



STATION BUS NATION

DRIVER'S LIBRARY · VOLUME 13

Defensive Driving, Mastered

Space, eyes, and the professional mindset that keeps 56
lives safe

FREE FOR MEMBERS

A PREMIER membership resource · stationbusnation.com/driver
Station Bus Nation Driver's Library · © 2026 BusTrusted LLC

Before you start — something worth knowing

DID YOU KNOW

It is legal for bus companies to buy insurance together.

Not a loophole. Federal law — the **Liability Risk Retention Act of 1986** — specifically allows businesses that face similar risks to join up and buy liability coverage as one group instead of one company at a time. It even overrides state rules that would otherwise block it.

Doctors did it. Truckers did it. Contractors did it. Bus operators mostly have not — so almost every one of us walks into that room alone, with two coaches, against a carrier that writes ten thousand policies a year.

Don't take our word for it — look it up:

Liability Risk Retention Act of 1986

Pub. L. No. 99-563, 100 Stat. 3170

15 U.S.C. §§ 3901–3906

Purchasing groups are § 3903; risk retention groups are § 3902. Free to read in full at uscode.house.gov or law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/15/3901.

To be straight with you: Station Bus Nation has no insurance program, no carrier partner, and no rate to offer. Nobody can promise you a price, and anyone who does is selling you something. This is the law and how it works — nothing more.

Educational material only. We are not lawyers, insurance agents, brokers, underwriters, adjusters, consultants, or financial advisors, and nothing here is legal, insurance, tax, or financial advice. Verify everything against your own state's law and current federal regulation, and with a licensed professional, before you act on any of it.

Insurance is the biggest bill most operators have after the coach itself, and almost nobody has ever had it explained to them. We wrote a plain-English guide for every state and the District of Columbia — free, with no form to fill in:

stationbusnation.com/guide.html#insurance-states

Full disclaimer. BusTrusted LLC, Station Bus Nation, and anyone associated with them are **not** attorneys, law firms, insurance companies, insurance agencies, producers, brokers, agents, underwriters, adjusters, risk managers, insurance consultants, actuaries, accountants, tax preparers, financial advisors, or investment advisors, and are not licensed in any of those capacities in any state. Nothing in this document is legal, insurance, tax, or financial advice, or a recommendation regarding any policy, carrier, coverage amount, program, or course of action. No attorney-client, agent-client, fiduciary, or professional relationship is created by reading it. It quotes no premium and makes no representation, promise, or guarantee that any cost, saving, rate, coverage, eligibility, or other outcome is available or achievable. Laws and regulations change and may have changed since this was written — verify everything independently against current law with a licensed attorney or licensed insurance professional in your state. You are solely responsible for your own insurance, legal, and business decisions. If any part of this conflicts with the law of your state or with guidance from a licensed professional, **the law and the licensed professional govern.**

VOLUME 13 · SAFETY SERIES

Defensive Driving, Mastered

You do this every day — in and out of traffic, the tailgater on your bumper, the driver who gives you the finger because nobody wants to be behind a bus. A **certified professional isn't rattled by any of it**. Your whole life is on the road, so the road is where you stay calm, leave space, and make the boring, correct decision every time. This booklet is the full playbook — and much of it isn't just good sense, it's the **law**.

The one line that saves careers

It is always better to arrive a little late than to not arrive at all. Every technique in here buys you the two things that prevent crashes: **space** and **time**.

