

Bus Transportation Info

Organizing A Bus Rental or Charter

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This information is provided solely with the intent to be helpful to Focus Day attendees: anyone wishing to make arrangements with a bus rental or charter company does so by their own prerogative – WSPTA has not nor will make any booking arrangements with a transportation company. WSPTA is not providing any specific recommendations, warranties, or reimbursements.

This doc compiles generic tips on what to look for in selecting a vendor and questions to ask – all this material was pulled from the internet, so no specific recommendations or warranties made! Please use your best resources and judgment in making decisions. Please pass along info you discover that you think others would benefit from too.

Some councils and regions have organized chartered buses for their members; buses are usually quite comfortable, have a bathroom, and make good time in traffic. At the Capital you will likely be dropped and picked up on one of the Diagonal Streets leading to the centrally located Winged Victory Monument, to the NE of the Legislative Building. Be sure to know when & where to meet back at your bus – remember what your bus looks like (make a sign to put in its window).

Bus organizers: keep in touch with your Regional Legislation Chair (RLC) – they may help you get a feel for what areas are looking at organizing a bus, and they may be able to help "link up some paths enroute" to help fill buses and share the rental cost by stopping to pick up more riders.

Several companion files are on the WSPTA Focus Day webpage for bus organizers.

- Files to record bus rider information: **Template Files for Organizing Carpool & Bus Riders** (in Excel or PDF; *FD09_Transpo_Bus_Carpool_Forms_v1.xls/pdf*).
- Templates of signs to put in the bus windows – messages and identification to find your ride home!
- Info to distribute on the bus to prep for your arrival and day's activities.

Get driving directions, parking info and a Campus map off the WA Gov website - <http://www.ga.wa.gov/Park/visitor.htm> (also on the WSPTA website – directions are on the back).

Very Approximate Cost: Likely not less than \$15 / seat, nor much over \$25 / seat.

General Bus Info Sites:

<http://www.busrates.com/>

<http://www.alltimefavorites.com/local/transportation/transportation-services-Bus-or-Motorcoach-Charters/Washington/cities.htm>

Renting a Charter Bus

These representative online booking sites may offer you additional information and their rates – the list is not comprehensive by any means. Local rental companies may offer better selection and rates -- listed in no particular order:

<http://www.uscoachways.com/corporate.php>

<http://www.beelinetours.com/>

<http://www.starlinetransportation.com/>

<http://www.journeylinesinc.com/>

<http://www.mtrwestern.com/charter-bus-seattle.html>

<http://www.premiercoachesnw.com/>

Before you rent a charter bus look over these questions and make sure your choice for a charter bus is appropriate for your trip. Make sure when purchasing a charter plan that you consider your traveling times. It may be sensible to collect the money from your group prior to the trip.

Each charter bus company has their own unique type fleet. Typically motor coaches range in capacity from 44-passenger to 57-passenger; although there are some rare 36-passenger motor coaches. For smaller groups try a mini-bus. These look like the airport shuttles you take to hotels except all the seats face forward -- sometimes they have separate luggage storage, reclining seats or a TV, but they very rarely have bathrooms.

Top 10 Things to Know Before Chartering a Bus

1. You can check a company's safety rating at www.safer.fmcsa.dot.gov/CompanySnapshot.aspx.
2. You can check to see if the company has had any complaints filed with the Better Business Bureau, search.BBB.org.
3. The best way to get the lowest quotes is to contact each company individually -- unlike the airline industry, no site providing instant quotes and availability exists in the bus industry.
4. Most websites first found on the internet are national brokers or "networks" adding on average, a 38% commission to the cost of your trip.
5. You can check to see how many buses a company owns by running a search on the DOT's link above (see #1) and check the number of power units registered.
6. The bus industry is made up of about 5,000 local and regional bus companies across the US - there are no national services that own buses.
7. Prices do not typically rise as the travel date draws near or in times of low availability.
8. The average deposit to book a bus is 10% for trips over the road.
9. Operators cannot drive more than 10 hours following 8 consecutive hours off-duty.
10. Charters are typically priced by the hour for local use, or by the mile for out-of-state trips averaging more than 275 miles per day.

