

Happy New Year! Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

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Confusion reigns in wake of new red-dyed fuel law

Motorcoach operators across the U.S. will begin "loaning" the federal government a little money every time they fill up their fuel tanks beginning Jan. 1, and many of them aren't the least bit happy about it.

"Our phones are ringing off the hook," said Norm Littler, vice president of government affairs for the

United Motorcoach Association. "Operators are calling saying they don't like what's going on."

Clyde Hart, executive vice president of government affairs for the American Bus Association, said a number of carriers have complained to his office as well, saying they don't like the idea at all.

Worse, perhaps, is the possibility

of facing huge fines for running coaches with red-dyed fuel after Jan. 1. The minimum fine is \$1,000 per event, or \$10 for each gallon of fuel in their tanks, which ever is larger.

The reason for all this upset is federal legislation that takes effect Jan. 1. The new law prohibits operators from using tax-exempt red-

dyed fuel in coaches that qualify for tax exemptions. Instead, they are required to use fully taxed clear fuel in all of their coaches, pay the full tax and then file for refunds of that portion of the tax from which they are exempt.

Red-dyed fuel — colored with red dye so law enforcement officers can easily spot it — is exempt from

the 24.4 cents a gallon federal excise tax. Although motorcoach operators are exempt from 17 cents of the tax, they have been allowed under federal law to buy the fuel without paying any taxes and then pay the 7.4 cents a gallon tax when they file their quarterly tax statements.

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Should operators verify mechanics' brake inspections?

When more than half of the motorcoaches inspected in Florida during last fall's Operation Air Brake were found to have brake problems serious enough to put them out of service, some people in the industry were stunned.

But not brake expert Chris Farell.

"Nope. Not at all," said the North American sales manager for Haldex Brake Systems.

Farell has long suspected that a number of mechanics and many others in the over-the-road industry either don't have the knowledge or the right equipment to properly inspect the drum brakes that are on thousands of coaches touring the highways today.

"Probably 60 percent of the people checking brakes out there don't do it properly," Farell suggests.

The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance Operation Air Brake inspections conducted in Florida could offer support for his contention. (See Nov. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)



Of the 13 coaches that were checked, six were found to have brakes that were out of adjustment and a seventh had brake components that failed to meet inspection standards. All were put out of service.

However, it is not known how many of the coaches had drum brakes, which are standard equipment on older coaches and are often stopped for inspection, or disc brakes, which are on newer buses. "Unfortunately the data does not get that granular in terms of the type of braking systems employed on the vehicles," said Steve Keppler, CVSA director of policy and programs.

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Public takeover of private operators begins in New York

NEW YORK CITY — The first step in the long-delayed public takeover of the private bus lines operating in New York City was scheduled to occur on the last day of 2004, when the city was to assume ownership of Liberty Bus Lines.

Under a deal announced last month by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Liberty Lines' President Jerry D'Amore, the city agreed to buy Liberty Lines for a total price of \$15.2 million.

The purchase includes all of the property of Liberty Lines Express, including its maintenance center and bus depot, parking facilities, equipment, vehicles and other assets.

Liberty Lines operates more

than 400 vehicles in metro New York and Westchester County, including seven express routes between the Bronx and Manhattan. The company, which has been around since 1953, has 700 union and 160 nonunion employees. It carries upwards of 32 million passengers annually.

The purchase is the first agreement between the city and the seven private New York City bus lines it seeks to take over.

Striking similar deals with the other six companies will be far harder, according to New York Councilman John Liu, chairman of the council's transportation committee and a frequent critic of the mayor's takeover policy.

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Alcatraz group ticket sales halted

SAN FRANCISCO — Months of effort in California and Washington to try to convince the National Park Service to drop plans to bar the group tour and travel industry from buying tickets to Alcatraz Island appear to have come up short.

As 2004 rolled to a close,

neither the Park Service nor the Golden Gate National Recreation Area showed signs of backing away from the ticket ban that was scheduled to go into effect Jan. 1.

In fact, coach operators in California reported they were unable to buy tickets last month for groups wanting to tour Alcatraz

after Jan. 1.

Although tour organizations, the California Bus Association and others have been trying since September to get the policy rescinded or revised, none report success. Yet, the groups are soldiering on.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 ►



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Driver shield foils would be attacker

LOXLEY, Ala. — The security shield being installed on Greyhound buses is being credited with helping defuse a situation involving a passenger who went nuts and tried to attack the driver.

A spokesman for the Baldwin County, Ala., Sheriff's Department said the driver's alertness, combined with a quick response by deputies, also helped keep the episode from escalating into violence.

The incident occurred last month as a Greyhound coach was traveling on Interstate 10 between Pensacola, Fla., and Mobile, Ala. A passenger from Gary, Ind., became agitated and tried to get at the driver.

As the man cursed and threatened to kill passengers, the driver pulled the bus off the highway in Loxley, about 17 miles east of Mobile.

Sgt. John Murphy, a spokesman for the Sheriff's Department, said some of the 35 passengers helped subdue Lawrence W. Reedus while deputies placed him in handcuffs. In a phone interview with *Bus & Motorcoach News*, Murphy said the early morning incident left passengers shaken, with a few still sobbing when deputies arrived.

In their report, the deputies credited the driver shield with playing a role in controlling events.

Greyhound spokeswoman Kim Plaskett said the company began installing the transparent driver shields after receiving a grant from the Transportation Security Administration in October 2003. (See Nov. 1, 2003, issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The shields have been controversial among Greyhound drivers. Some have questioned the potential effectiveness of the shields.

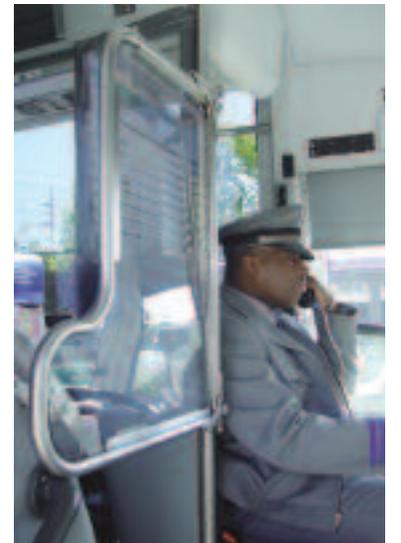
Ms. Plaskett declined to say how many Greyhound coaches now have the safety shields, which were designed to protect drivers from unruly passengers. A year ago, Greyhound said it planned to

spend \$5 million installing shields on 1,700 of its buses.

Ms. Plaskett said Greyhound equips all of its drivers with cellular telephones that have preprogrammed emergency numbers. She said the driver pulled off at an exit and then called 911. "The driver did exactly what he was trained to do," she said.

Murphy said Reedus, 67, boarded the bus in Pensacola and apparently became enraged over a problem he perceived on the bus. The barrier prevented him from reaching the driver.

Reedus was charged with communicating a terrorist threat.



Greyhound Lines is installing driver security compartments, featuring a swing-out gate.

Coach industry leader Bruce Matthews dies

PUNTA GORDA, Fla. — Bruce R. Matthews, who cut a wide swath in the bus industry — not only as a successful operator and a specialty supplier but also as an industry leader, died here last month at the age of 65.

For 35 years, Mr. Matthews battled the ups and downs of the bus industry and, in August, he survived the direct onslaught of Hurricane Charley, helping save his Punta Gorda home from 100 mph-plus winds, but he lost his fight with cancer and heart problems.