1 · Following distance — your first and best brake

Distance is the only brake that never fades. A loaded coach needs roughly **40% more room to stop than a car**, so you follow farther than anyone on the road. Count the seconds from when the vehicle ahead passes a fixed object until you reach it:

Condition	Following distance	Notes
Good, dry conditions	4–6 seconds	A 45-ft coach: never less than ~5 seconds
Over 40 mph	add 1 second	Speed stretches your stopping distance fast
Rain / wet	8–10 seconds	Double your dry number
Snow / ice	10+ seconds / park it	On true ice the answer is not technique — it's stopping

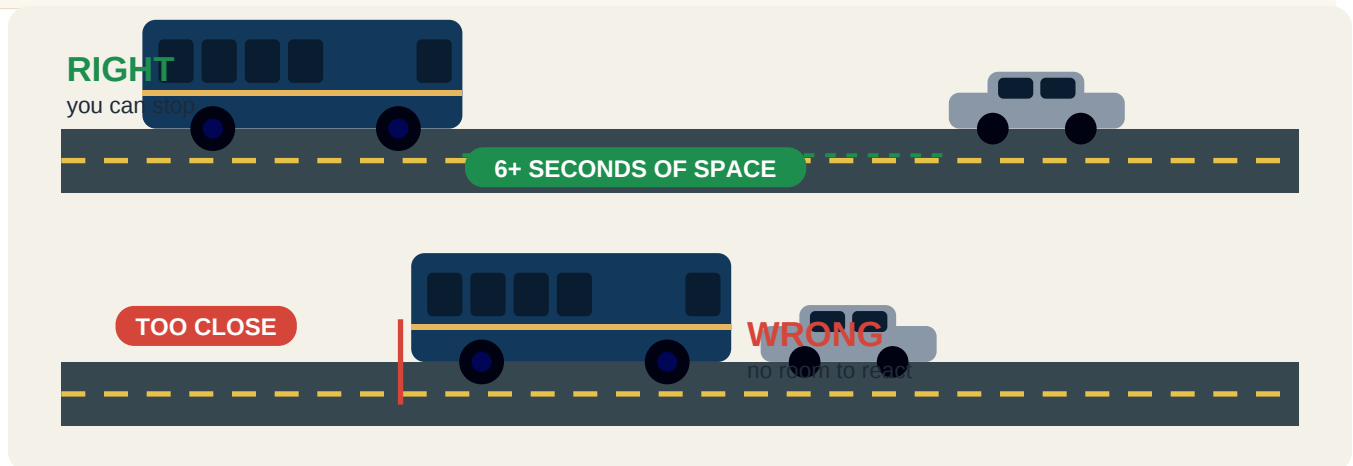


Figure 1 — Right vs. wrong: a professional leaves 6+ seconds; a tailgater leaves none.

Getting tailgated yourself?

You can't control the driver behind you — so give the driver *ahead* even more room. That extra cushion lets you brake gently and early, so the tailgater never gets a hard stop that rear-ends your coach. Never brake-check. Never speed up into a crowd.

2 · The five keys of seeing (the Smith System)

The defensive-driving method that has cut fleet crashes by more than half comes down to five habits. Learn them until they run without you thinking:

- ✓ **Aim high in steering** — look 12–15 seconds down the road, not at the bumper ahead. You steer where your eyes go.
- ✓ **Get the big picture** — take in the whole scene: shoulders, sidewalks, the car three ahead braking.
- ✓ **Keep your eyes moving** — scan, don't stare. Mirrors every 5–8 seconds; a still eye misses the thing that hits you.
- ✓ **Leave yourself an out** — never let traffic box you in. Always know your escape path — usually an open space, not a hard stop.
- ✓ **Make sure they see you** — signal early, tap the horn, make eye contact at intersections. Assume no one sees the bus.

AIM HIGH — scan 12–15 seconds down the road, eyes always moving, mirrors every 5–8 sec

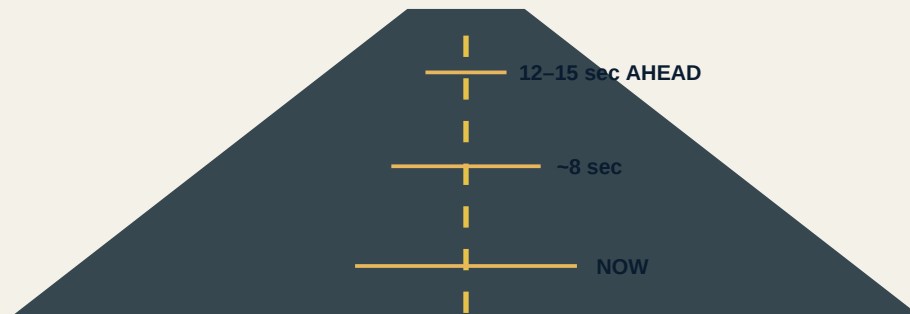


Figure 2 — Aim high: your eyes lead the coach by 12–15 seconds.

