

Response to a High-speed Bus Accident on the Hokuriku Expressway

In the early hours of the morning on March 3, 2014, a high speed bus crashed into a parked truck at the Oyabegawa Service Area on the Hokuriku Expressway inbound side, causing a major accident in which 2 passengers or crew died and a total of 26 passengers as well as the driver of the truck received serious injuries.

Immediately after the accident the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism established an “accident response headquarters” to collect information, as well as to deal with the needs of the victims as their point of contact.

In the case of this accident there is a possibility that the driver lost consciousness immediately before the accident, so the accident response headquarters looked into the various issues in order to prevent accidents associated with a sudden change in the physical condition of drivers. As a result there was an amendment to the health management measures for drivers on April 18 2014, countermeasures were formulated to prevent bus accidents associated with a sudden change in the physical condition of the drivers, and measures such as examination of all high speed buses were implemented during the Golden Week period.

These measures included (1) prevention of illness and fatigue in normal times, (2) identification of and dealing with symptoms during roll call prior to driving, (3) measures to ensure the safety of passengers through safety technology, etc., in the event of an accident, and both hard and soft aspects were incorporated. Also, as part of these measures, the “Health Management Manual for Drivers of Business Vehicles” was revised, incorporating thorough follow-up of health checks and thorough and detailed control of working conditions, so that these measures will be thoroughly established among those concerned, including the drivers.

These measures were adopted to further improve safety and restore trust in bus transport.

◆ Points regarding the “Health Management Manual for Drivers of Business Vehicles” (amended April 18 2014)

1. Identification of illnesses by periodic health checks

In these health checks, if there is an opinion that re-examination, detailed examination, or treatment is necessary, the driver is required to obtain that examination or treatment from a doctor, and the results (opinion of the doctor regarding the work) need to be grasped.

2. Determination of measures regarding employment

Measures are required to be taken regarding the employment of the driver, based on the opinion of the doctor in 1 above (reduction in workload, change of work, termination/suspension of work, etc.).

If measures such as reduction or changing work are taken, the driver is required to take the improvement guidance or health guidance from the doctor, and the driver’s health status shall continue to be determined.

3. Assessment of drivers at roll call before work

At roll call before work, the health status of drivers must be assessed to determine whether they can safely drive or not based on the assessment guidelines defined in the Health Management Manual for Drivers, to determine whether the drivers can drive or not.

4. Assessment and response during work

If warning signs or subjective symptoms of certain illnesses that could affect the ability to drive a vehicle appear while driving, the driver is required to stop at a nearby car park, service area, or parking area and promptly report the situation to the operation manager, etc., and not continue driving unreasonably.

If the physical condition of the driver actually worsens, or if warning signs or subjective symptoms of brain or heart disease appear that require urgent measures, the driver is required to immediately stop driving, ensure safety by parking the vehicle in a safe location, and promptly report to the operation manager, etc.

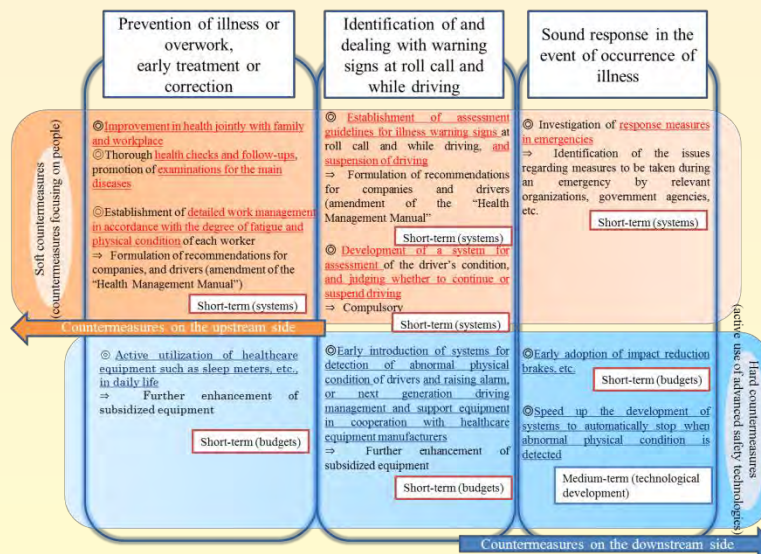
5. Improvement in health in normal times