Top Questions to Ask Before Chartering a Bus

1. How many local miles are allowed per day after reaching your destination? What is the charge for exceeding them?
2. Does the quote include parking and tolls?
3. What is your cancellation policy?
4. Is 10% the standard driver gratuity with your company?
5. What is your procedure in the event of a breakdown?
6. Can you provide proof of insurance? (The state requires a \$5 million policy).
7. Does your company own the bus, or will it be brokered out?
8. Is the bus available for inspection before chartering?
9. Are you members of any associations? (ABA, UMA, MCC, NTA)

Frequently Asked Questions

How much of a deposit is required? 87% of coach companies require a deposit when booking. The average deposit is 22%.

When is the final payment due? Typically, final payment is due before departure, but not always.

What is the cancellation policy? Most companies allow you to cancel without penalty 14 to 30 days before travel.

How soon do I need to book? Ideally, you want to book at least 3 weeks in advance to ensure availability. The earlier you book, the more options you will have.

Do I need to tip the bus operator? The standard gratuity is 10% Part of the bus driver's compensation comes from the gratuity.

Who pays for parking, tolls and other fees? A majority of bus companies include these fees in their initial quote, but some companies separate them and have you pay as the fees are incurred. Just be sure to ask if these fees are included or are separate before booking.

Food & Drink: Drink coolers are permitted on motor coaches. Coolers can usually be placed on the seats or in the undercarriage below the bus but not in the aisle. If the charter bus returns in a reasonable condition your deposit will be refunded.

Is alcohol or smoking allowed? Short answer is no. Some bus companies allow alcohol with a refundable deposit. Only a very small percentage of bus companies allow smoking.

I have a CDL License, can I charter a bus without a operator? No, the bus owner's insurance policy doesn't allow it.

Do I need to book the hotel room for the bus operator? Yes, for overnight trips, it is customary to book the operator's hotel room, but most hotels will comp the bus operator's room (provide the room for free) when you book rooms for large groups. Ask for someone in group sales at the hotel to ensure the operator's room gets comped.

May there be a refund if the bus was to return early? Most likely not.

What do your charter buses look like? There should be pictures available for each bus company on your quote.

The Components of a Quote

How are the charter bus trips prices arranged? Pricing methods depend on the company and trip variations; bus companies have different rates and methods for pricing. Often a 5-hour minimum will be set for in town and will be priced by the hour. Out of town trips will have a flat day rate or by the mileage. There may be a processing fee ranging from 2% to 4% for many companies to cover administrative costs and the costs of refunds and cancellations. You should plan for extra time just in case you are not back at the time you thought you would be. Depending on the company, they may charge extra for trips that run long.

What if my charter bus trip is disrupted? Charter bus companies help make sure that each trip goes smoothly as possible. If a refund of the trip is necessary due to a problem or disruption you will have to negotiate it with the charter bus company. Often, 10% of the trip will not be refundable under most circumstances. Requests for refunds should be sent to the bus company directly.

Sales Tax: There is no sales tax when chartering a bus in most states (CA has a 1% tax, and OH appx. 7.75%).

Local Use Charters Hours of use: Local travel is most commonly based on hours of use. The national average rate per hour for a full size deluxe motor coach in March of 2007 was \$90 (2004 was \$83; 2003 was \$68). Almost all companies have a 3, 4, 5, or 6-hour minimum charge-5-hours being the most common across the U.S.

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Over the Road Charters Mileage: buses traveling out of the local area and overnight are quoted based on miles. The average charge per mile across the nation in March of 2007 was \$2.94 (2004 was \$2.66) with the company's day rate as a minimum charge per day.

Day Rate: The minimum charge per day if the per-mile charge is not more than the combined day rates. The average day rate in March of 2007 was \$821 (2004 was \$769; 2003 was \$703).

