RIPPED FROM THE HEADLINES:

Bus Drivers Under Attack

AMALGAMATED TRANSIT UNION

MOVING CANADIANS SAFELY SINCE 1892
INTRODUCTION

Here they come again: it’s the neighborhood tax collector. No, not a Revenue Canada agent with an audit in hand. They work in a safe environment in little cubicles in Ottawa, ON. Someone from the Provincial Department of Taxation? Nope. Again, comfortably tucked behind a computer screen in some Provincial Capitol.

The only people who come through our neighborhoods -- every few minutes -- and collect hard earned money from working families are doing so while trying to safely steer 40,000 pound vehicles through traffic. They are our communities’ transit bus operators, and the taxes that they collect are bus fares. For years, those fares have been going through the roof. Combine that with massive service cuts on our transit systems, and you have the ingredients for very angry passengers. Unfortunately, when some people are asked to pay more for inferior service, they take it out on the face of the system – the bus driver.

In the recent past, we have seen a dramatic increase in the level and intensity of senseless attacks on defenseless operators. Drivers have been punched, slapped, stabbed, shot, and have had bodily fluids thrown upon them. And they are confronting all of this while trying to safely steer their vehicles through traffic, protecting the lives of passengers, pedestrians, and other drivers who are seriously distracted by today’s hand-held gadgets.

The impact on these individuals is clear. Broken eye sockets. Deep puncture wounds. The loss of certain bodily functions. And while broken bones heal with time, the emotional scars linger indefinitely. Ironically, many operators who got into this line of work in the first place due to their friendly nature now find themselves unable to interact well with people, especially strangers. Constantly looking over their shoulder in paranoia, many cannot come back to work. For women who are victims of unspeakable sexual assaults on the vehicles, life is of course never the same again.

For the transit systems, the impact on the budget is serious. The number of lost work hours is immeasurable. Absenteeism becomes a real factor. Ridership suffers when word gets out that buses are unsafe, and customer satisfaction plummets, resulting in farebox loss.

Unfortunately, we don’t need charts and graphs prepared by some government agency to know that bus operator assault is a real problem. Details about these brutal, senseless incidents, which take place in big cities and small towns, fill our newspapers each day:

An Airdrie Transit bus driver was threatened by a man with a seven-inch serrated knife who demanded the bus continue on without stopping. The bus driver was able to notify his dispatcher that he was being threatened.

A 19-year-old Cambridge man threatened to stab a Grand River Transit bus driver while brandishing a samurai sword.
A Halifax bus driver was assaulted as he got out of his vehicle to break up a fight between two young women. The bus driver was knocked to the ground and kicked in the head causing minor facial injuries.

In April, a 42-year-old woman was waiting at a bus stop in a wheelchair in Vancouver. When the driver refused to let her on, she leapt from the chair and punched him before taking off. She will serve 40 days in jail after pleading guilty to assault.

An intoxicated man tried to attack two bus drivers, attempted to stab a passenger, and took a swing at a third bus driver before being arrested.

Police say at around 9:45 a.m., a bus driver made an announcement, saying the bus was entering a fare paid zone. He was then hit in the face by a passenger with a paper bag with unknown contents. The suspect then got off the bus and ran, leaving the bus operator shaken.

A homeless man repaid the kindness of an OC Transpo driver who gave him a free ride by shoving and punching him after the driver missed his stop.

A bus driver suffered a broken nose after he was punched in the face by a passenger on his route.

An intoxicated man became belligerent and aggressive after boarding a bus. The man assaulted the driver while the bus was in motion. The bus swerved into the opposite traffic lane during the assault, but avoided any collisions.

“OC Transpo recorded 62 incidents of violence against drivers in 2012; among those, one driver was splashed with a cup of urine, another had his crotch grabbed by a drunken passenger and many others were punched and spat on.”
A 31-year-old Kelowna woman stabbed a public transit driver with a syringe after she told the driver that she was trying to get away from someone and the driver gave her a free ride. The driver will face a lifetime of testing for hepatitis C, and endless uncertainty about his future as a wage earner, as a husband and as a father. In his emotional statement to the judge the driver read: “I am filled with anger, confusion, resentment and sadness, and wonder how a person seemingly without any forethought seriously affected someone's life in such a horrific way.”

