

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Greyhound Lines sponsors its own coach crash testing

DALLAS — The decision by Greyhound Lines to have passenger restraints and safety seats included in an order of 100 new Prevost motorcoaches came after the nation's largest line-run operator ran the buses and a combination safety systems it was considering buying through a series of crash tests.

The company said results of the sled, reliability, durability and ergonomic tests conducted for it by passenger restraint manufacturer IMMI of Westfield, Ind., convinced it to include three-point passenger belts and newly designed safety seats on its new buses.

The focus of the tests done on the Prevost X3-45 models Greyhound ordered late last year for its regular intercity and BoltBus oper-

ations was the SafeGuard seat and restraint system IMMI recently began producing in a partnership with American Seating of Grand Rapids, Mich.

The restraint system features the SmartFrame seat, which separates in a frontal accident with the front portion of the seat moving forward and the back section remaining stationary, preventing unbelted passengers from being thrown over the seat in front of them.

Greyhound spokeswoman Abby Wambaugh said that results of the tests conducted at IMMI's Center for Advanced Product Evaluation facility in Indiana showed the SafeGuard system not only exceeds current government injury criteria, but provides the highest



Greyhound's new X3-45 Prevost coaches have been given an understated livery that prominently features its iconic logo.

level of protection for passengers by combining strength and compartmentalization.

"Following the extensive testing, the combination of the new seat design, coupled with other aspects of the coaches, make SafeGuard a decision that further enhances customer safety on the new coach design, which allows all elements to work together," she added.

As a result, she said Greyhound opted to have the three-point restraints and safety seats installed on all of its new coaches.

Greyhound purchased 50 Prevost X3-45 coaches last year, but they were bought before the crash tests were completed and are not equipped with the belts or safety seats.

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Greyhound seatbelts

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The testing ordered by Greyhound came at the same time the National Highway Transportation

Safety Administration was wrapping up a series of crash and roll-over tests as part of a much broader program designed to evaluate the need for passenger restraints and possibly new window and con-

struction standards for coaches.

Preliminary results of those tests show that passengers wearing lap or three-point belts would suffer substantially fewer injuries in an accident than those who are not restrained.

NHTSA officials have hinted that a recommendation for seatbelts — at least on new buses — and some new window and construction standards are likely to come after all of the test results are analyzed and additional testing for bus fires is completed.

Wambaugh said Greyhound is supportive of the NHTSA testing and called for the federal agency to continue to follow the recommendations of the National Transportation Safety Board, which initially called for the study, the first of its kind by the federal government.

"We are committed to working with NHTSA to not only study the area of seatbelts, but also other equipment features made to best enhance motorcoach safety while not removing the safety benefits of current vehicle design," she said.

Greyhound and NHTSA offi-

cial have met to talk about their separate tests, but neither side would say much about those discussions.

"They have been in to talk to us about certain issues and we have had discussions with them," said NHTSA spokesman Rae Tyson.

The agency has hinted several times that its tests are likely to lead to some form of seatbelt requirement and possibly new windows and bus construction standards, but have yet to say what they might be.

Wambaugh said Greyhound agrees that seatbelt standards are needed and believes that its choice of three-point belts that are engineered into the design of its new coaches will meet requirements that might be developed by federal transportation safety regulators.

"We believe this will accommodate whatever federal standard is set," she said.

In January, Sir Moir Lockhead, chief executive of FirstGroup, the parent of Greyhound, was in Washington D.C., where he met with congressional representatives who

have supported seatbelt legislation for motorcoaches in the past.

He told Bloomberg news that FirstGroup supports requirements for the use of seatbelts on coaches as long as they do not mandate that existing coaches be retrofitted with them. "If you look at 10 years time, all the vehicles will have seatbelts," he said. "So start now, that's my advice."

The direction taken by Greyhound on seatbelt standards reflects an industry trend that appears to acknowledge that requirements are on the way.

At the United Motorcoach Association Motorcoach Expo 2009 in Orlando in January, most motorcoach manufacturers displayed coaches equipped with seatbelts and a few said they will be standard equipment on at least some of their new models.

Part of the push for the passenger restraints, according to the bus manufactures, is coming from motorcoach operators who say they are getting more requests from customers for coaches equipped with seatbelts.