3 · Your blind spots — the No-Zone

A coach has blind areas big enough to hide an entire car — widest on the **right side** and directly **behind**. A car that vanishes into the No-Zone is the one you turn or merge into. Two defenses: **set your mirrors right**, and **move your eyes and your head** before every lane change and turn.



Figure 3 — The No-Zone: assume a vehicle is hiding in the red until your mirrors prove otherwise.

Set the mirrors before you move the coach

- ✓ Flat mirrors: see a sliver of the coach's side, then the lane beside you and back.
- ✓ Convex/spot mirrors: cover the close-in blind area low and to the side.
- ✓ Adjust them **seated in your driving position**, engine off, before the trip — never while rolling.
- ✓ Wipe every mirror in your pre-trip; a filthy mirror is a blind spot you gave yourself.

4 · The cockpit — seat, glass, and dashboard

Adjust your seat so the coach fits you

- ✓ Hips back in the seat; a slight knee bend with the pedal fully pressed — you should never stretch to brake.
- ✓ Back supported and upright; wrists able to rest over the top of the wheel; height set so you see the road close in front.
- ✓ Set it **before** you roll. A good seat position fights the fatigue and back pain that ten hours will hand you (Volume 09).

Clean glass and a clear dash = more time to react

- ✓ Windshield spotless inside and out — the film you stop noticing is the glare that hides a pedestrian at dusk.
- ✓ Keep the dash clear: no papers, phone mounts, or clutter blocking your view or the defroster vents.
- ✓ Working wipers, full washer fluid, and a clean interior windshield kill the sun-glare and fog that cause daytime crashes.
- ✓ Mirrors, headlights, and marker lights clean — being *seen* is half of defensive driving.

Small habit, big payoff

Every extra second of clear sightline is an extra second to brake. A clean windshield and a 12–15 second eye-lead together can turn a collision into a near-miss you never even feel.

5 · Lane discipline & turning from the proper lane

The right lane is the coach's home. It gives you an escape path to the shoulder, keeps you out of the fast-moving left-lane duels, and it's the law in most states for slower/large vehicles when a road has three or more lanes.