UMA Chairman and CEO Victor Parra said Mr. Matthews will be greatly missed.

Mr. Matthews served on the UMA board for 11 years. He also was active in the American Bus Association, serving on its board and chairing its Marketplace show and a number of committees. Additionally, he was a past president and board member of the Bus Association of New York.

In 1998, *Bus Ride* named Mr. Matthews one of the 25 most-influential people in the bus industry. In an interview, Mr. Matthews said the secret to business success was to "listen to your customers and employees, be responsive to their needs and suggestions. Have a strong, cohesive team working with you and be proactive rather than reactive to stay ahead of the competition." He was firm believer in being active in industry affairs.

Born in 1939, in Staten Island, N.Y., Mr. Matthews joined his brother Robert in the bus industry in 1970, with Matthews Buses Inc. Ten years later, the company pur-

chased Upstate Transit Inc. of Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Upstate eventually became Upstate Tours and Mr. Matthews built its charter, tour and commuter-line services and retail travel agency.

The Matthews' bus-related businesses grew to include Matthews Distributor Services of Greensboro, N.C.; Matthews Specialty Vehicles of High Point, N.C., and Rifled Air Conditioning Systems of Archdale, N.C. All of the companies operated under the banner of the Matthews Group, and Mr. Matthews was chairman until he retired last year. (See Dec. 1, 2003, issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Mr. Matthews established a home in Punta Gorda in 1997, and he and his wife Lynne had been residents there for the past three years. He was very involved in community activities.

He also was a veteran of the U.S. Army.

Survivors, besides his widow, who chaired last year's ABA Marketplace, include his son Tim of Saratoga Springs; his daughter, Meridith of Daytona Beach, Fla., and his brother Robert of Green Cove Springs, Fla.

A memorial has been established with the American Bus Association Foundation, George T. Snyder Jr. Scholarship Program, 700 13th St. N.W., Ste. 575, Washington, DC 20005-5932.



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THE DOCKET

More security funds: Try, try and try again

WASHINGTON — For the third year in a row, efforts to win a substantial increase in federal funding for motorcoach industry security improvements have fallen short.

But the American Bus Association, which has been trying to convince Congress it should dole out more dollars to beef up industry security programs, plans to keep trying.

However, if another large over-the-road bus security bill does surface in the new Congress that convenes later this month, there's a possibility the legislation could undergo an important change that would cheer some in the industry.

The bill that failed in the last session of Congress would have allocated \$150 million to motorcoach operators over a three-year period.

The grants and security programs the money would have financed would have been administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Having the FMCSA manage the programs raised some concerns in the industry and may also have raised the hackles of the Transportation Security Administration in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

While some line-haul operators maintain they have an urgent need for more security funding, there also are worries the FMCSA is too busy working on critical safety issues to be burdened with additional, non-safety-related responsibilities. Instead, they contend it would be more appropriate for the Department of Homeland Security or its Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to run an expanded bus security program.

"The FMCSA could double its staff tomorrow and it still wouldn't have enough folks to get through the list of critical safety-related challenges on its agenda," suggested one worried coach industry official. "The agency doesn't need the distraction of trying to assure industry security, too."

But Clyde Hart, executive vice president of government affairs for the American Bus Association and a strong supporter of the most-recent legislation, said he sees no problem with the FMCSA administering the grants.

"What, the TSA isn't busy?" he responds rhetorically at the suggestion the TSA handle the funding. "What really matters is the money, and we would like to see the legislation come back again next session."

Hart said the ABA will campaign for the bill to be reintroduced when the new Congress meets.

The 2004 legislation — HR 5082 — was introduced by a bipartisan group of a half-dozen congressmen led by Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, and was approved by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which Young chairs. However, because it was presented late in the session, it was not called up by the House before Congress adjourned for the year.

Congress' failure to act on the bill marked the third time such legislation has failed to win approval in as many years. Two years ago, a bill that would have given the industry \$300 million over three years failed to get a vote on the Senate floor, and a year later a similar bill failed to make it to a vote in the House.

House Transportation Committee spokesman Justin Harclerode said the measure could be brought back again this year and, if it were, lawmakers would listen to the concerns of the industry. "Any concerns that anyone has with proposed legislation would be revisited by the committee," he stressed.

Harclerode said the committee went with the DOT and FMCSA to run the program because the agencies have more expertise with the motorcoach industry than does the homeland security department.

The legislation, which also would have made \$3 billion available to public transit agencies, would have allowed motorcoach operators to finance a wide range of security improvements, including terminal and station reconstruction, driver protection, passenger screening, employee training and surveillance and emergency communication equipment.

Before any grants could have been allocated, however, the FMCSA would have been required to survey security systems now in use in the industry and develop a priority list for funding based on its findings. Individual carriers then

Tourism voice is created in security dept.

WASHINGTON — The sometimes not-very-tourism-friendly Department of Homeland Security is going to get a tourism voice in its midst.

The 9/11 intelligence reform bill passed by Congress last month creates a "tourism office" within the Private Sector Office of the Department of Homeland Security. Passage of the bill culminated three years of effort by CrossSphere, formerly the National Tour Association, and its industry partners to create a tourism voice within the homeland security agency. (See Nov. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

"This CrossSphere-initiated and industry-led effort represents a great success that will benefit all travelers, assist in keeping America safe and encourage inbound tourism around the globe," said CrossSphere President Hank Phillips.

The National Tour Association launched its quest to create a tourism industry position within DHS because of concern that heightened security procedures would cause delays at U.S. borders, further discouraging packaged travel between the U.S. and its North American neighbors.

"Now," said the association, "a remedial response is in statutory language." In other words, the interests of the travel and tourism industry will be represented within the agency.

CrossSphere Legislative Counsel Jim Santini said a meeting will be requested with Al Martinez-Fonts, special assistant to the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, to explore ways to work together to meet security objectives, while minimizing travel and tourism disruptions.

The National Tour Association officially changed its name to CrossSphere at its annual convention in mid-November. The "rebranding" is designed to build on the association's more than 50-year history as "an international community" of nearly 4,000 professionals working in the packaged travel industry.

For more information go to www.CrossSphere.com.

Ill. DOT says coaches must have inspections

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — The Illinois Department of Transportation has sent a letter to Illinois coach operators telling them they're required to have a state safety inspection every six months.

The directive, from the manager of the vehicle inspection unit of Illinois DOT, was sent to "clarify confusion that exists concerning the Illinois safety inspection requirement" for coaches registered in the state.

Vehicle inspection chief Tony Klasing said Illinois-registered buses must be inspected twice a year at an Official Testing Station. Klasing also noted that the state inspection "no longer satisfies the annual (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations) Appendix G inspection requirement (49 CFR 396.17)."

While Klasing's letter was meant to end confusion, it left many Illinois coach operators scratching their heads.

Illinois operators in large numbers are believed to be ignoring the state inspection requirement because of its limited scope and the dearth of inspectors at state testing stations who know Thing One about motorcoaches.

Many operators perform their own USDOT inspections using the rigorous federal standards and Commercial Vehicle Safety Alli-

ance Out-of-Service Criteria. They then affix a federal sticker, which has satisfied state police whenever they've been stopped.

Adding to the confusion is a note under 49 CFR 396.23 *Equivalent to periodic inspection* of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations. The note says Illinois' non-mandatory inspection "will satisfy federal requirements."

