time, it can change later on, with respect to some of the things we're sinking our teeth into right now—is the sentence that says, “no less than two meetings”. I would say, “no less than one hour”, which would be half a meeting, “of the Committee be dedicated to this study”.

I do want to repeat what I just said. If, in fact, we do come into more time, based on what we're getting into next, then possibly we can consider giving more time to this particular issue at that time. I'm just uncomfortable with dedicating it now, because I don't want to impede the other processes we're involving ourselves in.

The Chair: Your amendment is, where it says, “no less than two meetings”, to indicate that we dedicate one hour to this issue.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Correct.

The Chair: “No less than a one-hour meeting”.... Is that what your wording was?

Mr. Vance Badawey: Right.

The Chair: All right, the wording is “no less than a one-hour meeting”, so the committee would be—

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Chair, just to make it simpler procedurally, I will take that as a friendly amendment.

Mr. Vance Badawey: That's great.

The Chair: All right.

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: All right. Thank you all very much.

Monsieur Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It seems that, since the start of this session, we haven't taken advantage of subcommittee meetings. Wouldn't it be a good idea to hold a subcommittee meeting to try to set the agenda before the end of the session? This would help us see where we're headed with the various studies. As a result, we would know our level of flexibility when an additional request concerning our work comes in. We could also determine what needs to be dropped if we want to make room for something else.

[English]

The Chair: Well, we certainly can do that. At the moment, of course, we have Mr. Jeneroux's favourite minister coming on Thursday, for 90 minutes. Then on April 30, when we come back, we'll have the last witness on bus passenger safety. This is what the clerk has scheduled.

The Canadian transportation and logistics strategy will be May 2 and May 7. On May 9, we're having Minister Garneau for an hour. Then we'll have another hour when we might be able to fit something in, such as this particular issue. May 14 and 16 are back to transportation and logistics strategy, which completes that study. Then on May 28, at the moment, we would be on to passenger rail service. That's the proposed schedule the clerk has given us, up until the end of May. We would still have three or four meetings after that, into June.

Does that sound like a reasonable schedule at the moment?

Mr. Liepert.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I'm sorry. I may have missed it, but I thought we were doing four meetings on the trade study.

The Chair: Right, that's the Canadian transportation and logistics strategy, on May 2, May 7, May 14 and May 16.

Mr. Ron Liepert: Oh, okay.

The Chair: Then that would be finished as well, and we would be going on to the rail service.

May 9 is with Minister Garneau for one hour. We have a two-hour session, so for the second hour, I'm suggesting we might be able to put your colleague's motion into play.

• (1250)

Mr. Ron Liepert: Thank you.

The Chair: Matt.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Let's get this down on paper so we can wrap our heads around it.

The Chair: I'll have the clerk send that off.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Thank you.

The Chair: That's where we are right now, and if that's okay with everybody, we will continue on, and if something else comes up, we will deal with it as it comes up.

Mr. Liepert.

Mr. Ron Liepert: Is there any indication that we're getting anything hived off to us from finance?

The Chair: We will find out today, and of course, that's why everything has to be fluid. We'll find out today.

Okay, is everybody good? All right.

The committee is adjourned.

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