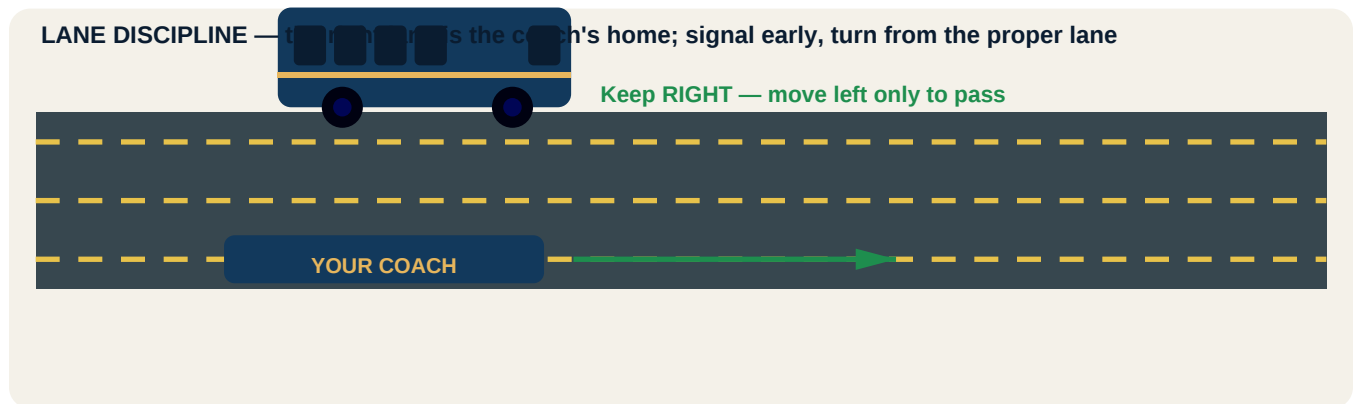


Figure 4 — Keep right; move left only to pass, then return. Set up turns from the correct lane, early.

- ✓ Stay right unless passing; complete the pass and move back — don't camp in the middle or left lane.
- ✓ A wide coach needs to swing — turn from the **proper lane** and use your mirrors so you don't clip the vehicle beside you.
- ✓ Signal early and long; give cars time to clear the No-Zone before you change lanes.
- ✓ Never make a lane change or turn you can't complete in one smooth motion.

6 · Driving in heavy, congested traffic

Stop-and-go is where fender-benders and frustration live. The professional's move is to **slow the whole picture down**:

- ✓ Leave a rolling gap — keep space to the car ahead so you brake gently, not suddenly. In a coach, smooth is safe.
- ✓ Look far ahead for brake lights three and four cars up so you're already easing off before the wave reaches you.
- ✓ Pick one lane and stay; weaving for the 'faster' lane saves seconds and spends your safety margin.
- ✓ Cover the brake, not the throttle, in tight traffic. Anticipate the merge, the taxi, the delivery van door.

- ✓ Protect your space — if someone dives into your gap, ease back and rebuild it. Your gap is a safety device, not a challenge.

7 · Managing the road — and managing yourself

This is the part that separates the professional from everyone else. You will see it all, every day: the cut-off, the tailgater, the horn, the finger. None of it is about you, and none of it is worth your license or your passengers' safety.

When another driver is aggressive

- ✓ **Don't engage.** No eye contact, no gestures, no racing, no brake-checking. Let them go — a few seconds of your day is all it costs.
- ✓ **Make space.** Slow down, change lanes, or let them by. Distance ends almost every conflict.
- ✓ **Stay professional on the radio and the PA.** Your passengers are watching how you handle it — that calm IS the five-star experience.
- ✓ **If it turns dangerous,** don't pull over to confront anyone. Keep driving to a safe, public place and call 911.

Managing your own head

- ✓ Breathe. A slow four-count breath drops the adrenaline that makes good drivers do dumb things.
- ✓ Reframe it: 'no one wants to be behind a bus' is just physics, not disrespect. You expected it; it can't rattle you.
- ✓ Give yourself margin — leave early so you're never chasing a clock. A rushed driver is an angry driver.
- ✓ Remember the stakes: 56 people are trusting you to be the calmest person on the road. Be that person on purpose.

The professional's creed

Better a little late than not at all. You cannot control traffic, other drivers, or the weather — only your space, your speed, and your temperament. Master those three and you will finish a forty-year career with a clean record and a full coach every time.

8 · Fatigue & medication — the invisible impairments (and the law)

Tired and medicated driving cause crashes that look exactly like drunk driving — and federal law treats them seriously. This isn't just common sense; **49 CFR 392.3** forbids driving while your ability is impaired by fatigue or illness, and **49 CFR 392.4** and **391.41** prohibit driving under any drug that affects safe operation.

Sleep before every trip

- ✓ Aim for a real night's sleep before a driving day — protect the same window even on multi-day charters.
- ✓ Know the fatigue tells: drifting speed, missed exits, heavy blinks, wandering thoughts. The response is a stop and a phone call, not a fifth coffee.
- ✓ Untreated sleep apnea ends careers — if you snore hard and wake tired, get screened (Volume 09). Treated apnea keeps you driving.

