An Alarming Situation Regarding A Madison Metro Broken Emergency Exit And The Continued Use Of The Unsafe Bus

ISSUE: Madison Metro vehicles are not being inspected for equipment requirements (emergency exits in working order) and Madison Metro is not responding to reports of immediate safety concerns.

Summary:

Madison Metro dispatched a bus with a missing emergency exit roof knob in the rear exit. This is despite the requirement in the Wisconsin Commercial Driver's Manual that states:

"Before driving your bus, you must be sure it is safe."
"Always check the interior of the bus before driving to ensure rider safety. The following parts of your bus must be in safe working condition: (list of other items ending with **Emergency exit handles**)"

Madison Metro kept the unsafe bus in service despite being informed of the situation.

Madison Metro repaired the knob but took out the English instructions and latch position indicator.

The situation brings up many questions of the safety, adherence to regulations, and overall competency within Metro's operations.

Friday, June 19 2015

— 10:30 AM Missing emergency exit knob noticed in rear roof of Bus 007 on Route 2

— 11:00 AM Call made to Metro Customer Service 265-4466. After explaining the problem to customer service supervisor Scott, it was asked how soon the bus would be taken out of service. The answer was not known. When the issue was pressed about there being any policy or law requiring the suspension of that bus, there was still no definite answer given. If an aircraft has a missing emergency exit handle, it is grounded until repaired. If a school bus in Wisconsin has an inoperative emergency exit, the bus is immediately classified as Out Of Service. It has not been determined if there are any regulations for transit buses like there are for school buses. However, common sense says that the repair of the exit is much more important than keeping that particular bus in service. What customers need to hear is this: "We will confirm the situation with the bus driver, and if the emergency exit is broken, the bus will be pulled from service as soon as possible."

— 2:00 PM Bus 007 is seen still operating. Metro Customer Service was called to find out if the bus had been repaired, and if not, why it was still in service. It was reported that the exit was deemed to be working, there are plenty of other emergency exits if that one is broken. The bus will stay in service until the end of the day.

Problems:
The exit was not working as designed. See further notes under June 30 section.

The answer of "there are plenty of other emergency exits" is inexcusable. Buses are designed with emergency exits so that all likely situations are covered with the assumption that the exits are initially working. After a crash or a rollover, several emergency exits may be inaccessible or disabled. Sometimes the only way out might be the roof exit in the rear.

Another thing to note about this particular emergency exit: it is the ONLY exit in the rear balcony-seating area of the bus. None of the windows in the rear upper seating area have emergency exits by design. If a head-on collision were to occur, the front door, front roof exit, and many of the side window exits could be disabled, leaving only the rear door (which could also be pinched by the crushed frame) and the rear roof exit.

Friday, June 26 2015

Bus 007 has a new emergency exit knob in the rear but the English instructions and latch position indicator are missing. Also noted was that the front emergency exit had all the right parts but the knob was in the unlatched position.

Tuesday, June 30 2015

— Received call from Jack Laylan (job title shop supervisor) explaining more details of the situation.

The bus is finally fixed because parts had to be ordered.

It was explained that Bus 007 remained on the road because the emergency exit mechanism was turned to the open position.

This is not an acceptable procedure. If a crash happens and passengers are in a panic, they have no information that the hatch is already unlocked and can be pushed open. The panicked passengers will try to decipher the instructions about turning a knob that they can't find and will just give up on that particular exit.

Questions that were asked but none of which had reasonable answers:

Why is the bus in service when the exit is disabled or not fully repaired?

What is so important about that particular bus; aren't there vehicles in reserve that can be substituted in such situations?

If a school bus is immediately Out Of Service for an emergency exit violation, why not city buses? Remember too that Metro transports school children, not technically as a school bus operation, but very close conceptually. Shouldn't the same precautions that apply to school buses also be used for Metro buses? Our school children (and of course adults too) are precious cargo.

Why didn't the CDL-required pre-trip checklist and inspection uncover this problem?

