

Original: 7758

October 7, 2003

Gentlemen,

I do not feel numbers on the roof of a bus will be sufficient. To know the location of a bus you need to use GPS. With this system you can locate any bus, anywhere, and acquire immediate data. This is vital for the safety of our future generations.

The series of events on January 24, 2002 was probably a worst case scenario. We should learn from it. Numbers on the roof would not have been any help. Cloudy and stormy weather did not allow for helicopters to be in the air for a number of hours. GPS would have been able to locate the bus immediately.

The safety of our children should be the number one priority in this discussion.

GPS are used in cars, trucking companies, airplanes, and cell phones. The cost is minimal compared to the value of children.

Radios can be ignored or turned off. A GPS would not be accessible by the driver or anyone else who might take the bus.

Time is critical in locating a missing bus. To find the bus, police need to know what area to look and what direction it is traveling. Think about how far you can travel in 15 minutes. 30 minutes. On January 24, 2002, it took 1 full hour to discover the bus was missing. GPS would have picked it up immediately upon straying from the designated route.

Numbers on the roof give a false sense of security. It is pacifying the families whose children ride the bus. You cannot see the roof if the bus is under trees or inside a barn.

Oley Valley has many places to hide a bus. What if the bus is over an embankment on its side or roof? Children could be trapped or hurt, or worse, while police are driving around looking.

January 24, 2002 involved many man hours by policemen who could have been serving the public on other calls. Police were involved from several states because the circle of travel distance grew larger with each passing minute. GPS would have prevented this.

As far as funding a GPS project, we should look at what government and private sector can do together. Work cooperatively to assure our children's safety to and from school, and during activities that require transporting students.

There also needs to be better requirements for checking a driver's mental stability. When you take on the roll of a public servant, especially in the capacity of taking care of children, you must relinquish some of your privacy. I, for one, want to know who is transporting my children.

The new bus driver after Otto Nuss, approximately a week after taking over the route, terrorized and intimidated the children. (The same children who had been kidnapped.) This was deplorable. This same driver also decided to take multiple routes to and from school on a daily basis. This would not have gone unnoticed if there were GPS on the bus. The bus company which employs this driver was not aware of his actions. I, myself, called the bus company to inform them that my children worried about taking a different route to school every day.

I believe we need to take a hard look at how we transport our children. These are tough times, scary times. We need decision makers who are up to the challenges and willing to do the right thing.

The question is... what are we trying to accomplish? What is the best way to accomplish the goal?

The technology is available. We need to make use of it.

Sincerely, 
Dennis P. Berky

113 Conrad Rd, Freetwood, Pa. 19522

Original: 2758

October 7, 2003

Dear Committee Members,

As a parent of two of the children on the kidnapped school bus, I would like to address the issue of bus safety and putting numbers on the roof.

In any kidnapping case time is a critical factor. Locating the kidnap victim in the shortest time possible can be the difference between life and death.

The best way to achieve a quick and precise location of a vehicle, whether it is a bus, a car, or a plane, is to install Global Positioning Systems. (GPS)

When our school bus was kidnapped it took an hour for anyone to realize. Even then, it was discovered only because the person responsible for attendance at the school noticed that all the "absent" students were from the same school district. Without her, it could well have been a full day, 4:00 PM, until anyone knew their children were missing.

There should be no reason for parents to fear about their children when there is technology out there to prevent such things. There are GPS programs available that immediately alerts a company when a vehicle is off its designated route. It tracks the location, the speed, and all the stops and starts. I feel very strongly that this system should be on every bus.

January 24th, 2002 was a rainy, foggy, Thursday. We were unable to put helicopters up for quite some time. Even when it cleared enough, which direction do we go? We had no visual confirmation anywhere. The bus had disappeared.

As the hours passed, Otto Nuss took our children farther and farther away. Many more people got involved in the search. Not just police officers, but family members, friends, and even strangers. The search spread out from Berks County to Montgomery, Chester, and Bucks Counties. Finally, all of Pa., New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland were searching. Hundreds of people. How many helicopters does it take to cover this vast area? This was assuming the bus hasn't been hidden in our own back yard literally, in a barn. Remember, time is critical.

Try to imagine the pure terror we went through that day. Every minute that passed was like hope slipping away. We were asked to give descriptions of our children to the police. What are they wearing? Any birthmarks or scars? Height. Weight. Were they preparing to identify bodies? We didn't know where our children were, or who had them. We wondered if they were being threatened or hurt or worse. Were they hungry? Are they crying?

It's hard to write this letter even though it is 20 months later. It's still so fresh in my mind. The effects of the kidnapping remain. In the beginning there was tremors, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, nightmares and fear. There are still some nightmares. Fear still grabs me when my children are late. Fog and rainy days still make me uneasy.

There is so much more that I could tell you. Every family involved could give testimony of the horror of that day in January.

All of this could have been prevented by having GPS on the buses. We could have known in seconds there was a problem. We could have located the bus immediately.

A few minutes after learning our children were safe, I asked the bus company owner about putting GPS on buses. His response was, "It costs too much". I won't even get into what a slap in the face that was.

Many families send their children to private schools, Christian, Catholic, or home school. All of us pay school taxes. The only "education" we receive for our tax dollars is a bus ride. The amount of taxes we pay could go a long way to providing GPS for buses. After all, it's not buying us books, or lunches, or band instruments, etc.

GPS is available. It is used in many applications. In fact, it is used to track garbage trucks! Why are we not using it for our children?

It's not just about kidnapping. It's about drivers who get ill, have heart attacks, run off the road, break down, get detoured, have accidents. It's about accountability. When you are responsible for children you must use the best possible tools available. GPS is the most efficient way to protect our children.

Thank you for your time. I hope you will consider what I have said.

Sincerely,
Lisa Berky

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa Berky".