

Minimum Fixed Route Bus Operator Annual Refresher Training Guidelines

BACKGROUND

Bus Operator training is one of the cornerstones of the Florida public transit industry and falls into three general categories:

- New Hire Training
The Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT) Florida Operators Network and Florida Transit Safety Network have jointly developed "Minimum Fixed Route Bus Operator Training Guidelines" for new bus operators. These guidelines provide for 80 hours of classroom training, 40 hours of behind the wheel training, and up to 80 hours of route training.
- Remedial Training
Remedial Training (or retraining) is required when an operator is involved in a preventable accident or observed operating the bus in an unsafe manner. The remedial training is designed to meet the specific situation and lead to corrective actions. Trainer road observation may also be conducted.
- Refresher Training
Refresher Training should be provided annually to all existing bus operators. Usually there are two components of annual refresher training: four (4) to eight (8) hours of classroom training plus behind the wheel observations and instructions.

The bus operator training can be supplemented with:

- Bus Simulator Training – this mimics actual driving and road conditions in a wide variety of circumstances and weather. It is used for both new operator training and refresher training classes. It allows the trainer to evaluate the driving skills of the operator in a safe environment.
- Safety Ride Along – this program is regularly conducted by supervisors and trainers. The supervisor/trainer conducts the road observation and determines if remedial training is needed.
- Safety Messages and Slogans
- Operator Notices and Memorandums
- Employee Newsletters
- Monthly or Quarterly Mandatory Operator Meetings

RECENT FLORIDA ACTIONS

Similar to the Florida Operators Network (FON) and/or the Florida Transit Safety Network (FTSN) training committees' effort to develop "Minimum Guidelines for Bus Operator Training," there has been overwhelming support for the development of similar minimum guidelines for annual bus operator refresher training.

A conference call among representatives of both the FON and FTSN was conducted on Thursday, October 16, 2014 to begin the process. Participants shared their agency practices for annual refresher training for bus operators. Refresher training is aimed at all agency bus operators and is above and in addition to remedial training that may be conducted for individual employees.

Based upon discussions with the operations, safety, and training representatives from Florida's public transit agencies, it was the consensus that, while the primary bus operator training currently provided is focused on

new operator or on remedial retraining, it was important that transit agencies conduct formal and organized “refresher training” for all of its bus operators on a regular, re-occurring basis.

In late 2014, a survey was conducted to determine current annual refresher training practices for bus operators and identify those topics to be included in the guidelines. The survey was divided into two sections. The initial series of questions requested general information about each agency’s annual bus operator refresher training. This was followed by questions that specifically requested input on those topics that should be offered in annual bus operator refresher training and allowed for additional comment.

FINDINGS

1. All agencies participating conducted some form of annual refresher training for its bus operators.
2. While the most frequent format of the training was annual training sessions, other agencies used their regular bus operator meetings (i.e., conducted on a monthly, quarterly, or semi-annual basis) to present refresher training topics.
3. The most popular training delivery methods were classroom training, handouts, and memos/notices. These primary methods were supplemented with posters, banners, computer based training, and employee newsletters.
4. The annual refresher training topics varied from system-to-system and within systems from year-to-year depending upon industry topics, local situations, and critical needs. The topical areas, however, focused on these six (6) general categories:
 - 1) Defensive Driving
 - 2) Distracted Driving
 - 3) Passenger Relations
 - 4) Bus Operator Policies and Procedures
 - 5) Emergency and System Security Issues
 - 6) Maintenance Related Issues

Attachment A details associated sub-topics that could be included in each of these categories.

Attachment B provides additional maintenance topic input provided for consideration in Annual Bus Operator Refresher Training from the Florida Transit Maintenance Consortium (FTMC).

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINE

While it is not feasible to direct specific requirements to the content or format of annual refresher training for current fixed route bus operators, these Annual Bus Operator Refresher Training Guidelines include the development and implementation of annual refresher training that consists of a minimum of four (4) and preferably eight (8) hours per employee per calendar year. Each transit agency, while designing the annual refresher training approach to meet local needs and situations, should observe elements of all or most of the six (6) general training categories previously listed.

