



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

SEP 17 2004

BY FAX AND CERTIFIED MAIL
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

David Hobson
Manager, Quality Services
TRW Commercial Automotives U.S. LLC
Commercial Vehicle Systems Division
800 Heath Street, P.O. Box 60
Lafayette, IN 47904

NSA-214sjm
PE04-062b

Dear Mr. Hobson:

On September 15, 2004, the Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) opened a Preliminary Evaluation (PE04-062) to investigate reported incidents of "Alleged Tie Rod Tube Failure" in school buses manufactured by Thomas Built Buses Inc. (Thomas) and equipped with axles manufactured by Dana.

The ODI investigation was initiated based on two complaints from separate school bus entities alleging that while their drivers while maneuvering in a parking lot the tie rod tube fractured and disconnected from one of the tie rods. Since opening this investigation, ODI is aware 12 other allegations of fractured tie rod tubes

Our understanding is that TRW supplies the axle components to Dana Corporation which are then assembled on axles and sold to Thomas, the final stage vehicle manufacturer, for installation on school buses. ODI is concerned that this type failure results in the loss of alignment and controllability of the steering axle wheels and could compromise the drivers ability to maintain full control of the school bus.

Since this issue could pose potential safety consequences, this letter requests information from your company that is intended to assist the Agency in its investigation by providing information about your company's experience regarding the steering components sold to Thomas and installed on the subject vehicles.

NHTSA requests that all data files submitted should be identified as "NHTSA File PE04-062b" and that the data requested in table format be submitted in Excel format.



DOT AUTO SAFETY HOTLINE
888-DASH-2-DOT
888-327-4238

Unless otherwise stated in the text, the following definitions apply to this information request:

- **Subject vehicle:** all model year 2000 through 2002 school buses manufactured by Thomas Built, Incorporated, sold or leased in the United States, equipped with a Dana front axle and produced with a tie-rod tube assembly furnished by TRW Automotive.
- **Alleged Defect:** any failure, malfunction or otherwise unsatisfactory performance of a tie-rod tube assembly on a subject vehicle which contributes to or results in a loss or reduction of steering control.
- **TRW:** TRW Automotives U.S. LLC., all of its past and present officers and employees, whether assigned to its principal offices or to any of its field or other locations, including all of its divisions, subsidiaries (whether or not incorporated) and affiliated enterprises including, but not limited to, TRW and all of their headquarters, regional, zone, and other offices and their employees, and all agents, contractors, consultants, attorneys and law firms and other persons engaged by or under the control of TRW (including all business units and persons previously referred to) who are or were involved in any way with any of the following related to the alleged defect in the subject brake systems:
 - (a) design, analysis, modification, or production;
 - (b) testing, assessment, or evaluation;
 - (c) consideration or recognition of potential or actual defects, reporting, record-keeping and information management (e.g., complaints, field reports, warranty information, part sales) analysis, claims, or lawsuits;
 - (d) communications with motor vehicle manufacturers; or
 - (e) communication to or from zone representatives, fleets, dealers, or other field locations, including but not limited to people who have the capacity to obtain information from dealers.
- **Document(s):** is used in the broadest sense of the word and shall mean all original written, printed, typed, recorded, or graphic matter whatsoever, however produced or reproduced, of every kind, nature, and description, and all non-identical copies of both sides thereof, including, but not limited to, papers, letters, memoranda, correspondence, communications, electronic mail (e-mail) messages (existing in hard copy and/or in electronic storage), faxes, telegrams, cables, telex messages, notes, annotations, working papers, drafts, minutes, records, audio and video recordings, data, databases, other information bases, summaries, charts, tables, graphics, other visual displays, photographs, statements, interviews, opinions, reports, newspaper articles, studies, analyses, evaluations, interpretations, contracts, agreements, jottings, agendas, bulletins, notices, announcements, instructions, blueprints, drawings, as built, changes, manuals, publications, work schedules, journals, statistical data, desk,