What is the criteria for pulling a bus off the road? Why was there no policy or adherence to applicable regulations to provide direction for this situation?

FOR THE TRANSIT & PARKING COMMISSION

Hopefully the members are also alarmed about how this situation played out. They should ask Metro management for a report at next meeting detailing the following:

What went wrong?

What were the pre-trip inspection reports for this bus for that morning and prior days?

What policies and laws were broken?

- By the bus leaving the garage with a broken emergency exit (appears to be an incomplete pre-trip inspection)

- By the bus remaining in service after the knowledge of the knob deficiency

- By the bus remaining in service after the instructions were removed

Will happen next time in a similar situation?

What needs to be done next?

Suggestions for future action:

- Extensive inspection of all emergency exits on all buses to make sure no other buses are currently deficient in emergency exits.
- Consult with the manufacturer about emergency exits falling apart.
- Change procedures so that all required CDL pre-trip inspections are performed
- If no policy currently exists, create a policy that a broken emergency exit will immediately place the bus in out-of-service status.
- Are employee reprimands appropriate? It seems as though several employees chose convenience over safety.
- Ensure the bus riders and the general public that Metro takes safety regulations seriously and has timely and prudent responses to reported safety issues.

NO EMERGENCY EXIT KNOB

BUS 007-rear Friday, June 19 10:30 AM

REPLACED EMERGENCY EXIT KNOB — BUT— Missing English instructions and latch position indicator

BUS 007-rear Friday, June 26

CORRECT EMERGENCY EXIT KNOB INSTALLATION
— BUT — why is the bus operating with the knob not in the latched position?

BUS 007-front

Friday, June 26

WISCONSIN COMMERCIAL DRIVER'S MANUAL

January 2014

www.wisconsindmv.gov

Section 4: Transporting Passengers Safely

This section covers:

- Vehicle Inspection
- Loading
- On the Road
- After-trip Vehicle Inspection
- Prohibited Practices
- Use of Brake-door Interlocks

Bus drivers must have a commercial driver license if they drive a vehicle designed to transport 16 or more persons, including the driver.

Bus drivers must have a passenger endorsement on their commercial driver license. To get the endorsement you must pass a knowledge test on Sections 2 and 4 of this manual. (If your bus has air brakes, you must also pass a knowledge test on Section 5.) You must also pass the skills tests required for the class of vehicle you plan to drive.

4.1 Vehicle Inspection

Before driving your bus, you must be sure it is safe. You must review the inspection report made by the previous driver. Only if defects reported earlier have been certified as repaired or not needing to be repaired, should you sign the previous driver's report. This is your certification that the defects reported earlier have been fixed.

4.1.1 VEHICLE SYSTEMS

Make sure these things are in good working order before driving:

- Service brakes, including air hose couplings (if your bus has a trailer or semitrailer).
- Parking brake.
- Steering mechanism.
- Lights and reflectors.
- Tires (front wheels must not have recapped or re-grooved tires).
- Horn.
- Windshield wiper or wipers.
- Rear-vision mirror or mirrors.
- Coupling devices (if present).
- Wheels and rims.
- Emergency equipment.

4.1.2 ACCESS DOORS AND PANELS

As you check the outside of the bus, close any open emergency exits. Also, close any open access panels (for baggage, restroom service, engine, etc.) before driving.

4.1.3 BUS INTERIOR

People sometimes damage unattended buses. Always check the interior of the bus before driving to ensure rider safety. Aisles and stairwells should always be clear. The following parts of your bus must be in safe working condition:

- Each handhold and railing.
- Floor covering.
- Signaling devices, including the restroom emergency buzzer, if the bus has a restroom.
- Emergency exit handles.

The seats must be safe for riders. All seats must be securely fastened to the bus.

Never drive with an open emergency exit door or window. The "Emergency Exit" sign on an emergency door must be clearly visible. If there is a red emergency door light, it must work. Turn it on at night or any other time you use your outside lights.

