

## Bus driver too lax, and rider's video shows all

The Boston Globe

### Worried passenger alerts Peter Pan

By Noah Bierman, Globe Staff | May 19, 2009

The video is almost boring on one level: 10 minutes of a guy tearing paper bus tickets, yawning, and at one point, fiddling with his cellphone.

But the unwitting star is a Peter Pan bus driver, responsible for carrying dozens of passengers from Boston to New York on a rainy April morning. The auteur is a worried passenger, filming it all on a Blackberry camera and then broadcasting it on YouTube.

Peter Pan managers, after viewing the video yesterday afternoon, said the unidentified driver appears to be breaking at least two company rules - using his cellphone and taking his hands off the steering wheel to tear tickets - and faces unpaid time off and possible termination. He has been identified internally and put on leave while managers examine his record and set up an interview with him and his union representative, said Chris Crean, vice president of public safety and security for Peter Pan.

The Globe's attempt to reach the unnamed driver yesterday afternoon through Peter Pan and his union was not successful.

Crean said it was the first time he has received such a video from a passenger. But still pictures from cellphones have sparked other investigations at the company in recent years.

In an increasingly digital world, bus, train, and subway drivers are more likely than ever to get caught flouting the rules, as everyday technology empowers passengers to play safety patrol. Last week, a student in Clinton videotaped a bus driver using a cellphone to send a text message. The driver was fired, his story on the nightly news. The next day, MBTA General Manager Daniel A. Grabauskas encouraged public transit passengers to make similar reports as he announced a crackdown on cellphone use following a May 8 Green Line crash. The driver in the crash told authorities he was text messaging his girlfriend.

The Peter Pan video was made last month by Shelomo Alfassa, a Brooklyn man who takes a bus between New York and Boston almost every week to visit his girlfriend. He did not set out to make a video, he said. But from his front-row seat, he noticed the driver folding and tearing tickets, both hands off the wheel and eyes apparently not aimed at the road. He noticed a cellphone call, even as the driver maintained highway speeds alongside tractor-trailers.

He said he called Peter Pan from the road and reached someone who sounded so concerned that she uttered a curse word. But he thought that the woman did not seem likely to intervene to stop the behavior, so Alfassa started filming on and off with his Blackberry, capturing about 20 minutes of footage over the four-hour trip, he said.

He tried to find company officials when he got to the terminal in New York and even called after the trip, but got nowhere, he said. Some of the attempts, he said, were with Greyhound, which books service on the route jointly with Peter Pan under a pooling agreement, but does not have supervision of Peter Pan's buses.

Robert Schwarz, Peter Pan's executive vice president, said he cannot find records of the first call and would have initiated an investigation sooner if the company had been aware of a safety complaint.

"We don't want a renegade out in the road doing the wrong things," he said.

Crean said there is "obviously some gap we need to fix if complaints about our drivers to Greyhound aren't getting forwarded to us."

Alfassa was frustrated by the bureaucratic hoops he seemed to be going through and was especially worried that he could not reach someone to complain before the driver, who he believed was sleepy and distracted, made a return trip to Boston on the same day.

After letting it go for a few weeks, he sat down a couple of weeks ago and spent four hours editing the video, putting in captions describing the behavior he found most egregious: "Driver removes his hat, and again yawns, rub his eyes, and stretch in his seat. Then, he either is texting or reading e-mail on his cell phone."

Yesterday, Alfassa sent a link of the video to Peter Pan executives, law enforcement officials, and the Globe.

"My goal is not to get this guy fired," Alfassa, said. "My goal is to get these guys, as a corporation, to be responsible."

Through most of the video, the driver appears unaware that he is being filmed. Only near the end of the trip, after snacking on a bag of chips and drinking a soda, does he look back. That was when Alfassa stopped filming.

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