

# Tips for School Bus Drivers

One collision between a school bus and a train is too many! These tragedies can be prevented by following these recommended procedures at highway-rail grade crossings:

- Approaching the crossing, slow down by shifting to a lower gear (manual transmission) and test your brakes.
- Activate the four-way hazard lights approximately 200 feet before the crossing.
- Scan your surroundings and check for traffic behind you. Make sure your intentions are known.
- Choose an escape route in the event of a brake failure or problems behind you.
- Stop no closer than 15 feet and no farther than 50 feet from the nearest rail, where you have the best view of the tracks.
- Look beyond the tracks to see if there is traffic congestion, a signal or STOP sign. Is the containment area large enough to allow the bus to completely clear the crossing when stopped? Are you absolutely sure?
- Place the transmission in neutral and press down on the service brake or set the parking brakes.
- Turn off the AM-FM radio and noisy equipment, and silence the passengers.
- If your laws and policies permit it, open the service door and driver's window. Look and listen for an approaching train.
- Check the crossing signals again before proceeding.
- At a multiple-track crossing, stop ONLY before the first set of tracks. When you are sure no train is approaching on any track, proceed across all of the tracks until you have completely cleared them.
- Cross the tracks in a low gear. Do not change gears while crossing.

## Special Procedures

### **Police Officer or Flagman at the Crossing**

If a police officer or properly-identified railroad flagman is at the crossing, obey directions. If there is no flagman, and you believe the signals are malfunctioning, call your dispatcher to report the situation and find out how to proceed. Some crossings have a 1-800 number posted for reporting problems.

### **Obstructed View of Tracks**

Plan your route so it provides maximum sight distance at highwayrail grade crossings. Do not attempt to cross the tracks unless you can see far enough down the track that no trains are approaching. Be especially careful at "passive" crossings without gates, flashing lights or bells. Even if there are active railroad signals, and they indicate the tracks are clear, you must look and listen to be sure it is safe to proceed.

### **Containment or Storage Areas**

If it won't fit, don't commit! Know the length of your bus and the size of the containment area at highway-rail intersections on the bus route. When approaching a crossing with a signal or STOP sign on the opposite side, pay attention to the amount of room there. Be certain the bus has enough containment or storage area to clear completely the railroad tracks on the other side, in case there is a need to stop.

### **Evacuating a Bus**

If your bus stalls or is trapped on the tracks, evacuate immediately. Have everyone get off the bus, moving far away from the tracks at an angle, in the direction of the approaching train.