

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency
Management

Hearing on

**A Growing Capitol Complex and Visitor Center: Need for Transportation, Security,
Screening, Energy and Maintenance**

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Testimony of

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Madame Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Peter J. Pantuso and I serve as the President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Bus Association (ABA). The ABA would like to thank you, Madam Chairman for your leadership in convening this hearing and we appreciate the opportunity to testify on this important matter. The ABA is the national trade association for the private over-the-road bus industry. ABA is comprised of approximately 3800 member companies that operate buses and provide related services to the motorcoach industry. Our members operate 40-45 foot touring style coaches with baggage bays under a passenger compartment. Nearly all of the operator members provide charter, tour or commuter service and some 100 ABA member companies provide regular route scheduled service. The American motorcoach industry is large and diverse. Our operator members are large and small; provide local, regional and national services' and are saddled with a variety of operational challenges.

All together, ABA members provide all manner of bus services to 600 million U.S. passengers annually, a number that is equal to the number of passengers carried by

all U.S. airlines in a year. In addition, we move more passengers in two weeks than Amtrak does in that same year. In providing transportation services and most pertinent to this hearing, the majority of our members, large and small provide charter and tour services to the nation. It is our mission to bring families, school groups and senior citizens to the nation's capitol and we do so to the tune of up to a thousand buses every day and 55 passengers to a bus. With this as a backdrop you can see how the subject of the Capitol Visitor Center (CVC) is a topic of great interest to the ABA and its members.

ABA is not alone in this interest. This testimony is supported by the Student Youth Travel Association (SYTA), the National Tour Association (NTA), the Guide Service of Washington (GSW) and the United Motorcoach Association (UMA). Each of these organizations is engaged in the business of bringing tourists to the nation's capitol and providing them with a safe, secure and pleasant experience. All five of the organizations, known as the Travel & Tourism Advocacy Group, have serious concerns about the proposal for allowing visitors to view the nation's capitol and capitol city and believe that the proposal, if implemented as drafted, would be a disaster for the District of Columbia, the people who visit here and the organizations that carry those people to D.C.

As we understand the proposal, people attempting to visit the CVC by motorcoach would arrive at Union Station, disembark and then be reloaded on to other buses (the current DC Circulator bus has been mentioned as a candidate for this duty) for which they would pay a fee, for the six block ride to the entrance to the CVC. Presumably, once at the CVC they would disembark, be cleared through security and led into the CVC. We further understand that this proposal is advanced in the name of

security and that standard motorcoaches are in some way more of a threat to the security of the CVC than the D.C. Circulator buses mentioned in the proposal.

Tourism and motorcoach visitors in particular are an important part of the area's economy. In fact, in past statements, the Washington Convention and Tourism Corporation had estimated that as many as one-third of D.C.'s tourists come by motorcoach or are transported by private bus companies when they arrive in the area.

A study done by George Washington University, a copy of which is appended to my testimony, estimated that for each motorcoach that brings visitors to the area for an overnight stay, as much as \$8,000/per day remains in the local economy through the purchase of meals, hotel rooms, attraction tickets, gifts, etc.

The Travel & Tourism Advocacy Group has analyzed this proposal and have found several deficiencies that call into question its usefulness from a security as well as transportation standpoint. It is to those deficiencies I turn to now.

First of all, Union Station does not have the space to accommodate the motorcoaches that would bring visitors to its doors either in the front of the Station or in the rear, where there is space to accommodate approximately 35 motorcoaches. During the peak season, 1,000 private motorcoaches bring as many as 55,000 visitors each day into the District of Columbia. There is no way that anywhere near that number can be accommodated in the area in front of or around Union Station. In addition, the limited space at Union Station would not be able to accommodate the D.C. Circulator buses that would be needed to load and unload passengers to and from the CVC. Moreover, the proposal would require more Circulator buses to be available than motorcoaches due to the difference in capacity between them. A modern motorcoach will seat approximately

55 passengers. A D.C. transit bus holds several fewer passengers. So for each motorcoach unloaded at Union Station, one would need one Circulator bus plus several additional seats. The potential for mass confusion at best is obvious.

Second, most motorcoach passengers coming to D.C. are part of a group. Either the Girl Scouts from a specific council or the D.C. Classroom program from a State or even the senior class trip are in D.C., particularly at this time of year to see the government in action and to meet their Congressional representatives. Generally, these groups are easy to spot; their members usually wear identically colored shirts and hats or badges. Thus, allowing harried chaperones to find the members quickly.