Now, Klasing says the state inspection won't meet the federal requirement.

While Klasing's letter appeared to confuse operators, the fact that it was sent did not come as much of a surprise to operators. They have been expecting a state response to the Oct. 9 crash of a Chicago-based coach that went off a highway in northeastern Arkansas, killing 15 people.

The coach reportedly had a number of problems that should have kept it off the road but it had passed an inspection at an official state testing station two months prior to the crash. The problems discovered after the crash are not believed to have contributed to the accident but may have exacerbated the seriousness of the event.

Few operators believe a state testing station inspection would have uncovered the apparent problems with the coach that crashed in Arkansas.

Amtrak, roads don't mix

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., has promised to seek funds this year for highway projects left out of the omnibus spending bill adopted in waning days of the last Congress, the *Washington Post* reports.

Rep. Ernest Istook Jr., R-Okla., who chairs the House Appropriations Committee panel that oversees spending on roads, rejected the projects sought by some lawmakers after they defied him by signing a letter calling for

a doubling of Amtrak funding, the newspaper said.

House and Senate negotiators increased funding for Amtrak to \$1.2 billion in the final version of the spending package that Congress approved in late November, that was \$300 million more than the \$900 million President Bush had asked for.

And, as he threatened, Istook did not include most of the road projects sought by the pro-Amtrak contingent, the *Post* said.

Money for Washington bridges

Olympia, Wash. — The Washington Department of Transportation has received nearly \$35 million in federal funding to repair and replace 33 city and county bridges.

Kathleen Davis, highways and local programs director, said that fixing the bridges was vital to preserving Washington's transporta-

tion infrastructure.

Grant Griffin, a bridge engineer with the department, said the money would help "replace bridges that are at the end of their service life, and [provide for] repairs that can add years to the life of a bridge at a fraction of the cost of replacement."

Expanded parking choices eyed for Atlantic City

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Alternative parking arrangements may become available to motorcoach operators that regularly run in and out of Atlantic City.

The new parking arrangements, should they materialize, could take a little of the sting out of the higher permit fees some operators are now paying to bring coaches to Atlantic City.

The South Jersey Transportation Authority, which regulates bus traffic around Atlantic City, is considering easing regulations that would make it easier to open additional parking facilities for motorcoaches that make close to 300,000 visits to the gambling and tourist center every year.

Currently, coach parking in Atlantic City is limited to the Atlantic City Transportation Center.

Coach operators urged the authority to review the parking regulations during hearings in July on an update of its Bus Management Program, which governs motorcoach activity in Atlantic City.

"We decided to look at the parking regulations at the request of the motorcoach operators," said Rose Marie Rodriguez of the authority.

Among the regulations that would be revised is a requirement that bus parking facilities located within a driving distance of five miles of a section of Atlantic City between Maine and Albany avenues, and the need to demonstrate that bus parking demand exceeds 85 percent of the existing number of authorized spaces.

"It probably was the biggest thing they did for our industry," said Andrea Malamut, executive director of the Greater New Jersey Motorcoach Association.

At least one company already is considering opening a bus parking facility in Pleasantville, a community west of Atlantic City that is outside the five-mile restriction.

"We look for favorable rates for parking, but we also look for convenience," noted Tom JaBran, president of the New Jersey association and chief executive of Trans-Bridge Lines in Bethlehem, Pa. "We like our members to be able to have a choice as to where they park and where ever works out best for them."

He said the opening of additional parking facilities would promote competition and possibly lead to lower parking rates.

Ms. Rodriguez said she did not know when there would be a vote on the parking proposal.

Meantime, the higher fees that went into effect in October apparently have caused little stir from

motorcoach operators who serve Atlantic City, according to JaBran and Malamut. They said there was very little outcry during the approval process and they have heard little since.

Part of the reason, Malamut

suggested, was that the authority worked closely with the association and accepted several of its key recommendations, including holding the daily fee for a bus at \$2 and increasing the single and fleet medallion fees over a three-year

period rather than making them effective at one time.

"We worked very well together," said Malamut.

Under the new fee schedule, a medallion for a single coach costs \$600, increasing to \$650 in

October and to \$675 in October 2006. The fleet medallion fee is \$33,500 and will rise to \$37,000 in October and to \$40,500 in October 2006. The previous single-coach fee was \$550 and the fleet fee was \$30,000.



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THE DOCKET

Fuel tax rate growth slows; Pa. tax to leap

The pace of fuel tax increases slowed to crawl during the third quarter of last year, figures compiled by fuel tax expert Robert C. Pitcher of Annandale, Va., show.

However, Pennsylvania announced last month that its tax on diesel fuel would be increasing 5.2 cents per gallon for 2005, giving Pennsylvania the distinction of again having the highest diesel fuel taxes in the nation.

The Pennsylvania Department of Revenue said the state's oil company franchise tax rate for 2005 will increase from 19.2 cents a gallon to 24.4 cents, pushing the total state tax on diesel fuel to 36.4 cents per gallon.

That will leapfrog Pennsylvania ahead of Connecticut, New York and Wisconsin among states with the highest taxes on diesel fuel. The tax rate in those states is 32 cents a gallon or a fraction higher.

Meanwhile, only three states boosted their taxes on diesel fuel during the third quarter of last year.

The biggest increase was in Michigan, which increased its tax on diesel fuel from 23.9 cents per gallon, to 26.5. Michigan's fuel tax rate includes a 6 percent sales tax.

The other two increases were more modest. New York's tax on

State & Provincial Fuel Tax Rates

Only three states boosted fuel tax rates during the third quarter of 2004. Here are the updated rates for all states and provinces, plus the federal tax rate in the U.S.

State	Gasoline	Diesel	State	Gasoline	Diesel
Alabama	16	19	North Carolina	24.6	24.6
Alaska	8	8	North Dakota	21	21
Arizona	18	26	Ohio	28	28
Arkansas	21.5	22.5	Oklahoma	16	13
California	34.35	27.8	Oregon	24	0
Colorado	22	20.5	Pennsylvania	26.2	31.2
Connecticut	31	32	Rhode Island	30	30
Delaware	23	22	South Carolina	16	16
D.C.	20	20	South Dakota	22	22
Florida	19.37	29.07	Tennessee	21	18
Georgia	12.5	12.03	Texas	20	20
Hawaii	16	16	Utah	24.5	24.5
Idaho	25	25	Vermont	20	26
Illinois	26.9	29.6	Virginia	19.5	19.5
Indiana	29	27	Washington	28	28
Iowa	20.5	22.5	West Virginia	25.35	25.35
Kansas	24	26	Wisconsin	32.1	32.1
Kentucky	19.8	20.1	Wyoming	14	14
Louisiana	20	20	U. S.	18.4	24.4
Maine	25.2	26.3	<i>Tax Rate in cents per gallon</i>		
Maryland	23.5	24.25	Province	Gasoline	Diesel
Massachusetts	21	21	Alberta	9	9
Michigan	29	26.5	British Columbia	14.5	15
Minnesota	20	20	Manitoba	11.5	11.5
Mississippi	18	18	New Brunswick	14.5	16.9
Missouri	17	17	Newfoundland	16.5	16.5
Montana	27	27.75	Nova Scotia	15.5	15.4
Nebraska	24.8	24.8	Ontario	14.7	14.3
Nevada	23.81	27.75	P.E. Island	17	16.5
New Hampshire	18	18	Quebec	15.2	16.2
New Jersey	14.5	17.5	Saskatchewan	15	15
New Mexico	17	21	<i>Tax Rate in Canada = cents per liter</i>		
New York	34.9	32.75			

diesel fuel rose less than a penny a gallon to 32.75 cents, and the tax rate in Georgia edged up to 12.03 cents a gallon, from 11.71. New York's rate includes a 7 percent sales tax.

