February 2, 2000

MEMORANDUM

To: Section 5307, 5311 and 5310 Subrecipients

From: Mr. Robert J. Jill
Multimodal Transportation Engineer

Subject: Standard Vans and Safety

In recent years, the use of passenger vans to transport children to and from school and school-related activities has become a significant issue. FTA prohibits the use of federally funded equipment in the provision of exclusive school bus service. Tripper service may be operated if it complies with specified criteria.

Tripper service means regularly scheduled mass transportation service that is open to the public and designed or modified to accommodate the needs of school students and personnel, using various fare collection or subsidy systems. Buses used in tripper service must be clearly marked as open to the public and may not carry destination signs such as "school bus," "school special," "student," or any other marking indicating that they are carrying school children. These buses may stop only at stops that are accessible to the public and that are clearly marked as available to the public. All routes traveled by tripper buses must be within a grantee’s or operator’s regular route service as indicated in their published route schedules.

Recently, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has issued fines to some dealers for selling standard vans to schools for school transportation. The primary issue with NHTSA is safety. Specifically, the standard van is not designed nor is it built for use as either a commercial or school vehicle. Therefore, if a standard van is used for school service, the local operator could incur increased liability if an
incident occurs. The NHTSA standards are not regulations but
guidelines that are strongly recommended.

The Alabama Department of Education (SDE) prohibits the use of
standard club wagon-type vans to transport students to and from
school, and/or school-related activities/functions. Further, it is the
position of the SDE that students be transported in vehicles that meet
school bus standards.

All transit vehicles currently under state contract meet or exceed
school bus specifications with the exception of the traffic control stop
arm, which is not legal on a public transit vehicle. In addition, federal
law does not require a school bus to be yellow. State law dictates the
color of a school bus.

This memorandum is provided to keep you informed of the latest
developments concerning this subject. Please take appropriate
measures if this situation is applicable to your program.

If you have any questions please call Tom Garrison at (334) 242-
6084.

File General Correspondence