portable and computer calendars, appointment books, diaries, travel reports, lists, tabulations, computer printouts, data processing program libraries, data processing inputs and outputs, microfilms, microfiches, statements for services, resolutions, financial statements, governmental records, business records, personnel records, work orders, pleadings, discovery in any form, affidavits, motions, responses to discovery, all transcripts, administrative filings and all mechanical, magnetic, photographic and electronic records or recordings of any kind, including any storage media associated with computers, including, but not limited to, information on hard drives, floppy disks, backup tapes, and zip drives, and shall include any drafts or revisions pertaining to any of the foregoing, all other things similar to any of the foregoing, however denominated by you, any other data compilations from which information can be obtained, translated if necessary, into a usable form and any other documents. For purposes of this request, any document which contains any note, comment, addition, deletion, insertion, annotation, or otherwise comprises a non-identical copy of another document shall be treated as a separate document subject to production. In all cases where original and any non-identical copies are not available, "document" also means any identical copies of the original and all non-identical copies thereof. If a document is not in the English language, provide both the original document and an English translation of the document.

- **Other Terms:** To the extent that they are used in these information requests, the terms "claim," "consumer complaint," "dealer field report," "field report," "fire," "fleet," "good will," "make," "model," "model year," "notice," "property damage," "property damage claim," "rollover," "type," "warranty," "warranty adjustment," and "warranty claim," whether used in singular or in plural form, have the same meaning as found in 49 CFR 579.4.

To assist my staff in its evaluation of the alleged defect, certain information is required. Pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30166, please provide numbered responses to the following information requests.

Please repeat each request verbatim before the response. After the response to each request, identify the source of the information and indicate the last date the source updated the information prior to the preparation of the response. When documents are produced, the documents shall be produced in an identified, organized manner that corresponds with the Information Request letter (including the subparts). When documents are produced and the documents would not, standing alone, be self-explanatory, the production of documents shall be supplemented and accompanied by explanation.

1. Please provide a full description, including part numbers and engineering drawing(s) of the tie rod tubes furnished to Dana Corporation for the axles which were used on the Subject Vehicles.

2. Provide the number of tie rod tubes furnished to Dana for the subject vehicles by month and year.
3. By month and year, provide the number of identical tie rod tubes furnish to any other company for model years, 2000 through 2002.
4. Describe all modifications or changes made by, or on behalf of, TRW, Dana, Thomas, or any other person or entity pertaining to the design, manufacture, quality control, supply, or installation of the steering components from the start of production to date, that relates to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject vehicles.

For each such modification or change, provide the following information:

- a) The date or approximate date on which the modification or change was incorporated into vehicle production;
 - b) A detailed description of the modification or change;
 - c) The reason(s) for the modification or change;
 - d) the vehicles and/or family of axles affected by each modification and/or change listed.
 - e) The part numbers (service and engineering) of the original component;
 - f) The part number (service and engineering) of the modified component;
 - g) Whether the original unmodified component was withdrawn from production and/or sale, and if so, when;
 - h) When the modified component was made available as a service component; and,
 - i) Whether the modified component can be interchanged with earlier production components.
5. Also, provide the above information for any modification or change that TRW is aware of which may be incorporated into vehicle production within the next 120 days.
 6. Produce copies of all service, warranty, and other documents that relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject vehicles, that TRW has issued, or is aware of, to any dealers, regional or zone offices, field offices, fleet purchasers, or other entities. This includes, but is not limited to, bulletins, advisories, informational documents, training documents, or other documents or communications, with the exception of standard shop manuals. Also, include the latest draft copy of any communication that TRW is planning to issue within the next 120 days.
 7. Provide a detailed chronology of all events regarding the subject defect starting from the time TRW first became aware of this issue to present. Describe how TRW first became aware of the alleged defect and state the date on which TRW first became aware of the possibility of the alleged defect. Include all information including dates of both internal and external meetings, meetings with fleets, manufacturers, Dana, Thomas, or any others involved in this issue and discuss the resolution, planned action, and/or the manner in which TRW plans to address this issue. Also separately and in chronological order provide a copy of any/all documents and presentation material that was used during these meetings which TRW has possession of.