State taxes on gasoline were largely unchanged in the third quarter, with only New York raising its gasoline tax, and two states reducing them, Alabama and California.

Leaks soak Big Dig roads

BOSTON — Boston's "Big Dig" highway project has become riddled with leaks, dumping millions of gallons of water into the \$14.6 billion tunnel system, news services report.

Jack Lemley, a consultant hired by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority to investigate the problem, told the *Boston Globe* it could take up to 10 years to totally fix the problem. Fixing just one

large leak can take months and require traffic lane closures.

During the past three-plus years, the Big Dig has replaced the elevated central artery of Interstate 93 with underground tunnels through downtown Boston. It also connects Interstate 90 — the Massachusetts Turnpike — to Logan International Airport, and added the Ted Williams Tunnel beneath Boston Harbor.

Speed lowered near Phoenix

PHOENIX — The Arizona Department of Transportation has lowered the speed limit to 65 miles per hour along stretches of Interstates 10 and 17 just outside Phoenix.

I-10 is a major east-west transcontinental thoroughfare, and I-17 runs north and south, linking I-10 with another major east-west highway, I-40.

ADOT spokesman Doug

Nintzel said the changes should improve safety along the freeway segments, which are seeing greater congestion resulting from higher traffic flows.

The affected areas are I-10 between Dysart Road and Cotton Lane, and I-17 between Happy Valley Road and Carefree Highway. The stretches are each about five miles long and had posted speed limits of 75 mph.

Study will reveal all about driver fatigue

WASHINGTON — Researchers are putting the finishing touches on a study that could help motorcoach operators and regulators deal with two hot-button driver issues — hours of service and fatigue.

The report being prepared by the Transportation Research Board for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration will package all of the available research, current practices and other critical information that address the issues.

Christopher W. Jenks, manager of the research board's commercial truck and bus safety synthesis program, said the report will be finished in a matter of weeks and probably will be available to the motorcoach industry early this year after a review by an oversight committee.

The study was requested by the FMCSA after it decided to exclude the coach industry from the revised hours-of-service rules it developed for the trucking industry more than a year ago. The study also is designed to provide the coach industry with the most current information on hours of service and fatigue available.

"It is mostly meant to be informative and should be of use to motorcoach operators who are interested in knowing what is going on and what is out there right now," said Jenks.

Much of the information for the study was gathered from interviews and surveys of coach operators, tour trade groups, insurance companies and drivers, as well as a comprehensive review of contemporary literature on the subject.

John Brock, a private consultant who is writing the report, said very little specific research has been done on motorcoach driver hours and the potential for fatigue. Nor is there much literature available on motorcoach operations and management practices related to the issues.

"Had I known there was so little information out there I might not have been so eager to take the lead on this," he remarked.

A key portion of the study involved a review of the so-called extended workday. That is, when a coach operator drives before and after an off-duty period during which the driver's passengers are away from the bus sightseeing or

working. During those periods, there often are no adequate facilities where the driver can rest or sleep.

Currently, a motorcoach driver who has not worked for eight hours may drive up to 10 hours within a 15-hour period. Once the driver reaches 10 hours of behind-the-wheel time, or has been on duty 15 hours, the driver must go off duty for eight consecutive hours.

By comparison, the hours-of-service rules that truckers now work under limit their driving to 11 hours following 10 consecutive hours of off-duty time.

The project work statement for the study notes that while motorcoach customers try to maximize the use of drivers and coaches when scheduling charters and tours, most of them are unaware of the hours-of-service requirements imposed on drivers.

The work statement suggested the report describe the techniques motorcoach operators and their employees use to inform customers of the requirements and how they relate to driver rest and fatigue issues.

At the time the new hours-of-service rules were announced for truckers, FMCSA Administrator Annette Sandberg said there was no evidence that fatigue-related accidents were a problem in the motorcoach industry and that its exclusion from the rule change reflected its safety record.

Brock indicated the research project has confirmed what many motorcoach industry officials have been saying for years. That is, that there are major differences between driving people and hauling potatoes.

Brock said that while researchers found significant differences between coach and truck drivers, they discovered nothing that shows if one job is more fatiguing than the other. "We know coach drivers get more sleep because they have more access to hotels and motels," he said. "But that's after they have herded their group around and done a lot of non-driving activities."

Additionally, he said over-the-road drivers get stressed out for different reasons — truck drivers because they are trying to get a load delivered at a certain time,

Transits seek charter firms

The following public transit providers have informed the United Motorcoach Association of their intent to provide charter bus service unless willing and able private operators step forward to offer their services, or to bid on contract opportunities. UMA urges appropriate operators to take the time to respond to these notices:

Toledo, Ohio. Deadline: Jan. 13, 2005. Write to: James K. Gee, General Manager, Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority, P.O. Box 792, Toledo, Ohio. Phone: (419) 243-7433.

Roanoke, Va. Deadline: 2 p.m. Jan. 13, 2005. Write to: Assistant General Manager, Greater Roanoke Transit Co., Post Office Box 13247 (or by courier delivery to 1108 Campbell Ave., S.E.) Roanoke, VA 24032. Phone: (540) 982-0305.

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OPINION

Continuity at DOT

While much of the world is changing at break-neck speed, it's nice when an oasis of stability and consistency turns up.

Such should be the U.S. Department of Transportation for the foreseeable future. That's because President Bush has reappointed Norman Mineta to direct the agency for the next four years.

Bush's decision to keep Secretary Mineta has been widely applauded by the transportation industry.

"News from the White House that the president has asked Secretary Mineta to continue to lead the Department of Transportation is very good news for the motorcoach industry," said Norman Littler, senior vice president for government and industry affairs at the United Motorcoach Association.

"Secretary Mineta has been a good friend to the industry for many years," Littler continued. "He knows the difficulties that bus company owners face, and is committed to improving the operating environment by going after unsafe passenger carriers."

"We at the United Motorcoach Association look forward to helping Secretary Mineta achieve his safety goals during the next four years," Littler added.

Said Stephen Campbell, executive director of the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance: "I think to have continuity and to know the same people are going to be there, that's a big plus."

Added Bill Graves, president of the American Trucking Associations: "Secretary Mineta has done an outstanding job and his continued leadership will bring

consistency to the president's transportation agenda."

Mineta was well grounded in transportation issues when he accepted appointment as transportation secretary during the first term of the Bush presidency. He spent 21 years as a Democratic congressman from California, rising to become chairman of the House Public Works and Transportation Committee in 1993.

He resigned from Congress in 1995 to become a senior executive

"Secretary Mineta is committed to going after unsafe passenger carriers."

at Lockheed Martin, the giant defense contractor, but was lured back into government by then-President Clinton. After the 2000 election, Bush nominated him to his current job.

Secretary Mineta has plenty to keep him busy at the start of his second term. Among other things, he must develop new hours-of-service rules for truckers that comply with directives from a federal court. Plus, there are dozens of other safety-related issues working their way through various Transportation Department agencies, including the agency that regulates the safety of the over-the-road bus industry, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

It is likely Mineta will make

another push to get the border between the U.S. and Mexico open to buses and trucks from the two countries.

