

Drive Safely Through Detours



by **Debbie L. Feldman**

It's Friday rush hour, your bus is full and it's raining. Your dispatcher informs you that there is a traffic collision on your route that you'll need to bypass. What can you do to make the detour less unsettling for your passengers and make sure they arrive safely at their destination?

Inform your passengers

When passengers board your bus, let them know immediately that there's a detour. And be sure to make the announcement periodically during the trip to remind them.

"If necessary, be apologetic and be prepared to defuse any situation that comes up," says Jerry Baker, a Brooklyn bus driver.



"Don't get caught up in it."

"Passengers don't mind detours if they are informed and are given options of what they may want to do," says John Boland, training specialist at Cincinnati Metro. "With detours such as a parade, our operators tell riders about the detour at the beginning of the ride and tell them that they can get off now if they want to."

Safe pickups and drop-offs

But it's not safe to let passengers get off just anywhere. The policy in Cincinnati is to never drop riders off in the middle of a detour. "We don't leave anybody off in the street," says Boland. "We go to the next safest location to drop them off."

If the detour route has no bus stops, you should let passengers off as safety permits, says Michael Simonetti, assistant chief transportation officer at the Bus Command Center for New York City Transit.

Besides complicating drop-offs, detours also disrupt pickups. Stephen Nacco, director of the Bus Customer Relations Center at New York City Transit, advises drivers to be on the lookout for potential riders while driving the detour route.

"We tell our drivers that during road diversions or detours, anyone waiting for a bus should be picked up, even if they're not at a designated bus stop," he says.



Keep your cool

Nacco has plenty of experiences with detours, working in New York City. With some 234 bus routes in the city, on any day there may be as many as 10 diversions for bus drivers to deal with, such as street repairs, auto crashes, water main breaks, downed power lines and street fairs.

“Road construction or paving is the No. 1 reason for detours,” Nacco says.

So how do drivers handle all these stressful detour situations? The best solution is to try to remain calm. And be aware that regular riders who know the route may need special reassurance that they will reach their destination even if the bus deviates from the usual route.

“The main thing we tell our drivers is, don't lose your cool,” says Alex Guariento, director of safety at Greyhound Lines in Dallas. “Detours are frustrating. You may be tired and having a difficult day, but you need to try to be courteous to your customers. Just relax.”

Children are passengers too

There's no questioning a bus driver's obligation to inform his/her passengers about detours. But what if the passengers are children who are too young to understand what is going on?

“Always notify children that you can't go the normal way, and reassure them that they'll be all right and that you won't let them off at



an unfamiliar stop,” says Carlisle Beasley, a school transportation consultant, formerly with the Nashville school system. “Every bus driver has a responsibility to make sure children get to their appropriate stop.”

When transporting very young children or children with special needs, never let them off at a stop other than where you picked them up. “Before you pick them up at school at the end of the day, if you know there is a detour, call the parents and notify the principal of any potential drop-off problem so there is an adult parent or guardian to pick them up or meet them at an alternate stop,” says Beasley. “You must make any arrangement necessary to assure that the child is picked up safely.”

If you come across a detour during a trip, notify your dispatcher of the situation immediately. “Today, 95 percent of school buses have cell phones or two-way radios. Perhaps dispatch can send a smaller bus or auto to pick the child up,” says Beasley.

If necessary, you can notify the police, the fire department, or youth services division of the situation.

“The goal is to do whatever it takes to get that child home safely,” Beasley says.

Detours can be upsetting for you and your passengers. But if you roll with the punches and remain calm, chances are your passengers will too. ●