In addition to the above point 4, in order to prevent as much as possible the occurrence of illness or poor health condition of drivers due to overwork, etc., the health status of drivers shall be checked using an industrial doctor, healthcare equipment, various screening examinations, etc., and the work of each driver is required to be controlled in detail in accordance with the health status.

Also, efforts are made to provide an employment environment within companies to enable drivers to voluntarily report illness or overwork, so that they can receive treatment and return to work without anxiety.

Outline of “Measures to Prevent Bus Accidents associated with Change in Physical Condition of Drivers” (April 18, 2014)

Measures to prevent bus accidents associated with a change in physical condition of drivers (main measures)



Acceleration and support of active initiatives to enhance incentives for health and prevention of overwork, such as strengthening the function of the system for evaluation of good businesses

[Information on the topic is available on the website of the government]

Details regarding the countermeasures following the bus accident on the Hokuriku Expressway is available on: http://www.mlit.go.jp/report/press/jidosha02_hh_000163.html

Traffic Measures in Heavy Snow

In February 2014 as a result of the record snowfall in the Kanto-Koshin regions, traffic came to a standstill throughout the region. The stranded vehicles were an obstacle to snow removal operations, and while snow removal operations on the road were prevented, the traffic came to a standstill at other locations, and as a result traffic was stopped for several days causing large scale disruption.

In many cases the large scale standstills were caused by trucks slipping causing gridlock, and in most cases the cause was the use of summer tires or not fitting chains, etc.

The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism has taken measures to ensure road traffic during winter by strengthening the snow removal system, and enhancing the information provided to road users.

1. Establishment of MLIT Task Force on Exceptional Snowfall

In recent years the patterns of snowfall have been changing, so in order to minimize the damage caused by exceptional snowfall, on December 9, 2014 the “MLIT Task Force on Exceptional Snowfall” (chairperson: Akihiro Ohta, Minister for Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism) was established as a permanent organization. This Task Force has initially formulated a disaster prevention action plan (time line) that arranges the disaster prevention actions as a time series in the event of a heavy snowfall, to integrate the actions of the Task Force, Regional Development Bureaus, and other parties involved in traffic, in order to minimize the effect of the snowfall.

2. Concentrated implementation of snow removal work by promptly closing roads

Once traffic comes to a standstill, the stranded vehicles obstruct the snow removal vehicles, and removal of these vehicles also takes time, so gridlock is caused for a long period of time.

Therefore in areas where it is envisaged that such gridlock could occur, a plan is established for preparations such as positioning snow removal vehicles in standby positions and for deployment of personnel, etc., so that it will be possible to promptly take the initial response when heavy snowfall causes major impact on traffic.

Also, from this winter onwards, response will not be taken after occurrence of gridlock, but when abnormal snowfall that could cause gridlock occurs, the roads will be closed from an early stage prior to occurrence of gridlock, so that in total the traffic stoppage time will be shortened by the more efficient snow removal.

3. Moving vehicles by road administrators based on the amended Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures

Based on the heavy snowfall in the Kanto-Koshin region in February 2014, in accordance with the “Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures” as amended in November of the same year (hereafter referred to as the “Amended Act”), when there is a necessity to ensure the passage of emergency vehicles during a disaster such as heavy snowfall, an order can be issued to drivers and vehicles in a designated area to move off the road, and in the event that a driver does not move in response to the order or the driver is not present, the road administrator can move the vehicle.