High up on Secretary Mineta's agenda is the six-year highway and public transit spending bill. Many in the ground transportation industry are counting on Mineta to finally get a highway-public transportation bill through a recalcitrant Congress.

It is unacceptable that federal transportation policy has become hostage to a series of funding extensions. In fact, since Oct. 2003, federal highway, transit and safety programs have been operating via a series of short-term extensions, with the current one set to expire at the end of May.

The Bush Administration reportedly will resubmit its surface transportation reauthorization program early in the 109th Congress, but the bill is expected to have few changes from what was first submitted nearly two years ago.

There have been few signs the second Bush Administration is any more eager than the first to spend much more than the \$256 billion it originally proposed for a six-year highway and public transportation bill.

Secretary Mineta reiterated last month that whatever Congress sends the president in the way of a highway bill must not increase excise taxes, fund projects through federal bonding, or authorize highway spending from the general fund.

We're glad to see Secretary Mineta back, and we're eager to see him build on his record of accomplishments.

Nevada operator fights for state deregulation, seeks flood of e-mails

CARSON CITY, Nev. — Bob Fairman is on a mission and wants your help.

Fairman's vocation is operating No Stress Express, a shuttle and charter bus company serving Reno, Carson City and Lake Tahoe in northern Nevada.

But his avocation is fighting to put the Nevada Transportation Services Authority out of business. You can guess which pursuit he relishes more.

That the Nevada TSA is anachronistic is clear. It continues to impose regulatory policies on motorcoach companies that most states did away with years ago. In fact, last fall, the chief counsel of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration informed the state legislature that Nevada laws and administrative codes regulating charter bus companies are at odds with federal law.

Fairman is advocating reform legislation that would revamp Nevada's regulatory scheme and ultimately deep six the TSA, farming out its various duties to other agencies or eliminating them all together.

Obviously, he's fighting an uphill battle. The TSA is no small potatoes. The agency has an annual budget of \$8.3 million, a payroll of \$5 million, and a staff of 63. It regulates charter buses, taxis, limousines and household movers. The chairwoman of the TSA commission is paid \$110,000 annually and other commissioners draw

salaries of close to \$100,000. Those folks aren't about to give up their state paychecks without a battle.

But Fairman has allies. Chief among them is a state assemblyman by the name of Lynn Hettrick from Gardnerville, a community about 15 miles south of Carson City.

Hettrick has prefiled a handful of bills for the 2005 session of the Nevada Legislature that would turn the TSA into a shadow of its current self.

One measure would adopt the charter bus deregulation provisions in the federal TEA 21 legislation for Nevada and require the state to abide by the federal regulatory process. Others would abolish the TSA and divvy up its regulatory and safety oversight functions among four or five other agencies.

The Nevada Legislature convenes next month, meaning the heavy legislative lifting will begin then.

Fairman needs help. He is asking that coach operators across the U.S. send e-mails supporting and encouraging charter bus deregulation in Nevada.

The e-mails should specifically mention Assembly Resolutions 2546 and 1689 and Bill Draft Requests 55, 56, 59 and 64.

Send e-mails to nu@nostressexpress.com. Fairman has set up a system that forwards the e-mails to Nevada's 62 assemblymen and women and state senators.

Make sending an e-mail a New Year's resolution you keep.

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Truckers conditionally support on-board recorders

WASHINGTON — There is going to be an interesting debate in the United States during the next year or two over the use of “electronic data recorders” in over-the-road trucks and buses.

A sorta subrosa discussion of the issue has been going on for the last half-dozen years since the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration first surfaced the idea.

The issue gained new momentum and increased visibility this past summer when a federal court threw out the now one-year-old hours-of-service rules for truckers.

In its opinion, the court said the FMCSA was missing the boat by not considering electronic on-board recorders, or EOBRs as they are increasingly being called, for enforcing hours-of-service regulations.

Within a matter of weeks of the court decision, the FMCSA issued a request for comments on the current state of EOBR technology and potential amendments to its regulations concerning the use of on-board recording devices to document HOS compliance.

The deadline for issuing the

comments recently closed and large segments of the truck and bus industries weighed in with their opinions, along with safety organizations, data recording suppliers and others.

Significantly, some major truck companies and trucking associations offered the FMCSA conditional support for mandating the use of EOBRs. Others in the trucking industry, however, still maintained that the technology should not be forced on truckers.

The seeming shift in position by powerful elements of the truck-

ing industry caught some in the motorcoach industry by surprise.

It was just one year ago this week that the American Trucking Associations, the Truckload Carriers Association and the Distribution & Less Than Truckload Carriers Conference sent a detailed letter to the U.S. Department of Transportation saying they only supported the voluntary use of EOBRs. And even then, the trucking groups wanted a whole host of performance standards and other requirements to be established.

A year later, the tide may be

turning among truckers and the movement undoubtedly has to do with a number of factors, including the court decision and its recommendations, the pending rewrite of the hours-of-service rules by the FMCSA, the fear the FMCSA may try to force something on the industry that is half-cocked or produces unintended consequences, and the possibility of a phase-in of EOBRs that would give some segments of the industry advantages over others.

Whatever the motivation,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

ABA says on-board recorders are costly, inaccurate logs

WASHINGTON — The American Bus Association has told the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration that electronic on-board recorders are little more than expensive, electronic log books that share virtually all of the same problems as paper logs.

In a four-page document filed in response to a request for comments on electronic data recorders from the FMCSA, the ABA said EOBRs lack the precision necessary to be considered as possible tools to monitor hours-of-service rules because they can easily be thwarted or falsified.

Further, said the ABA, “if enacted without proper protections for the users, the information generated would create a huge potential for liability for the motor carrier.”

Here are excerpts from the comments the ABA submitted to the FMCSA:

“Mandating EOBRs will result in a large expense to the motorcoach industry without safety benefit. First, it is simply impossible for current EOBR technology to accurately measure or record all the time a driver is driving, on-duty not driving, or off-duty without driver input. The only item that an EOBR may be able to accurately measure is driving time, if it can be assured that the same driver who is being recorded is actually driving — far from a certainty, especially in team or ‘slip-seat’ relay-driver operations common to the intercity bus industry.

“The end result is that honest drivers will remain honest, and dishonest drivers will still be able to list time as ‘off-duty’ even though they may be ‘on-duty not driving.’ The EOBR concept simply cannot work under any set of prescriptive rules that take into consideration on-duty not driving and off-duty time.

“In short, EOBRs in their current form are simply expensive electronic logbooks that will have no safety or compliance benefits whatsoever because they can still be falsified.”

The ABA also asserted that the intercity bus industry has “no history of fatigue-related problems, possesses an unparalleled safety record, and has a low hours-of-service violation rate.

“The latest analysis of NHTSA’s Fatal Accident Reporting System (FARS) data for intercity buses was completed by Ken Campbell of the University of Michigan’s Transportation Research Institute in 2001. This report, commissioned by the ABA, and entitled *Over-the-Road Bus Accidents in the United States, 1995-1999*, showed an average of one fatigue related fatal accident in an intercity bus per year.

“Intercity bus companies have an extremely low violation rate for hours-of-service, typically less than one-half the rate of trucks.... The (MCSAP) reported 153,649 truck driver out-of-service violations that relate to hours-of-service out of a total of 2,206,990 total truck driver inspections, resulting in a violation rate of 6.9 percent, three times that of bus drivers.