8. Provide a copy of any and all documents and communications (related to the alleged defect) that have occurred between any school bus fleet, Dana, Thomas, and/or TRW, as well as communications with any other company with which Dana was involved pertaining to this matter.
9. Describe and provide a copy of all assessments, analyses, tests, test results, studies, surveys, simulations, investigations, field inspections, inquiries and/or evaluations (collectively, "actions") that relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject vehicles/axles that have been conducted, are being conducted, are planned, or are being planned by, or for, TRW, Dana, or Thomas. For each such action, provide the following information:
 - a. action title or identifier;
 - b. the actual or planned start date;
 - c. the actual or expected end date;
 - d. brief summary of the subject and objective of the action;
 - e. engineering group(s)/supplier(s) responsible for designing and for conducting the action; and,
 - f. a brief summary of the findings and/or conclusions resulting from the action.

For each action identified, provide copies of all documents related to the action, regardless of whether the documents are in interim, draft, or final form. Organize the documents chronologically by action date.

10. Furnish TRW's detailed opinion of the alleged defect in the subject vehicles. Include an assessment of the following:
 - (a) the causal or contributing factors;
 - (b) the failure mode;
 - (c) the risk to motor vehicle safety that it poses;
 - (d) what warnings, if any, are provided the operator and other persons;
 - (e) any actions that TRW intends to take on this issue.

This letter is being sent to TRW pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30166, which authorizes NHTSA to conduct any investigation that may be necessary to enforce Chapter 301 of Title 49 and to require a manufacturer to make reports to enable NHTSA to decide whether the manufacturer is complying with that Chapter. Your failure to respond promptly and fully to this letter could subject TRW to civil penalties pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30165 or lead to an action for injunctive relief pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30163. (Other remedies and sanctions are available as well). Please note that maximum civil penalties under 49 U.S.C. § 30165 have increased as a result of the enactment of the Transportation Recall Enhancement, Accountability, and Documentation (TREAD) Act, Public Law No. 106-414 (signed November 1, 2000). Section 5(a) of the TREAD Act, codified at 49 U.S.C. § 30165(b), provides for civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per day, with a maximum of \$15 million for a related series of violations, for failing or refusing to perform an act required under 49 U.S.C. § 30166. This includes failing to respond to ODI information requests.

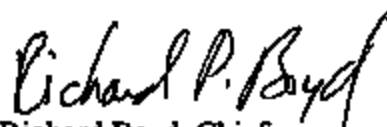
If TRW cannot respond to any specific request or subpart thereof, please state the reason why it is unable to do so. If, on the basis of attorney client, attorney work product, or other privilege, TRW does not submit one or more requested documents or items of information in response to this information request, TRW must provide a privilege log identifying each document or item withheld, and stating the date, subject or title, name and position of the person(s) from and the person(s) to whom it was sent, and the name and position of any other recipient (to include all carbon copies or blind carbon copies), the nature of that information or material, and the basis for the claim of privilege and why that privilege applies.

Your response to this letter, in duplicate, must be submitted to this office by October 18, 2004. Please refer to PE04-062b in TRW's response to this letter. If you find that you are unable to provide all of the information requested within the time allotted, you must request an extension from Richard Boyd at (202) 366-4933 no later than five business days before the response due date. If you are unable to provide all of the information requested by the original deadline, you must submit a partial response by the original deadline with whatever information you then have available, even if you have received an extension.

If TRW claims that any of the information or documents provided in response to this information request constitute confidential commercial material within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(4), or are protected from disclosure pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 1905, TRW must submit supporting information together with the materials that are the subject of the confidentiality request, in accordance with 49 CFR Part 512, to the Office of Chief Counsel (NCC-30), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Room 5219, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. TRW is required to submit two copies of the documents containing the purportedly confidential information (except only one copy of blueprints) and one copy of the documents from which information claimed to be confidential has been deleted.

Please contact Sonny Murianka of my staff at (202) 366-5196 upon receipt of this letter. Mr. Murianka will address any technical questions concerning this matter that you may have.

Sincerely,



Richard Boyd, Chief
Medium and Heavy Duty Truck Division
Office of Defects Investigation