ATTACHMENT A
General Training Category Sub-Topic Detail

The annual refresher training topics varied from system-to-system and within systems from year-to-year depending upon industry topics, local situations, and critical needs. The topical areas, however, focused on these six (6) general categories:

1. Defensive Driving
2. Distracted Driving
 - a. Dealing with Passenger Distractions
 - b. Agency Guidelines for Use of Electronic and Wireless Communication Devices, Including Related Distractions
 - c. Dealing with Bicyclist Distractions
 - d. Dealing with Pedestrian Distractions
 - e. Dealing with Other Traffic Distractions
3. Passenger Relations
 - a. Passenger Wheelchair Securement and other Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Items
 - b. Dealing with Difficult Passengers
 - c. Customer Service
 - d. Passenger Boarding and Alighting
 - e. Passenger Assistance
4. Bus Operator Policies and Procedures
 - a. Agency Policies and Procedures
 - b. Drug and Alcohol Policies, Procedures and Education
 - c. Farebox and Fare Collection Issues
 - d. Rule 14-90 Updates
 - e. Fatigue Awareness
5. Emergency and System Security Issues
 - a. General
 - b. Awareness
 - c. How to Handle Emergency Situations
 - d. System Safety/Security Issues
 - e. Fire Extinguishers
 - f. Blood Borne Pathogens
 - g. Hurricane/Mass Evacuation
6. Maintenance Related Issues
 - a. Pre- and Post-Trip Inspections Process
 - b. Reporting Bus Problems
 - c. Overview and Understanding of Bus and Bus Equipment
 - d. Interaction and Communication with Maintenance Division

ATTACHMENT B
Annual Bus Operator Refresher Training
Input from Florida's Transit Maintenance Consortium

On October 19, 2014, a posting to the Florida Transit Maintenance Consortium (FTMC) requested input as follows:

"The Florida Transit Safety Network and Florida Operations Network are in the process of establishing minimum guidelines for annual bus operator refresher training. Based on your experiences, we would like your input on specific annual refresher training topics for bus operators that may reduce any issues you are having related to bus operations personnel. Please provide the top 5 training topics that you would like to see included in annual bus operator refresher training. This may include topics such as: completing pre-trip inspection forms, completing vehicle defect forms, as examples."

The responses received (*direct quotes*) are provided below:

1. When reporting a defect/service call give as much information as possible
2. Go over the re-gen procedure, like high exhaust temperature – regen ect not always mean it has to be called in
3. Understanding DEF-REGEN-HIGH EXHAUST TEMPERATURE lights
4. Equipment orientation – understanding the controls and differences from hone bus to another
5. FAR BOX, ITS equipment and radio training
6. CHECK ENGINE LIGHTS – STOP ENGINE LIGHTS – what do they mean and what do they do?
7. Wheelchair lifts, ramps, HP Securement – Safety
8. Report pre-trip defects to the shop or dispatcher before pulling out of the yard that can potentially become a road call or safety problem e.g. fluid (oil-coolant-hydraulic) leaks, air leaks, safety lights out, etc.
9. Proper use of W/C restraint systems, to include storage of equipment and belts to maintain the cleanliness of the equipment.
10. Maintaining a clean driver's area. Vacate the driver's seat area when eating lunch or snacking during layovers.
11. Report damage and cleanliness of passenger areas as a part of the post trip- torn seats, sticky floors, graffiti, roaches, etc. Supervisors will be able to see a report of the condition and not rely on the service crew to catch the condition.
12. When parking the bus at the end of the shift- turn off all accessories/lights- put the bus in neutral- apply the parking brake- shut down the bus- release air pressure from the doors. Procedures vary at different properties, but having the bus safely secured is critical.
13. Pre-Trip and Post-Trip inspections. The proper way to perform one and its importance.
14. Warning Lights, Noises, and bus issues. The proper way to explain the problem, but don't diagnose it. Better communication.
15. Wheel Chair Restraints, Lifts, and SAFETY (the Wheelchair Seat Belt should be work in case of a hard stop).
16. Bus controls and functions. Different years have different controls. Cutaways are not the same.
17. Air conditioning. Factors that affect the A/C operation/performance.
18. ADA law and operators responsibilities
19. Customer service skills
20. Distracted driving
21. Pre-trip inspections
22. Advanced driving skills (left hand turns)