“Although EOBRs are touted as labor and paperwork saving devices, our members have found the opposite to be true. For example, checking the records for falsification requires no less effort than that expended to check paper logs. In fact, additional reports and summaries must be generated to ensure that the EOBR records are accurate and that the carrier remains in compliance in case of system failure on the road.

“It appears that the only way to ensure that a carrier would remain in compliance in the event of a system failure at the roadside is to either (a) require the driver to keep a duplicate paper log as a backup in case of system failure; or (b) communicate all change of duty status data continually in real time to the home office, and have the capability to re-broadcast the data to an enforcement officer at the scene....

“Also, since the records can be so easily falsified, additional monitoring must occur, requiring the use of additional resources and technologies. Hard or soft-copy backups also add to the cost and burden associated with checking and retention of the electronic records.

“ABA is concerned that, if EOBRs are mandated, the data generated would not only be of questionable accuracy, but will

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

UMA wants recorders limited to rogue companies, truckers

WASHINGTON — The United Motorcoach Association has urged the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to consider the motorcoach industry separately from the trucking industry as it considers electronic on-board recorders and to make them mandatory only for companies that have established patterns of hours-of-service violations.

In comments filed in response to an FMCSA request, the UMA repeated its long-held objection to mandatory on-board recorders. The association said it objected to the recorders on many levels.

“While the Department (of Transportation) may believe the devices will serve as ‘electronic cops’ to extend the enforcement capabilities of a depleted and overworked force of field investigators, the UMA sees this as a classic use of sledgehammers to kill flies.... UMA supports the voluntary application of commercial vehicle technologies and specifically opposes selective mandatory installation on commercial vehicles. We also believe that such mandated technologies represent a significant violation of the rights to privacy for our member operators.”

UMA said it could not abide proposed rules with “no limitations on the intrusion powers of the enforcement community and no clear guidelines for the enforcement uses of data that it recovers from such recorders.”

The association also opposed mandated EOBRs because of the strong evidence they are “far from the tamper- or trouble-free devices they are depicted to be. . . . The machines haven’t proven impossible or even difficult to alter. They have, however, proven difficult for roadside personnel to read and to use for enforcement. UMA is concerned, too, that a malfunctioning device could lead to unfair roadside enforcement or even an out-of-service citation while passengers are on board.

“No electronic devices are 100 percent reliable. Operators will be allowed to abandon paper logs once EOBRs are installed, but if a recorder fails during travel without the driver’s notification, UMA can foresee some

very ugly roadside confrontations with enforcement personnel. We can also foresee undue delays if drivers will be expected to service malfunctioning recorders before proceeding.

“Will the department allow passenger service to suffer for the lofty goal of electronic monitoring?”

“It is clear that the department had a desk-bound perspective of the commercial driving business when it drafted the electronic recorder provisions of this NPRM. The commercial passenger carrier industry is dominated by drivers and vehicles which serve both local and intercity needs — interchangeably — on a day-to-day basis. Though the department has anticipated the jump between types of service for drivers with the suggestion that companies will hasten to add EOBRs to non-mandated local service vehicles to accommodate the varying daily uses of the vehicle and driver, we suggest that just the opposite will happen.

“Given the confusions over both the appropriate use and reliability of EOBRs, UMA predicts that most carriers will continue to mandate duplicative paper logs, negating much of the . . . anticipated cost savings to carriers.”

“UMA fails to understand why EOBRs are being proposed for all carriers. Considering the expense and complexity of the devices, compared with the anticipated increase in compliance that they might cause, the cost-benefit ratio will be prohibitively high for most carriers. UMA would endorse the mandatory implementation of EOBRs only for chronic offenders. Their use as law enforcement ‘house arrest’ bracelets might be an acceptable alternative to the proposed rule.”

UMA also noted that the coach industry is extremely safe with an hours-of-service/driver out-of-service rate of roughly one-third of the trucking industry.

Finally, the association said that the costs in terms of hardware, software, equipment upgrades and training would be astronomical for the hundreds of small companies that populate the motorcoach industry.

INDUSTRY NEWS



Bus museum adds Golden Eagle

HERSEY, Pa. — One of the prize coaches in the fleet of the Museum of Bus Transportation — a pristine 1971 Golden Eagle — has been put on public display for the first time.

Museum President Tom Collins said the coach was the last Golden Eagle operating in the United States (Golden Eagle 05-8410). "It's a proud moment for the museum," said Bob Beard, a former Trailways driver and member of the museum publicity committee.

The 40-foot, 40-seat, five-star Eagle was donated to the museum about four years ago by the late Richard Allison of Panhandle Trailways in Amarillo, Texas. Panhandle bought the coach new and it was painted with Continental Trailways' cream and red livery. In March 2001, Mr. Allison drove it from Texas to the museum storage facility in York Springs, Pa.

The coach is equipped with a mid-section restroom, galley, seats with fold-down trays, and carpeted floor and ceiling.

Although the coach was in very good condition when it was turned over to the museum, it had



3 are ready for display; the 3 need some cosmetic enhancements. Six buses are on loan to the museum.

Collins said there are two buses the museum is eager to add to its collection, a GMC PD4501 Scenicruiser and an ACF Brill. He said the museum would prefer to obtain examples of these buses that are drivable and in fair to good condition. The museum is a 501(c)3 charitable organization.

The Eagle has been positioned on the museum floor next to a 1943 GMC PD4103 that was refinished in Greyhound livery.

The Museum of Bus Transportation has 23 buses, 17 of which are owned by the museum. All but

Park Service revealed that the group tour and travel industry would no longer be able to buy tickets to Alcatraz Island after Jan. 1. The announcement outraged the motorcoach and group travel industries both for the impact it would have on operators that take visitors to Alcatraz and for the precedent it set.

The recreation area said high visitation demand had left it unable "to meet the needs of existing and emerging tour and travel companies and of the public." So, its solution was to halt ticket sales to groups.

Waters said the CBA even tried to work with the Park Service's

concessionaire for Alcatraz tours but ran into a brick wall.

During meetings with Park Service officials, Waters said they were told the new ticket policy for Alcatraz might spread to other attractions managed by the service, notably the Statue of Liberty.

However, Sara Morton, public relations specialist for CrossSphere, said they do not believe the Park Service will eliminate ticket sales at other attractions. "Over the course of negotiations, we have gained the strong inclination that the Park Service will be willing to re-evaluate the elimination of ticket sales in the future," she told *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

has received scant attention compared to the air industry. The airlines have received about \$11 billion during the past three-plus years, while motorcoach operators have received about \$30 million.

2005 ABA Marketplace shaping up to succeed

CHICAGO — The American Bus Association Marketplace 2005 appears to be headed for record numbers.

The association says that 566 "buyers" and more than 1,800 "sellers" have registered for this year's event — Feb. 4-9 — in Chicago.

ABA Marketplace annually brings together hundreds of bus and tour operators — or "buyers" — to meet with travel representatives — or "sellers" from cities, hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions across North America. Marketplace "meetings" are pre-scheduled seven-minute appointments.

"We're extremely excited about heading to Chicago in February," said ABA President and CEO Peter J. Pantuso. "Each year Chicago welcomes millions of visitors from around the world to shop, dine and enjoy the magnificent architecture, museums and shows that make up the experience of this vibrant and beautiful destination. And there is no more appropriate venue for our 2005 Marketplace than this world-

class city," Pantuso added.