“OC Transpo bus driver Steven Parent suffered a cut on his nose when he was punched in the face by a passenger while driving his route in Barrhaven in 2009. The man who wallop ed him - a repeat offender who has attacked other bus operators - received a 120-day jail sentence. That punishment is not justice, said Parent, who told his story Tuesday during a roundtable discussion on Parliament Hill.”
An angry passenger pointed a handgun at the driver and threatened to kill him on a quiet street in Kelowna. He approached the driver’s window after getting off the bus and pulled the trigger three times. The pistol made a clicking sound each time, terrifying the driver.

A Maritime bus driver nearly died after being stabbed multiple times and losing over half his blood. The bus driver received 14 wounds, mostly on his right arm, some in the face, some on the neck, and some on the chest, as he told the attacker that he would have to take a different route to get to his desired destination.

27-year-old man was charged with attempted murder and aggravated assault after an intercity bus driver was stabbed in northwestern New Brunswick.

A young man who grabbed a bus driver by the throat and stabbed a passenger in two separate, unprovoked attacks last year has been sentenced to 22 months in jail.

A female bus driver had a hot coffee thrown on her after she pulled up to the curb with the intent to pick up a male standing at the bus stop.

A 54-year-old bus driver was punched several times by a passenger who was blocked by the driver from leaving via the front door of the bus, where the driver was helping someone in a wheelchair to exit. Told to use the back door, the man refused and punched the driver in the face.

A woman spat at a bus driver before running off - all because the driver asked her to pay her fare.

A 61 year old passenger was on a TTC bus at Kennedy Station. He was “unhappy with the bus routing,” according to the TTC, and spat in the operator’s face after receiving directions. He was charged with assault and sentenced to 75 days in jail.
A 24-year-old man was charged with attempted murder after a vicious and unprovoked attack on a city bus driver during the morning commute. The 33-year veteran of Edmonton Transit was hospitalized in intensive care. “It was just horrible. His whole face was covered in blood; it looked like his nose was stomped into his face,” said a Route 10 bus passenger.

A Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) bus driver was roughed up by a group of teenagers. As a result of a fare dispute, the bus driver was first punched inside the bus and then he was pulled outside and thrown to the ground. The second attack occurred when a female passenger threw her coffee at a driver.
A teen verbally abused a bus driver while on probation for assaulting a different bus driver.

Police say the driver and the suspects had been involved in an argument earlier when two males got on the bus, one was not wearing a shirt. The driver was going to refuse access on the bus, but to avoid further conflict he allowed the shirtless male on. When the two passengers got off the bus, one of them spat at the driver.

A new bus driver studying his route was confronted by an intoxicated man who wanted to get on the out-of-service bus. The driver was spat on, kicked in the face and kicked in the shin.

Edmonton Transit driver Lucy Ambrozuk first tried to reason with the woman demanding a transfer, even though she hadn’t paid. But when the woman hit her twice, the driver did what all bus operators are trained to do. “I grabbed a transfer and said, ‘Here you go. Please sit down and enjoy the ride.’ This is my safety. If I don’t give her a transfer, she’d probably hit me again, and she had another two friends. I don’t want people to jump me just because I am doing my job,” she said.

A Halifax Transit bus driver was assaulted on New Year’s Eve after asking a suspect to exit the bus for “abruptly” pushing past a female passenger. The driver and suspect got into a verbal argument and the man spit in the driver’s face before exiting the bus. The driver also exited the bus and was physically assaulted by the man who struck him in the face. A female suspect who was with the male then kicked the driver in the legs.