Medications — check the label, tell your examiner

- ✓ Any drug that causes **drowsiness, dizziness, or slowed reactions** — prescription OR over-the-counter — can make you unsafe and unlawful to drive on.
- ✓ Many antihistamines, cold medicines, sleep aids, and pain meds carry 'do not operate machinery' warnings. That machinery is your coach.
- ✓ **Disclose every medication** at your DOT physical. A prescribing doctor can clear you as safe to drive — get that in writing.
- ✓ Schedule I drugs, amphetamines, narcotics, and other habit-forming drugs disqualify you unless a doctor certifies otherwise.

When in doubt, don't roll

If you're not sure a medication is safe, ask your pharmacist and your medical examiner **BEFORE** the trip — not after a crash. 'I didn't know it made me drowsy' is not a defense the law accepts.

9 · Safety equipment — the 5 things, and how to use them

Federal law names the gear; the professional keeps it charged, mounted, and reachable. Here's the short list every coach must carry:

Item	What & why
1 · Fire extinguisher	UL 5 B:C+ (or two 4 B:C), charged, mounted, freeze-safe — gauge in the green
2 · Three warning triangles	Bidirectional reflective, meeting FMVSS 125 — for the breakdown you hope never happens
3 · Spare electrical fuses	One of each type your coach's required equipment uses (if fused)
4 · First-aid kit	Required by several states, carried by pros everywhere — bus-sized and stocked
5 · Hi-viz vest + flashlight	You WILL end up on a night shoulder someday — be seen and have light

Full detail

Volume 07 (Safety Equipment) covers ratings, the professional's full kit, and the monthly five-minute check. Keep it all in ONE known place per coach so any driver can find it.

10 · Setting up your triangles if you break down

If you stop on the road or shoulder for anything but a normal traffic stop, federal law (**49 CFR 392.22**) says you must put out three warning devices **within 10 minutes**. Where they go depends on the road:

Two-lane or undivided road

TWO-LANE / UNDIVIDED ROAD · 10 ft + 100 ft behind, 100 ft ahead

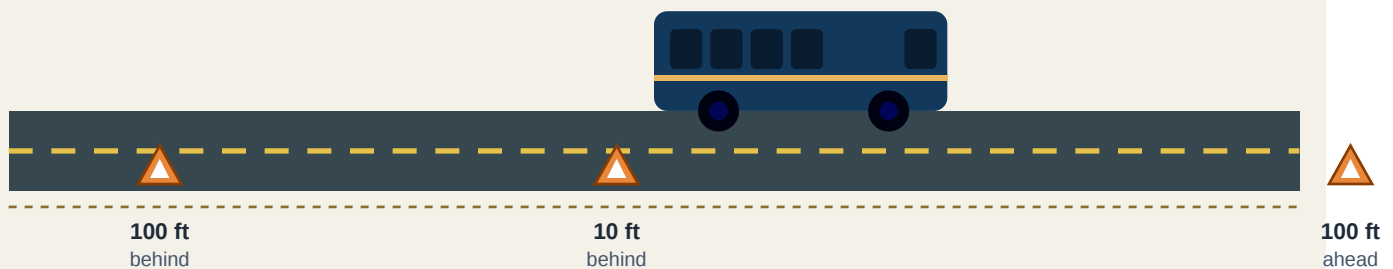


Figure 5 — Undivided road: 10 ft and 100 ft behind (toward traffic), and 100 ft ahead.

- ✓ One on the **traffic side**, ~**10 ft** behind the coach toward approaching traffic.
- ✓ One ~**100 ft behind**, centered in the lane/shoulder toward approaching traffic.
- ✓ One ~**100 ft ahead** of the coach, for traffic coming the other way.