For Marketplace '05, ABA is doing things a little different from past shows. In response to suggestions, ABA is allowing delegates more networking opportunities when not engaged in business appointments. To accomplish this, restrictions have been lifted on parts of the event floor. Now, delegates will have access to all parts of the show floor, with the exception of the business-appointment section. That will remain reserved for those with scheduled appointments.

"We continually tweak the show to maximize its usefulness, opportunity and value to our members," said Pantuso.

According to ABA, the 2,500 Marketplace delegates will require 8,000 hotel room nights and spend more than \$4 million in the city while enjoying hosted tours that showcase city and state venues.

For information about Marketplace, go to www.buses.org/marketplace, or call the ABA Meetings Department at (800) 283-2877.

Liberty Lines

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"Liberty is the lowest-hanging fruit on the tree," Liu was quoted by New York media as saying. "Hopefully, they'll be able to reach the fruit on the higher branches as well."

Under a timetable approved by the City Council, the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority is to begin managing the seven companies on four separate dates beginning Jan. 15 and ending April 30.

The timetable calls for the MTA to take over Liberty Lines Express on Jan. 15, Queens Surface Corp. on Feb. 26, Green Bus Lines and New York Bus Service on March 26 and Command, Jamaica and Triboro Coach on April 30.

Four of the companies, Triboro, Jamaica, Command and Green Bus Lines, have banded together as the Transit Alliance to negotiate the terms of their takeover.

Key issues in the takeover negotiations are pensions for employees of the Transit Workers Union, which represents the bus companies' employees; dealing with non-union employees, and a long list of "intangibles." A spokesman for the Transit Alliance said the intangibles are the "costs that must be paid when the city puts a franchisee out of business."

Whether the city council deadlines will be met is problematic. Numerous past deadlines have not been met.

The seven private operators, which have contracted with the city for decades, provide daily computer service for 400,000 riders. In recent years, the city has had the companies on starvation rations and failed to replace their fleets. Many of the buses are upwards of 20 years old and operating in what is generally regarded as the toughest transit service in North America.

B.C. bridge to ease border traffic

VANCOUVER, B.C. — The Canadian government says that construction of a new bridge in British Columbia will improve the flow of traffic from the Trans-Canada Highway to the Canada-U.S. border.

The bridge, which is expected

to be completed by July, will carry two lanes of southbound traffic leading to the border.

The unnamed bridge is being built parallel to the existing Roger Pierlet Bridge on Highway 15, the *Vancouver Sun* reported.

Alcatraz

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

CrossSphere, formerly the National Tour Association, reports it is still "very much involved in talks" with the Park Service, and the president of the California Bus Association says his group is trying to elevate the issue to Congress.

Mike Waters, president of the CBA and general manager of Gray Line of San Francisco, said his organization is attempting to meet with a congressman from California who sits on a Park Service oversight committee.

Last summer, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the

Security

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

would have had to apply for grants for specific improvements. The discretionary nature of the program

also concerned some in the industry.

Since the federal government began beefing up passenger security in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the motorcoach industry



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INDUSTRY NEWS

Red-dyed fuel

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The current process allows larger carriers to hang on to thousands of dollars of their own money each quarter, while the new system requires them to turn over the cash to the federal government in the form of the higher tax whenever they fill a coach or storage tank and then file for a refund.

Littler said there appears to be at least one way a carrier could avoid paying the full tax when they purchase clear fuel. However, it would require their finding a fuel supplier willing to sell fuel at the lower taxed rate, pay the additional tax themselves and then collect their own refund every quarter.

While a willing supplier might be difficult to find, a large fuel user could be in a position to negotiate such an arrangement.

The 17-cents-a-gallon exemption for motorcoach operators applies to coaches that seat more than 20 passengers and are available for public use. School buses and off-road farm vehicles are exempt from the entire 24.4 excise tax and their use of the red-dyed fuel was not affected by the legislation, although there is some question about some school usage.

The move to prohibit motorcoach carriers from using the red-dyed fuel was initiated by the Internal Revenue Service, which has maintained there is widespread illegal use of the fuel throughout the United States. "The IRS went to Congress and convinced them to change it because of those con-

cerns," he said.

The IRS has made surprise inspections and has had state police make traffic stops of highway trucks in efforts to catch violators.

Hart said motorcoach carriers that have been using red-dyed fuel in their coaches should drain and clean their tanks immediately to rid them of any signs of the dye. "I don't expect the IRS to go out on Jan. 1 looking for buses with red-dyed fuel, but they are authorized to do so," he added.

While operators understand Hart's advice, some say it is impractical.

One New York operator said it is both very costly and labor intensive to purge both facility and vehicle tanks on short notice.

And a Massachusetts operator reports he had just filled all of his tanks before receiving notice of the rule change. Now, his supplier won't take the fuel back and the operator is coming into the slowest period of the year with fuel that could last well into the first quarter of the year.

That operator could be in jeopardy even, as Hart suggests, there is some kind of grace period. Whether a grace period will last 90 or 120 days is seen as problematic. Plus, it make take two or three tank fulls to completely purge all traces of red-dye fuel from a coach fuel system.

That means those \$1,000 or \$10-a-gallon fines loom large.

While school buses may continue to use red-dyed fuel under the new legislation, there is concern among school districts and motorcoach operators about running

school buses for occasional non-school, charter trips, according to Robin Leeds, industry specialist for the National School Transportation Association.

"What if they have a regular school run in the morning, take a group of pre-school children on a charter run to the zoo during the day and then return for a school run later in the afternoon? They can't just switch the fuel that's in their tanks," she said.

Ms. Leeds said the association plans to try to clarify the situation with the IRS, hoping schools and school bus operators will be allowed to use the red-dyed fuel under such circumstances.

Currently, the IRS defines a school bus as a bus that transports school children at least 85 percent of the time. The wording could provide an opening for operators to continue to use red-dyed fuel even for some charter trips.

Meantime, the entire excise tax issue remains confusing to many operators and so far the IRS has offered little help.

Littler said the IRS has yet to update its Publication 510 on excise and fuel taxes, or publish any guidelines for schools or motorcoach operators, many of whom also operate school buses. "We just haven't heard anything from them at all," he said.

He said carriers can obtain information on current excise tax regulations by going to www.irs.ustreas.gov/publications/p510. For tax questions and other assistance, call the IRS tax help advocate at (877) 777-4778.

Coach Manager Web Pack launched

HAMILTON SQUARE, N.J. — Paradigm Technology Consulting has released a new module that makes it possible for Internet users to access Distinctive Systems' Coach Manager CBS software, which was launched last fall.

Coach Manager CBS is designed to handle all aspects of an operator's charter and regular contract bookings. The system produces confirmations, driver work tickets and invoices for either individual or multiple bookings. There also is a system for scheduling vehicles and drivers, in addition to a range of operational and financial reports.

Paradigm says its new Web Pack, which was developed using Microsoft ASP.NET, allows an operator's clients and staff to access selected features of Coach Manager CBS over the Internet using a standard Web browser.

Among features of the Web Pack are a quotation request capability, an allocations diary that enables operators to view their

bookings for any date and optionally change vehicle and driver allocations, and tools that allow authorized clients to list their bookings, view their account details, and optionally print a statement or reprint an invoice.

