

Connecticut School Transportation Association

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DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
DOCKETS

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Docket Management Facility
U S Department of Transportation
West Building Ground Floor
Room W12-140
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: **Docket Number FMCSA – 2007 – 27748**

I am pleased to submit the following comments on behalf of the Connecticut School Transportation Association (COSTA) in **opposition** to the adoption of Docket Number FMCSA – 2007 – 27748, *Minimum Training Requirements for Entry-Level Commercial Motor Vehicle Operators; Proposed Rule*.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration proposes new mandated training requirements on the motor carrier industry, including the operators of school buses. COSTA has several concerns with the Proposed Rule. Those concerns are herein presented.

- 1.) Connecticut Commercial Drivers' License (CDL) applicants already undergo several hours of required training and must pass specific tests to obtain their license.
- 2.) The State of Connecticut has adopted Federal Regulations governing the issuance of a Commercial Drivers License. In order to obtain a CDI to drive a school bus, drivers must be at least 18 years of age (21 for interstate driving); pass a physical exam meeting the requirements contained in 49 CFR 391.41; and pass the knowledge tests required in 49 CFR 380.502.
(Connecticut State Regulations: 14-163c-1)

In addition to those requirements, the driver must pass a proficiency test which includes several areas of competencies. Those competencies must be performed in the vehicle that they intend to drive. The competencies that must be passed include: a

Basic Control (Static Test Course) including parallel parking to the curb, Forward and Backward Through the Alley, Backing into the Alley Jack-Knife, and Driving the vehicle in traffic conditions including highway, urban and rural roads.

- 3.) The Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles (CT DMV) currently requires a minimum of ten (10) hours of additional entry-level driver training for school bus drivers. That training includes: Training to Obtain a Commercial Driver's License (CDL); Techniques for Conducting a Pre-Trip Safety Inspection and Completing a Driver's Vehicle Inspection Report (DVIR) as required by Section 14-275c-41 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies; Loading and Unloading Procedures; Procedures for Crossing Railroad Tracks; Emergency Procedures including Accident Management and Evacuation, and Instruction Relative to the Location, Contents and Use of the First Aid Kit in the School Bus; Motor Vehicle Laws and Regulations; and Use of Passenger Restraint Systems and Special Equipment for Students with Mobility Impairments if the driver intends to operate a vehicle so equipped. *(Connecticut State Regulations: 14-276a-3 Preservice Training and 14-276a-4 Contents of Preservice Training Subjects)*

Drivers also undergo several hours of training by driving students under the direct supervision of an Approved Instructor before they are allowed to drive students on their own. In addition, all drivers are required to undergo an additional six (6) hours of safety training annually in order to maintain their endorsements.

Mandating additional entry-level training will have a negative affect on carriers' abilities to hire new employees. As it is, the required background investigations of the drivers add twelve (12) to sixteen (16) weeks to the hiring process. During this time, the drivers receive additional training, but generally are not paid. Few applicants can afford to wait up to sixteen (16) weeks and beyond before receiving a paycheck.

The topics that are proposed in the NPR are not clearly spelled out. In fact, the NPR notes, "To provide flexibility for instructors and drivers, however, the content of each unit of training is described in general terms." The NPR goes on to say that, "At the conclusion of the training, the driver-student must pass knowledge and skills tests to determine if he/she has mastered the required information."

What "knowledge and skills" will the drivers be required to become proficient in? Specifically:

- What does "Basic Operation" entail?
- What comprises "Safe Operating Practices"?
- What are "Advanced Operating Procedures"?
- What type of "Vehicle Maintenance" will the drivers be responsible for?
- What are "Non-Driving Activities" and what do they have to do with obtaining a commercial drivers' license?

- 4.) Connecticut Instructors should not have to go through training from an "accredited educational institution or program." Connecticut Regulations are specific in their

requirements for approval as an instructor. In order to be recognized as a Connecticut Approved Instructor, the person must: a.) have a valid Class B License; b.) be employed as a school bus driver for a minimum of three (3) years; c.) have no more than two (2) moving violations in two (2) years; d.) train under the direct supervision of an Approved Instructor for one (1) year; e.) be recommended for approval by his or her employer; and f.) undergo forty (40) hours of a state approved training curriculum by state certified instructors.

(Connecticut State Regulations 14-276a-9 Instructor Requirements)

- 5.) Requiring training institutions to become certified would be burdensome on the private carriers that conduct their own training. The process generally requires that the training center be in operation for at least three years and undergo a two year process for certification. While accreditation does provide a means of measuring the effectiveness of the training center, there are other ways to ensure that they meet minimum standards. Additionally, the employer pays for school bus driver training expenses. As such, there is no financial burden on the applicant.

The absence of an accredited training facility for a period of several years means that there will be no new school bus driver training in Connecticut. As a result, there will be no new school bus drivers hired in Connecticut, putting the carriers in a precarious position. The carriers and school districts will be unable to guarantee enough school bus drivers to provide the necessary transportation for school children. This in turn will put children at risk as they travel to school in vehicles other than school buses. As is widely known and accepted, the school bus is the safest means to travel to school.

- 6.) The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration estimates that nationally only 119 school bus driver applicants would have to be trained for interstate driving annually. School bus carriers in Connecticut train all of their drivers for interstate travel, as it is the most effective and efficient method to train. Such training helps to ensure a ready pool of drivers for trips to near-by, out-of-state educational venues, athletic competitions and extra-curricular activities. The number trained in Connecticut last year alone exceeded 300.

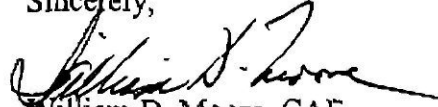
There are hundreds of interstate trips annually for school children in Connecticut. Children regularly travel to Boston, MA, New York, NY and Washington, DC on school trips. They travel to Sturbridge, MA and Pawtucket, RI. Children participate in regional athletic events out of state on a regular basis. They compete in extra-curricular activities out-of-state on a regular basis as a part of their educational experience. These trips require hundreds of drivers eligible to drive out-of-state.

- 7.) The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration estimates that the direct costs for forty (40) hours of training is \$1,000. This number is woefully inaccurate. The direct training cost per hour in Connecticut is approximately \$45.00 per hour, including the trainer's wages and benefits, the costs for training materials and overhead including facility costs. The true cost is approximately \$1,800 per pupil, not an insubstantial cost to the carrier.
- 8.) The estimates regarding fatal crashes annually incorporate all commercial motor vehicle accidents. In 2006, there were seven (7) fatalities involving school buses, the

lowest level in at least ten (10) years. It is unlikely that any of these fatalities involved entry-level drivers on interstate travel, as entry-level drivers are generally not assigned to interstate travel.

For these and other reasons, COSTA opposes the adoption of Docket Number FMCSA – 2007 – 27748, *Minimum Training Requirements for Entry-Level Commercial Motor Vehicle Operators*. I appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,



William D. Moore, CAE
Executive Director