A bus driver was sucker punched in his seat from behind after he repeatedly asked his assailant to get in line with all the rest of the passengers and enter by the front door instead of the back door. The driver was left with a broken orbital bone. He will be undergoing a third operation after a difficult recovery from earlier surgery to insert a plate and screws and repair his damaged right eye.

A driver stopped the bus after the passenger, who he believed was intoxicated, threw up. The driver asked the passenger to get off the bus, which is when the assault occurred. Police say the driver suffered “serious facial injuries “and had to be taken to hospital for treatment.
The attack happened on the 90 bus leaving Vendôme Metro station. The driver asked the suspect several times to move, because he was in his field of vision, police say. Finally, the driver stopped the bus and asked the man to leave, at which point the man struck the driver several times.

One man was arrested after the assault, which happened when an intoxicated passenger boarded a Winnipeg Transit bus. The man tossed a handful of change at the receptacle, sending coins tumbling to the floor. When the driver asked if he had enough to pay the fare, the man punched him, starting a struggle that ended with both men on the bus floor.

The passenger was waiting to get off at a stop at Douglas and Kings Road but when the bus driver informed him it was no longer in service and he would have to wait until the next stop, the man turned on the bus driver and assaulted him.

The bus driver was assaulted by a large group of drunken youth who boarded a double-decker bus. Once onboard, the group allegedly headed for the upper deck and somewhere along the route, at least one of the group urinated on the floor, while another one threw up and some of the fluid dribbled down onto the driver.

A 28-year-old man who assaulted and robbed a bus driver has been sentenced to 15 months in jail. A man tried to grab a transfer from a TTC driver at Yonge and Queens Quay when the employee placed his hand over the transfers. The assailant then punched the operator in the head and face and kicked him when he fell to the floor, before stealing his wallet and cell phone.

Transit Police in B.C.’s Lower Mainland are seeking a disruptive passenger who allegedly punched a bus driver in the face three times, took the driver’s glasses and fled.
CONCLUSION

Given Canada’s role as one of the world’s leading centres for transit vehicle manufacturing, we are in a unique position to enhance safety for the industry throughout our nation and the United States. Canada has three of North America’s largest urban transit bus manufacturers, and together they supply nearly 70% of the entire North American market from their Canadian roots.

Five transit employees are assaulted every day. Each year, more than 2,000 transit operators are assaulted, and 755 of these incidents occur on buses, putting passengers and other vehicles at risk. Thankfully, Bill S-221 is now law. Threatening or assaulting a transit operator could now result in more serious criminal charges and longer jail times. It is long overdue. However, as we have discovered in the U.S. – where about 30 states have passed legislation enhancing the penalties for assaulting transit operators and the federal Patriot Act actually allows for a 20-year prison sentence for interfering with an operator in the line of duty – criminal penalties alone will not stop these heinous acts from reoccurring. Transit buses do not sell tickets requiring identification, so most violators are able to flee the scene of the crime and escape justice. The logical next step is structural changes to the buses – specifically the bus operator workstation – to ensure that these incidents don’t happen in the first place. Train operators work in enclosed cabs. Since September 11, 2001, secure cockpits guard people who fly commercial airplanes. Yet, public transit “pilots” continue to be left vulnerable to vicious attacks.

ATU SUPPORTS:

Minimum safety performance standards for public transportation vehicles used in revenue operations that to the extent practicable, take into consideration recommendations of, and best practices standards developed by, transit labor representatives for the purpose of protecting bus operators from the risk of assault by requiring in all new vehicles and vehicles currently in revenue service –

- transparent partition enclosures around the bus operator seating area capable of withstanding gunfire; and
- a door or window (at least the same size as the passenger emergency window) the to the left of the operator seating area allowing for safe and rapid emergency egress; and
- a direct connection to local law enforcement, i.e. a “panic button.”
BUS DRIVERS UNDER ATTACK
ATU CANADA
Paul Thorp, President
61 International Blvd.
Suite 210
Rexdale, Ontario
M9W 6K4

Tel: 416-679-8846
http://atucanada.ca/