Fuel Surcharge: During periods of fuel price volatility, bus companies often charge a fuel surcharge to prevent having to change their primary rates (filed and posted) on a daily basis. Bus companies commonly link their fuel surcharge rate with the Department of Energy's website: <http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/oog/info/wohdp/diesel.asp>.

Driver Change: for every 10 hours of driving, or 15 hours of stand-by time, law requires 10 consecutive hours of rest. If you plan on driving over 10 hours, an operator change has to be made. Bus Operator changes range from \$200 to \$900 depending on how far from the departure city the change has to be made.

Gratuity: The standard bus operator gratuity for chartering a bus is 10%. About a third of operator's pay comes from the gratuity as an incentive to provide good service. The average wage earned by bus operators is about \$12 per hour.

Local Travel: The amount of local mileage allowed per day once the bus reaches the destination.

Driver Hotel: Usually the customer books and pays for the operator's hotel room, but most hotels will comp the operator's room at no charge when you book several rooms for your group. Ask for someone in group sales at the hotel to ensure the operator's room is complimentary.

Other expenses: Depending on your destination, you may encounter other fees such tolls or parking, most companies include these in your initial quote, and some have you pay for them as they are incurred - check.

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Common Charter Bus Characteristics – Check these per your requirements

Qty. Quantity of this type of bus the company owns.

Seats. The number of seats available for your group (passengers).

BusType. There are 8 common types of buses, but likely you will want a Coach or Motorcoach, or mini-bus. Visit the [Bus Types](#) section at busrates.com for descriptions and approximate rates.

Year. The year of the bus model, frequently displayed as a range from oldest to newest.

OTR. Is the company willing to take this bus "Over The Road" which is usually defined by traveling long distances out of state and overnight.

Rstrm. Restroom on board.

VCR. There are usually 5 to 6 TV monitors on board full-sized deluxe motor coaches with a VCR. Most buses do not receive any channels unless equipped with satellite, which is uncommon.

DVD. There are usually 5 to 6 TV monitors on board full-sized deluxe motor coaches with a DVD player. Most buses do not receive any channels unless equipped with satellite, which is uncommon.

CD. CD player on board.

PA. Public address system on board to help make announcements to the group.

ADA. Wheelchair elevator on board. Handicap accessible buses: Some companies have a limited supply of handicap accessible buses. While filling out your requests in for your quote select handicap to get information on these amenities.

Alch. Alcohol is allowed on board.

5 hrs. 5 hour rates posted are based on 5 hours of local use, low miles (excluding 10% gratuity). Bus companies most commonly have a 5 hour minimum of use with the exception of transfers.

Day. Day rates posted are often based on 10 hours of local use, low miles (w/o 10% gratuity.)

Mile. The rate per mile of travel. Quotes are calculated per mile or per day whichever is greater. Trips averaging over 300 miles per day are usually priced per mile and not per day.

Bus Industry Slang

Deadhead. Miles traveled without passengers before the pickup or after a drop off.

Live Miles. Miles traveled with passengers on board.

Over the road. Refers to longer trips out of the local area and typically overnight.

Pax. A written abbreviation for "passengers".

Pick and Drop. Bus returns home after dropping passengers off at their destination. The bus does not provide local travel.

Charter Bus Safety Regulations

The Department of Transportation (DOT) regulates the charter bus industry. Bus operators are required to carry a current DOT Physical Exam Card, be drug tested under DOT rules and regulations, and maintain a log for miles and hours of service. Coaches are not required by state or federal law to have seatbelts. Some states require that operators be certified for all school sponsored trips, grades 12 and under.

The DOT regulation 395.10 restricts the bus operator's driving time. There are three parts:

- 10 Hour Rule. The bus operator cannot drive more than 10 hours following 8 consecutive hours off duty (except in emergencies)
- 15 Hour Rule. After 15 hours on-duty (driving and non-driving tasks), an operator cannot continue driving until 8 consecutive hours of off-duty time is taken.
- 70 Hour Rule. On duty time cannot exceed 70 hours for any period of 8 consecutive days.