

Comment from Anonymous

I would like to post a comment about this particular petition for an exemption from the requirement of 3-point seat belts in side facing seats in buses that are custom manufactured but still meet the definition of an over the road bus.

I am opposed to the exemption being issued. The first item I would point out is that there already is an exemption in the regulation that allows for side facing seat lap belts to be installed if the vehicle is a perimeter seating vehicle with less than 8 forward facing positions. I am sure that NHTSA did analysis and scientifically set this requirement and cutoff of 8 forward facing positions for this exemption due to research and analysis of safety. If the company does not meet the definition to be able to take advantage of the exemption, they should not be afforded any other exemption unless they can clearly demonstrate that their vehicles are built equal to or safer than the current regulations. In my opinion, the companies that are involved in this petition have not clearly demonstrated this fact. Studies over side facing seatbelts in the past have been scarce and not fully convincing. The petition refers to discussions in literature about the possible increased risk of neck and carotid injury of 3-point seat belt use with side facing seating configurations and design rules put in place in Australia. I do not find that these references scientifically support the petitioners claim that safety is being maintained. I find it frustrating that NHTSA in this petition does not refer to recent scientific studies related to side facing seating and restraints published by the Society of Automotive Engineers earlier this year (SAE Technical Papers 2020-01-0980). This scientific study appears to offer direct data regarding side facing seats and different restraint systems as they affect safety in motor vehicles.

I also believe that by granting an exemption and permitting the petitioners to be able to bypass this requirement, you are not encouraging the companies to evaluate and find new alternatives that would be far safer (including finding configurations that incorporate far safer forward facing seats).

The last item I would point out is that this is a time where altered and custom built vehicles are coming under fire for their safety. In the light of the Schoharie limo crash, there have been concerns in the public about safety of passenger carrying vehicles including those that have been altered. Due to the current safety concerns, companies should be held to the minimal standards and exemptions should not be issued that may unknowingly or knowingly decrease safety of occupants. In light of recent events, I would also encourage NHTSA to review these outdated manufacturing standards particularly in regards to altered and modified motor vehicles. I would encourage NHTSA to expand the applicability of their regulations for manufacturers to include additional requirements for significant interior alterations and increased regulatory control over those public entities that substantially alter any motor vehicle after first sale.