

Mr Zafar Siddique
Black Country Coroners Court
Jack Judge
Halesowen Street
Oldbury
West Midlands
B69 2AJ

30th November 2018

Dear Sir

Thank you for sharing with us your report following the Inquest in to the death of Mrs Charlotte Tipper, which resulted from the tragic accident with our bus on 22nd January 2018. On behalf of myself and National Express West Midlands, I extend our sincere and continued condolences to Mrs Tipper's family.

I write to advise you of our findings and actions to be taken after review of our driver's comments in evidence at the Inquest. We understand from your report that [REDACTED] stated *"He had a practice of only focussing directly ahead with minimal eye contact with other drivers when emerging from junctions."* You commented further that *"It appears this was done so as not to give any other drivers an indication to pull out in front of his bus."*

Mr Nguyen's line manager was present at the Inquest. English is not [REDACTED] first language and his manager believes that he did not express himself well at the Inquest. He has a good record and has been driving with us since May 2005.

I shared your report with [REDACTED] General Manager and also with our UK Head of Operational Training, and together we have considered the content in the training delivered by NXWM (National Express West Midlands) and the messages we are giving to drivers in relation to making observations.

NXWM have a robust and well established Driver training programme which has at its core 5 principles of Defensive Driving. As a philosophy, Defensive Driving is a form of advanced driving that heightens a drivers abilities to predict potential hazards or accidents.

I have included with this reply a copy of the Defensive Driving course objectives and an outline of the training (appendix 1). Of relevance to the issue raised I would like to specifically highlight the following driving principles taught to all of our drivers;

- See it all – this principle looks at the driver's field of vision and the driver is coached on how to widen that field of vision. It covers the frequency of mirror checks and why they are important.

- Look all around – this section looks further at the field of visibility including how central vision differs from peripheral vision and the driver is coached on avoiding maintaining focus on one object for longer than 2 seconds.
- Be seen, be safe – this section highlights the need to see everyone and everything and for them to see us. This section also makes specific reference to the benefit of making eye contact.

I have included in appendix 2 some of the relevant trainer notes for these specific areas and the questions that will be put to the driver to challenge and check their understanding.

Our trainers are qualified ROSPA instructors and deliver licence acquisition training which covers the use of vision, observations and mirrors in great detail. Appendix 3 highlights relevant sections within the licence acquisition training, which requires specific sign off before competence can be achieved.

Each of our drivers have their own copy of the Guidelines to Professional Driving Standards which is prepared by National Express. I have included a copy with my letter (appendix 4), and would like to emphasise to you the following sections;

- Human Factors (page 8) highlights to the driver the effects their vehicle and driving have on other road users. On congested roads, particularly in shopping areas, drivers are told to take extra care and especially when there is a need to drive close to the kerb. In particular we highlight to them the risk presented by a pedestrian stepping from the kerb, the risk of mirrors overhanging the pavement and cyclists moving along the nearside of the vehicle.

– Awareness and planning focusses on the uncertainties presented by vulnerable road users, which includes pedestrians. This section highlights the importance of mirrors and taking the time to use them properly. In particular we highlight the importance of the driver using mirrors as a tool to gain information about their surroundings, not just as a procedural step in a manoeuvre.

Taken from page 14 in this section, we tell drivers *“Professional drivers develop a technique for checking mirrors whilst remaining fully aware of what’s happening ahead. Whatever method you adopt it is vital that you use your mirrors effectively and that you act sensibly on what you see. When you’re on the road, hazards can often occur together, or one immediately after another. One may also happen just when the need to begin a manoeuvre to deal with another occurs. You must ensure that you observe every potential danger and are fully prepared to deal with it, if it occurs. The sequence of checks has to be adapted as situations develop. In reality, it takes only moments to carry out and should become second nature without the need to constantly analyse what you’re doing.”*

Our driver, [REDACTED], has unfortunately been absent from work since 16th August 2018 (and following the Inquest) as he is recovering from an operation on his shoulder. He is not expected to return to work until early in 2019. When [REDACTED] returns to work the following action will be taken;

Details of action to be taken to prevent the risk of further accidents / death;
1. We will have a discussion with [REDACTED] in relation to his comments at the Inquest and look to gain more insight in to why he has felt the need to carry out this practice. We will remind him of the dangers that this way of driving creates. We will consider whether his response requires any further action in relation to training delivery and will highlight this case to our driver trainers.
2. [REDACTED] will undergo an assessment of his driving standards and will be provided feedback to enable him to improve as necessary.
3. [REDACTED] will undertake a refresher of our defensive driving training and will be assessed against the principles.

As I have outlined, the training we deliver at NXWM is aimed at focussing our drivers on the risks of operating a large vehicle in a dynamic environment, where the need to apply their knowledge and experience in relation to the limitations of their field of vision and mirror checks is crucial. Clearly [REDACTED]'s comments to you at the Inquest are not in line with the principles that we teach and we will be sure to follow this up immediately on his return to work, and prior to him returning to his driving duties.

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to let me know and I will be happy to assist.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Stables

Managing Director

National Express UK and Germany