4.1.4 ROOF HATCHES

You may lock some emergency roof hatches in a partly open position for fresh air. Do not leave them open as a regular practice. Keep in mind the bus's higher clearance while driving with them open.

Make sure your bus has the fire extinguisher and emergency reflectors required by law. The bus must also have spare electrical fuses, unless equipped with circuit breakers.

4.1.5 USE YOUR SEATBELT!

The driver's seat should have a seat belt. Always use it for safety.

4.2 Loading and Trip Start

Do not allow riders to leave carry-on baggage in a doorway or aisle. There should be nothing in the aisle that might trip other riders. Secure baggage and freight in ways that avoid damage and:

- Allow the driver to move freely and easily.
- Allow riders to exit by any window or door in an emergency.
- Protect riders from injury if carry-ons fall or shift.

4.2.1 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Watch for cargo or baggage containing hazardous materials. Most hazardous materials cannot be carried on a bus.

The Federal Hazardous Materials Table shows which materials are hazardous. They pose a risk to health, safety and property during transportation. The rules require shippers to mark containers of hazardous material with the material's name, ID number and hazard label. There are nine different classes of four inch, diamond-shaped hazard labels like the examples shown in Figure 4-1. Watch for the diamond-shaped labels. Do not transport any hazardous material unless you are sure the rules allow it.

School Bus Inspection Manual

WISCONSIN STATE PATROL

Prepared by the School Bus Project Action Team – April 2006

2. **Inspect** inside quick release mechanism and hold open device (3-1-1995) on emergency door.
   ****OOS if door release mechanism fails to function positively when activated from both inside and outside of the bus or if it opens accidentally or too easily.**

   ****OOS if door binds or is difficult to open** (reference- could a small child open the door?)

3. **Check** length of stroke on slide bar cam-operated lock.

4. **Check** function of buzzer indicating that the door is not fully closed.
   ****OOS if buzzer fails to function when slide bar is moved.**

5. If equipped with emergency door lock, attempt to start vehicle with door locked to **check** interlock function.
   ****OOS if vehicle starts or buzzer does not sound when switch is in the "ON" position.**

   ****OOS if no override.**

   ****OOS if any other lock installed without an override system.**

6. **Check** for padding above door.

7. **Check** for proper labeling and of emergency door and emergency windows.

8. **Check** that the emergency door is identified with the words "Emergency Exit" or "Emergency Door" on the inside at the top of, or above the door.
   ****OOS if "emergency exits" or "emergency doors" are not identified.**

9. Check that emergency exits are outlined with retroreflective tape on all school buses manufactured after 3 -1 -1995.

Note: Each opening for a required emergency exit shall be outlined around its outside perimeter with a retroreflective tape with a minimum width of 2.5 centimeters and either red, white, or yellow in color, that when tested under the conditions specified in S6.1 of Standard No. 131 (49 CFR *571.131*), meets the criteria specified in Table 1 of that section.

10. **Check** for free operation of all emergency exit windows and roof hatch if so equipped.
    ****OOS if emergency windows / roof hatches do not operate freely or at all.**

11. **Check** for audible alarm for emergency exit windows and for roof hatch if so equipped.
    ****OOS if signal does not operate or there is a cutout in the circuit.** (Windows- Effective 1-1-83)

    ****OOS if locking system with no audio alarm installed.**

    ****OOS if installed with roof hatches, does not have alarm or alarm is inoperative.** (Effective 3-1-95)

12. For rear window emergency windows, **check** for proper height, hinging and latching.
    ****OOS rear emergency window with less than 16" in height opening.**

    ****OOS if not hinged at the top and does not remain open at an angle of at least 45 degrees.**

    ****OOS if it does not properly latch.**

13. **Check** for unobstructed 12" of aisle to emergency doors, and that any articles transported on non-occupied seats are secured.
    ****OOS if passageway to any emergency door is blocked.**