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Contact: Bill Bronrott, 202-270-4415; bbcomm@aol.com

Relatives of motorcoach crash victims attend NTSB release of final report of US-75 tragedy; Families and safety advocates warn unsuspecting Americans about motorcoach bus dangers, call for swift federal action to protect nation's bus passengers.

WHAT: **MEDIA AVAILABILITY** with relatives of motorcoach occupants killed August 8, 2008 in a crash on US-75 near Sherman, Texas, which resulted in 17 deaths and 39 injured. They will join leaders of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (www.saferoads.org) at the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) public meeting where the safety agency will issue its Sherman crash final report and recommendations. The relatives and safety advocates will warn American motorists about motorcoach bus dangers, and will urge swift action by Congress to enact the Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act (S.554 and HR 1396) and regulatory action by U.S Department of Transportation (DOT).

WHEN: **TODAY – Tuesday, October 27, 2009 at 9:00am ET**
(1) 9:00am: Crash victims' relatives and vehicle safety advocates will provide statements to the media just before the 9:30am start of the NTSB meeting.
(2) Immediately after NTSB issues final report and safety recommendations, the relatives and safety advocates will provide reaction statements.

WHERE: Outside of the Board Room and Conference Center of the National Transportation Safety Board, located at 429 L'Enfant Plaza, SW, Washington, DC.

WHO:
-- Dr. Yen-Chi Le (Houston, TX), daughter of deceased, Catherine Tuong Lam.
-- Mr. Nghia Nguyen (New York, NY), whose sister-in-law's father, Khiem Nguyen, died.
-- Jacqueline Gillan, Vice President, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety.
-- Jerry Donaldson, Senior Research Director, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety.

BACKGROUND:

On August 7, 2008, a 2002 56-passenger motorcoach with a driver and 55 passengers on board departed Houston, Texas, en route to a festival in Carthage, Missouri. About four and a half hours into the trip, early on August 8, while traveling northbound in the right lane of U.S. Highway 75 in Sherman, Texas, the right steer axle tire failed as the motorcoach approached the Post Oak Creek bridge at a speed of about 68 mph; the bus went through the bridge railing and off the bridge. It fell about 8 feet and slid approximately 24 feet on its right side before coming to rest. As a result of the accident, 17 passengers died. In addition, the 52-year old driver received serious injuries and 38 passengers received minor-to-serious injuries.

The General Accounting Office launched an investigation following the Sherman crash and found the bus operator was "reincarnated" after being ordered off the road just weeks earlier. The company re-registered using the same mailing address as its predecessor. The GAO report ("Reincarnating Commercial Vehicle Companies Pose Safety Threat to Motoring Public") found that nearly 10 percent of interstate bus operators with their federal permits revoked for safety violations can quickly resume business by "reincarnating" themselves as new companies, and that 20 of the 220 motorcoach operators ordered to stop service by DOT in 2007 and 2008 remained on the road by re-registering under a different and sometimes same name.

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In 2006, more than 630 million passengers took trips in motorcoaches -- almost as many as U.S. commercial airlines carried that year. Today, nearly 3,700 interstate motorcoach companies operate over 34,000 motorcoaches, and thousands of others operate in intrastate commerce. Each year the number of new interstate motorcoach companies increases by about 900. Yet, DOT does not require motorcoaches to have the same occupant protection safety features routinely designed into passenger vehicles.

For example, the Surface Transportation Safety Reauthorization Act of 2005 (SAFETEA-LU) requires DOT to issue a federal vehicle safety standard to prevent ejection in rollover crashes by using laminated glass in the side windows of passenger cars. Since 1973, NTSB has issued repeated recommendations for improved safety glazing in motorcoaches to prevent these lethal occupant ejections.

Over the years, NTSB has investigated more than 25 motorcoach crashes and fires that resulted in more than 200 deaths and hundreds of injuries. The number of motorcoach crashes and fires reported since the Sherman, Texas, crash is 42, and there have been 50 since the Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act was originally introduced in November 2007. NTSB recommendations for enhanced motorcoach safety have languished for years, and congressional hearings have identified numerous oversight and enforcement failings that have not yet been remedied.

Despite numerous recommendations previously issued by NTSB, motorcoaches do not have many essential safety features, including seat belts, protection against dangerous motorcoach interior impacts, crush-resistant roofs, protection against fires, and occupant ejection prevention countermeasures, such as advanced glazing on windows, stability technology to help stop rollovers, and better federal and state oversight of unsafe motorcoach operators. Additionally, oversight of motorcoach carriers and drivers is lax and there are no federal requirements for motorcoach driver training.

Crash victims' relatives and safety advocates are calling for swift passage of the **Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act (S.554 and HR 1396)** to require DOT to promptly implement numerous unfulfilled NTSB recommendations. Senator Sherrod Brown (OH) is the lead sponsor of S.554, and is joined by Senators Barbara Boxer (CA), Roland Burris (IL), and Kay Bailey Hutchison (TX) as cosponsors. HR 1396 was introduced by Rep. John Lewis (GA) and is cosponsored by Reps. Michael Burgess (TX), Michael Conway (TX), Bob Filner (CA), Al Green (TX), Marcy Kaptur (OH), Ted Poe (TX), and Janice Schakowsky (IL).

LIVE WEBCAST OF NTSB MEETING: http://www.ntsb.gov/events/boardmeeting.htm. Technical support details are available at www.ntsb.gov under "Board Meetings."

SUMMARY OF NTSB'S FINAL REPORT, including findings, probable cause and safety recommendations, will appear on the NTSB website (www.ntsb.gov) at the close of today's meeting.

AN ELECTRONIC PRESS KIT is available at the Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety website (www.saferoads.org) with various fact sheets about the motorcoach safety problem, past NTSB recommendations on motorcoach safety, the pending Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act legislation, the recent GAO report, and more.

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety is an alliance of consumer, health, law enforcement and safety groups and insurance companies and agents working together to make America's roads safer.

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