



Department for Transport

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12 June 2014

Dear Miss Plovie

I refer to your letter of 16 April following the inquest into the death of Ms Muriel Dawson. On conclusion of the inquest Her Majesty's Coroner made a finding that the design and location of the seat on which Ms Dawson was sitting on the bus contributed to her fall and ultimately to her death. I am replying as Head of International Vehicle Standards division, which has responsibility for road vehicle safety standards.

I was grateful for the information provided in the Coroner's Regulation 28 Report and I have made further enquiries with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (formerly the Vehicle & Operator Services Agency), which is an Executive Agency of the Department for Transport with responsibility for bus certification and roadworthiness in Great Britain. The subject vehicle (Registration Number YJ60 KFR) was first registered in October 2010 and is certified to carry a maximum of 25 seated passengers, 16 standees and 1 wheelchair user although these capacities would not apply simultaneously. To attain the maximum standing capacity all of the folding seats would need to be in the stowed position.

In common with most buses currently operating in the UK, the vehicle on which Ms Dawson was travelling when she received her fatal injuries was approved to national regulations. These regulations specify the general safety items of the vehicles and include, for example emergency exits, lighting, and additional features to make it easier for disabled people, including wheelchair users to gain access. Amongst other provisions, they set requirements for additional hand holds, a minimum of 1 wheelchair space, together with a minimum of four priority seats for the disabled and elderly passengers. These priority seats have extra legroom and can be easily reached from the entrance of the vehicle.

It is also important to recognise that incidents involving buses and coaches are rare. Travel by bus and coach is one of the safest modes of road transport in Great Britain, with the rate of killed and seriously injured passengers per mile travelled being approximately one third that of passenger cars.

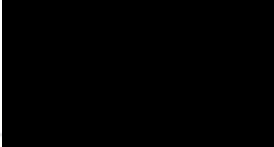
The Department is committed to improving safety for all bus passengers through the use of appropriate vehicle construction standards and ensuring the safe operation of vehicles. Vehicle manufacturers have some flexibility to install additional design features that benefit passengers providing they do not compromise the existing construction requirements.

Our national regulations setting the minimum standards for new vehicles utilise a number of specifications that are harmonised with EU and wider international requirements. These standards are reviewed regularly by an International group of experts under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The Department for Transport is an active participant in this group.

The Coroner highlighted his concerns in Section 5 of the report. Within this I noted his suggestion that additional design features could have prevented Ms Dawson being thrown forward. Following the Coroner raising this matter with the Department, I intend to bring this to the attention of the bus manufacturers through the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) technical group. My team will also raise the issue at the next meeting of the International technical group and consider whether it is appropriate to propose amending the minimum specifications for new vehicles (including those relating to the type approval) to help prevent this type of incident occurring in future.

I am grateful for the Coroner raising this issue with the Department.

Yours sincerely

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Head of International Vehicle Standards