

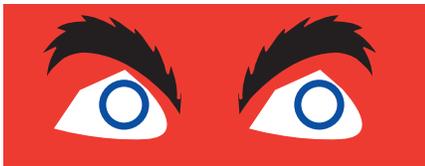


Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

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Watch Your Back! (and Your Front)

by James C. Holland



The driver behind you is riding your bus's license plate a bit too close. What's a driver to do? You may think that the only way to teach this tailgater a lesson is to abruptly apply your brakes. Wrong answer. The point is not to teach anybody a lesson. The point is to drive as safely and courteously as possible. Remember, you are in an agency vehicle and responsible for the safety of your passengers. There are several driving techniques you can use to deal with tailgaters.

Stay alert

Tailgating is one of the most common causes of traffic crashes. To keep tabs on these bumper-riders—and to maintain your response flexibility—pay very close attention to your traffic environment. You can do this by checking the road ahead and by checking your rearview and side mirrors every three to five seconds. Awareness of other drivers is the first key to driving safety.

Do what you can

There are three main reasons why people tailgate buses.

First, some tailgaters are simply in

too much of a hurry. Second, some drivers feel uncomfortable not being able to see ahead because a bus is in front of them. They tailgate in preparation for passing.

While you can't dissuade these first two kinds of tailgaters, you can reduce your risk somewhat by protecting the front of your vehicle. Maintain a safe "space cushion" between you and vehicles traveling or moving in front of you. Allow no less than 4 seconds between your vehicle and others during the day, 5 seconds at night, and 6 seconds during bad weather. You'll be better able to maneuver quickly and safely out of troublesome situations or if you have a sudden flat tire or an accident occurs ahead. Such sudden emergencies may cause a tailgater to rear-end you, but if you maintain space in front of your vehicle you can help prevent a chain-reaction pile-up and additional damage to your vehicle.

The third reason some drivers tailgate is they have trouble anticipating your intentions. They may be unaware of the number of stops and pick-ups your bus needs to make or the traffic regulations you must follow.

You can do something to reduce this kind of tailgating. Make sure that your bus is equipped with devices to communicate with drivers behind you. For example, each transit bus should have a "makes frequent stops" sign on the rear window and have working brake and tail lights. Reflective tape on

rear surfaces helps other drivers see your bus from a distance.

If you have to double park, turn on your hazard flashers. If you must stop in an unusual location or if your vehicle breaks down, use emergency reflective equipment and get as far off the road as possible. Always make sure you use the proper signals well in advance to let those behind you know what you are doing.

It is very difficult and can be dangerous to ignore tailgaters, and you should take the necessary measures to keep yourself and your passengers safe. As a last resort, you may be able to change lanes or pull over to the side and let the tailgater pass you, but be sure you can do so safely. Be careful out there!

Sources

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