The coalition's fear is that the proposal will make it more difficult for groups to stay together. Again, with the use of the Circulator bus performing this shuttle service it is probable that groups will have to be separated on their way to or from the CVC. Not a good prospect as far as any chaperone is concerned.

Third, and perhaps the most important issue, is the assumption that D.C. Circulator buses are somehow more secure than the private motorcoaches and therefore present less of a threat to the CVC and the Capitol complex. This is simply not true and for several reasons. First, motorcoaches are chartered by groups of people. The people in the group are not strangers to each other. Their security comes from knowing who is on the bus. That is not the case when the bus is a city bus. As we understand the proposal, anyone can board the D.C. Circulator at Union Station and ride to the CVC. That scenario asks the question: Which group has the better security? Second, security on chartered motorcoaches is enhanced by the presence of guides from the Guide Service of Washington, whose members must undergo background checks by the police. Thus,

every motorcoach tour that has a licensed guide has more security than any municipal bus or trolley. Third, many city transit buses are fueled by compressed natural gas, which is more of a threat to explode than a standard motorcoach which uses diesel fuel. Finally, while private motorcoaches are banned from the Capitol complex and transit buses are not, that ban is neither uniform nor logical. There are private motorcoaches, leased to the States of Virginia and Maryland for use as commuter buses that are allowed to proceed on the streets adjacent to the Capitol. The same bus, without a Virginia or Maryland decal is forbidden to use the same street.

With all respect to the law enforcement agencies and the job they do, the current ban makes little sense. It is not the bus or the motorcoach that is the security problem; it is the people within the motorcoach. There are many ways to resolve that issue without banning a class of vehicles from the streets of the District of Columbia.

There is no reason to exclude motorcoaches from the CVC. There are several ways in which security concerns may be alleviated without banning a class of vehicles from the CVC.

We suggest the following solutions:

1. **Security** - Putting into place a system wherein all tour busses can be inspected to enable them to move to the closest drop off point to the new Capitol Visitors Center, while maintaining maximum security. The Travel & Tourism Advocacy Group suggests the implementation of a thorough screening system, possibly including pre-registration, company based clearances, and/or on site inspections, as part of this process.

2. **Screening** - Identifying steps necessary to clear vehicles, and contents to move occupied busses prior to drop offs close to the new Capitol Visitors Center to maximize security. The Travel & Tourism Advocacy Group suggests the establishment of procedures through which tour operators can minimize screening by using steps to expedite clearance, such as having mostly empty luggage bays on the bus, registering the passengers and schedule tours of the CVC in advance, or other steps which will assist the Capitol Police in its duties to maintain maximum security. We assume that the actual screening of passengers will occur at the Capitol Visitors Center, if they are traveling on screened vehicles.
3. **Staging** - Identifying an area close to the Capitol Visitors Center, which can serve as a location for both screening and holding emptied busses waiting to reload their passengers after visiting Capitol Hill and the Capitol Visitors Center. Having amenities for the drivers, such as a lounge and refreshment area, would be appreciated. The Travel & Tourism Advocacy Group would work with the City of Washington to identify an appropriate location and improvements which would facilitate maximum economic impact for the District.
4. **Access** - Identifying a drop off location for security cleared busses to disembark their passengers on a pre-scheduled basis, as well as pick them back up, close enough to the new Capitol Visitors Center, so that virtually everyone will have easy pedestrian access without a fee based circulator transfer being required. The Travel & Tourism Advocacy Group will work with its governmental partners to implement all of the previously cited steps to make this more accessible drop point work smoothly.

5. **Communications** - Establish an internal and external communications plan to educate motorcoach and tour operators on how to participate in the implementation of this program. The Travel & Tourism Advocacy Group would be pleased to use their collective membership contacts, trade publications, industry media, and other means to assist their governmental partners to notify tour operators visiting the District on how to utilize Capitol Visitor Center procedures to maximize security, enhance visitation, and provide the best visitor experience possible.

The members of the ABA and of the Travel & Tourism Advocacy Group want to work with the Capitol Hill Police and with Congress to find a way to maintain security without destroying the tourism of the Capitol region or the people's ability to see their Capitol Visitor Center. We applaud you, Madam Chairman for allowing us this opportunity to testify and for using your good offices to set a meeting with the Capitol Hill police to allow us all to find ways to secure the complex without turning it into a fortress in which no one enters or leaves.

We look forward to working with you and the Committee in the future. The CVC and the bus industry will need to work together for many years to come. This is the first of many issues we will have to face.

Thank you for your interest and your leadership. I am prepared to answer any questions from the Committee.