Divided highway or one-way road

DIVIDED / ONE-WAY HIGHWAY · 10 ft + 100 ft + 200 ft, all behind

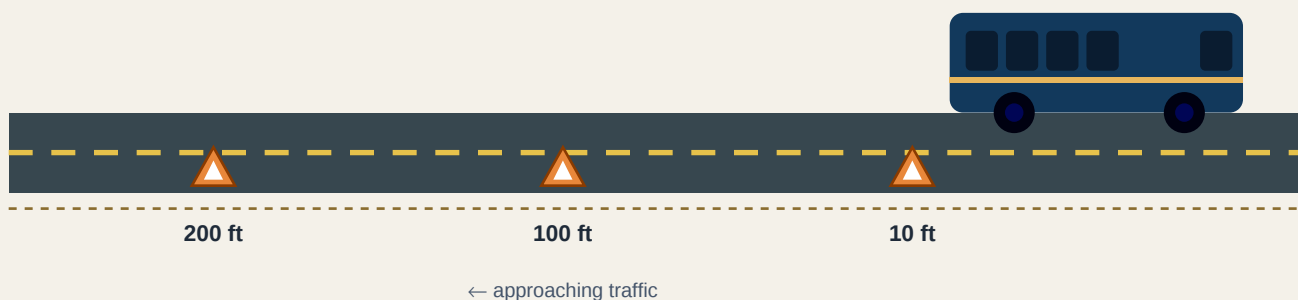


Figure 6 — Divided / one-way: 10 ft, 100 ft, and 200 ft — all behind, toward approaching traffic.

- ✓ Place them at **10 ft, 100 ft, and 200 ft** behind the coach, toward the traffic that's approaching from the rear.
- ✓ **Hills & curves:** if something within 500 ft blocks the view, move the farthest triangle back (100–500 ft) so drivers see it **before** the blind spot.

- ✓ Put the coach's **4-way flashers on immediately** — they buy you the minutes it takes to set the triangles.
- ✓ Wear your hi-viz vest, face traffic, and carry the triangles out; never turn your back on moving traffic.

The whole booklet on one page

- ✓ **Space** — 6+ seconds dry, more when it's wet. Distance is your first brake.
- ✓ **Eyes** — aim high, big picture, keep moving, leave an out, be seen.
- ✓ **Setup** — mirrors, seat, and glass clean and correct before you roll.
- ✓ **Lane** — stay right, signal early, turn from the proper lane.
- ✓ **Self** — never engage, always breathe, leave early, arrive a little late if you must — but arrive.
- ✓ **Fitness to drive** — sleep first, check your meds, and never drive impaired. It's the law.
- ✓ **Ready for trouble** — gear charged and mounted, triangles out within 10 minutes the right way.

■ Sources & further reading

Plain-language guide, not the regulation itself — verify current rules before you rely on them.

- [eCFR — 49 CFR 392.22 \(emergency warning devices / triangles\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/section-392.22)

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/section-392.22>

- [eCFR — 49 CFR 392.3 \(ill or fatigued operator\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/section-392.3)

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/section-392.3>

- [eCFR — 49 CFR 392.4 \(drugs and other substances\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/section-392.4)

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/section-392.4>

- [FMCSA — Medical \(DOT physical & med card\)](https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/medical)

<https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/medical>

- [FMCSA — What medications disqualify a CMV driver?](https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/faq/what-medications-disqualify-cmv-driver)

<https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/faq/what-medications-disqualify-cmv-driver>

- [Smith System — the five keys of defensive driving](https://www.smithsystem.com/)

<https://www.smithsystem.com/>

- [FMCSA — Regulations \(Parts 390–397\)](https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/regulations)

<https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/regulations>

Not law, not legal advice.

This volume is a free plain-English training aid for Station Bus Nation members. It is NOT the FMCSRs, your state CDL manual, your carrier's policies, or your coach maker's procedures — where they differ, they govern. Rules vary by jurisdiction and change; always verify current rules for YOUR operation with FMCSA ([fmcsa.dot.gov](https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov)), your state DOT, and local authorities — or a qualified attorney — before acting. © 2026 BusTrusted LLC.