In the case of heavy snowfall this winter, the “Amended Act” will be actively applied to promptly remove stranded vehicles and shorten the time that traffic is stopped by more efficient snow removal operations. For this winter only expressways and 48 sections of national roads had been designated, on which stranded vehicles were forcibly removed by the road administrator. (As of March 31, 2015)



Stranded vehicles

(January 1 to 2, 2015; National Route 25)



Moving a vehicle

(December 5, 2014; National Route 192)

<Examples on national routes>



Stranded vehicles

(December 17 to 21, 2014; Tokai-Hokuriku Expressway)



Moving vehicles

<Examples on expressways>

4. Pleas to drivers

In order to ensure road traffic during winter, the cooperation of drivers in fitting winter equipment, etc., is essential. Therefore at Road Stations, SA, PA, etc., at normal times drivers are asked to pay attention to weather information and traffic information, and they are urged to fit winter tires, chains, etc.

Also, each of the Regional Development Bureaus and Expressway companies publicize in advance the sections of road where there is a possibility of road closure at an early stage in the case of abnormal snowfall, and vehicles not fitted with the winter equipment are called upon to avoid traveling on those sections.

* Sections where road closures are anticipated throughout Japan

(http://www.mlit.go.jp/road/bosai/road_closed/)

Also, when abnormal snowfall is anticipated, the “MLIT Task Force on Exceptional Snowfall” will make an emergency announcement. This winter also heavy snowfall was anticipated over the new year period, so from December 31, 2014 an announcement was made similar to past weather conditions, indicating the damage and the effect, and calling on drivers to refrain from making unnecessary and non-emergency journeys, and calling for care on the road.

(Reference) Amendment to the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures

(1) Background to the Amendment to the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures

The heavy snowfall in the Kanto-Koshin region on February 14, 2014, and the "Countermeasures against the Postulated Damage due to an Inland Earthquake in the Tokyo Region" compiled by the Central Disaster Management Council Working Group on Countermeasures to an Inland Earthquake in the Tokyo Region, have raised the possibility of serious traffic congestion and abandoned vehicles caused by damage to the roads themselves, or an increase in the road traffic load due to stoppage of railway operation.

In the system prior to amendment, there were limitations such as it was not possible to move or damage vehicles on the nearby roads that were not directly damaged in order to access disaster areas, so on November 14, 2014 the "Act to Amend in Part the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures" was adopted, and on the 21st of the same month was published and came into force.

(2) Outline of the Amendment to the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures

① Movement of vehicles, etc., during a disaster

- When a disaster occurs and it is necessary to ensure the passage of emergency transport vehicles, the road administrator may designate sections of the road under their administration, and order the owner of vehicles or goods that have fallen from vehicles (hereafter referred to as "vehicles, etc.") and are blocking the passage of emergency transport vehicles to move the vehicle, etc., off the road, or to move the vehicle, etc., into empty space between vehicles
- In any of the following cases, the road administrator can take measures to move vehicles, etc., and when unavoidable in order to take these measures can damage a vehicle, etc.
 - a. When the owner, etc., that has been ordered to take these measures does not take these measures
 - b. When the owner, etc., is not present
 - c. When the road administrator has not issued an order because it is not possible to force the owner to take measures, etc., due to the road circumstances, etc.

In these cases,

- The road administrator can temporarily use the land of another person for disposal of waste, when unavoidable in order to take these measures

② Instructions from the Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism or Prefectural Governors

- When it is particularly necessary to ensure the passage of emergency transport vehicles on the network, from an overall wide area perspective of the routes to the disaster affected areas, the Central Government can issue instructions to prefectural, city, town, or village governments, and prefectural governments can issue orders to city, town, and village governments to take the necessary measures

③ Requests from Prefectural Public Safety Commissions

- When it is necessary to close roads, etc., the Prefectural Public Safety Commissions can request the road administrators to designate sections of the road and take the necessary measures

④ Compensation for loss

- When the road administrator, institution, or local road public corporation has damaged a vehicle, etc., out of necessity, compensation shall be paid to the owner, etc.