There also are facilities for checking available vehicles or drivers and accessing information such as driver telephone numbers.

KVH brings HDTV to coaches, RVs

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. — KVH Industries Inc. has announced the availability of TracVision® High-definition Converter for DIRECTV® programming. The system makes it possible for coach owners to enjoy HDTV on the road.

Most of the high-definition programming offered by DIRECTV is from a new satellite that broadcasts unique signals that could not be decoded by most mobile satellite antennas. The TracVision HD

Paradigm said the main benefit of the Web Pack allocations diary is that it enables operators to manage their bookings in response to changing operational circumstances when they are away from the office. Meaning it could be done from any location where there is Internet connectivity.

For more information, go to www.busandcoachsystems.com.

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For more information go to www.kvh.com.

Focus on Care: Keeping your coach's new look

By Bryan Couch
Motor Coach Industries



Bryan Couch is director of product development at MCI.

Keeping a coach free from rain, dust, tree sap, road splash, salt and other de-icing chemicals is an impossible feat. Keeping it clean doesn't have to be. Regular care and maintenance of a coach's exterior will keep a coach looking new longer and protect your investment.

How often a coach should be washed depends on the environment in which it is operated. In extreme winter conditions, wash salt and de-icing chemicals from the body and undercarriage daily to prevent corrosion.

Recent studies suggest that commonly used road salt is more corrosive to a vehicle than the newer road de-icers and anti-icing agents. However, these new chemicals, which are sprayed on roadways in advance of snow or freezing rain, tend to adhere more strongly to vehicles than salt and are consequently more difficult to wash off, causing or exacerbating vehicle corrosion. Due to the increased use of de-icing chemicals and their corrosive properties, it is critical to inspect undercoating and to touch up any chipped or damaged areas on the vehicle.

A well-cleaned coach begins with the right detergents, brushes and washing sequence. To preserve a factory finish, do not use alkaline cleaners on aluminum, iron or steel. Do not use abrasive cleaners, polish or steel wool. These remove the protective coatings and can scratch and discolor the finish.

To start, wet down the coach using a high-pressure water spray with a solvent-based dissolving detergent to remove grit before brushing. Motor Coach Industries recommends a non-abrasive, neutral pH (range 6-8, non-acidic and non-alkaline) detergent for its coaches. Dupont, maker of most paints used on MCI® coaches, recommends power-wash water temperatures not exceed 80 degrees Celsius (176 degrees Fahrenheit), and that the distance between the spray nozzle and painted surface be about 1.5 meters or almost 5 feet.

Follow the pre-wash with a clean water rinse. Both wash and rinse water should be free of grit. Then begin brushing the coach, either by hand or through an automatic bus wash, using a highly

lubricating detergent. MCI recommends tampico-fibered brushes, however, soft cloth or felt brushes can also be used. The final rinse should be high-pressure. Wash steel and Dura-bright wheels the same way. Buff aluminum wheels periodically to keep their shine.

To remove tar, ink marks and graffiti from paint, use a soft cloth saturated with isopropanol or an aliphatic hydrocarbon solvent. MCI recommends an antistatic cleaner such as Like-Magic N1-5 or Trend on Lucite® windows.

MCI recommends hand-washing for coaches newer than 60 days. Do not use high-pressure washers until the paint has cured and hardened — 30 to 60 days depending on the humidity and regional temperatures. Wait one week before washing the coach after graphics have been applied to assure the adhesive has cured. Keep the water warm (122 degrees Fahrenheit, 50 degrees Celsius) for routine washing of coaches with decals, and keep the power spray farther away from the body.

Washing a coach presents an opportunity to check for body damage, rust and corrosion, glass cracks, loose bolts, door seals and exterior lights and mirrors. Repair anything that needs to be fixed. Window and windshield cracks may spread, especially in cold weather. Repair small depressions, scratches or pits in Fiberglas with body putty. Large holes and torn sections require resin repair.

Repair any damage to the finish of a coach as soon as possible. Using the same paint product as the original finish will ensure the best possible color match. Paint being applied to coaches today has advanced UV screeners that make it resistant to fading. If a coach is properly maintained, the paint should last the life of the coach.



Jeff Polzien



Rick Hillard



Dave Bolen



Bob Brisman



Steve Brown

UMA picks 6 directors, 3 are new

WASHINGTON — Three incumbents and three newcomers have been elected to the board of the United Motorcoach Association.

Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City was re-elected from UMA Region I, which includes the western two-thirds of the U.S., plus the western provinces in Canada. New to the board from Region I is Larry Benjamin of Northfield Lines in Northfield, Minn. Northfield, which offers a variety of coach and

bus services, is a member of the International Motor Coach Group. Benjamin sits on the IMG board.

Rick Hillard of Tri-State Tours in Galena, Ill., and a former chairman of UMA, was re-elected to the UMA board from Region II. Joining him on the board from Region II is new comer Dave Bolen of New World Tours in Bristow, Va. New World is a 10-year old company that Bolen has made one of the most dynamic in the industry.

UMA Region II is comprised of 13 states stretching from Michigan

to Louisiana and Florida, plus the District of Columbia and Ontario.

From Region III, Bob Brisman of West Point Trailways in Vails Gate, N.Y., was re-elected to the UMA board. Steve Brown of Brown Coach in Amsterdam, N.Y., was elected a director for the first time. Brown's company has four divisions that provide coach and travel services, tours, and contract school transportation. UMA Region III is comprised of 13 northeastern states and the eastern provinces of Canada.

Nebraska program to train truckers

LINCOLN, Neb. — The Nebraska Trucking Association and state government are teaming up to encourage more people to become truck drivers and diesel technicians.

Although details of the pilot program are still being worked out,

many of the 19,000 people registered with Nebraska Workforce Development as active job seekers would be eligible for tuition funding and pre-training job placement, according to an article in the *Omaha World-Herald*.

The trucking association said

potential drivers must not have had a moving violation for 10 years, be in good health, and be able to pass the commercial drivers license test in English.

Additional information is expected to be posted early this year at www.nebraskaworkforce.com.



Coach traveler Madden is wedded to his coach

DALLAS — Question: What does America's most-famous motorcoach traveler think about riding a bus?

Answer: "It's the only way to go," says NFL broadcaster and MCI spokesman John Madden.

Q: Has Madden ever driven his MCI E4500 cruiser?

A: Yes, once. In an empty stadium parking lot.

Q: Does he miss coaching?

A: Not at all. "I see what coaches go through today, and I've never thought, 'Boy, would I like to be in their shoes.'"

Those questions and Madden's answers came at a regional MCI customer-appreciation event in Dallas.

Madden, who co-hosts ABC's Monday Night Football, has been riding a motorcoach between

weekly NFL games for nearly 20 years. He tried travel by train when he began his broadcast career with CBS in 1980, but soon found train schedules were too restrictive.

In 1986, CBS leased Dolly Parton's tour bus and later a Greyhound. In 1987, Madden moved into the first of several MCI coaches. Today, his Outback Steakhouse Madden Cruiser travels more than 80,000 miles a year.

His coach features a full array of high-tech gadgets, including three satellite-linked plasma televisions, and a well-outfitted galley kitchen.

He told operators attending the Dallas get-together that he has had opportunities to switch coach companies, but, "When you're standing in an MCI it just feels like a line-backer: solid."

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INDUSTRY NEWS



Augusta Transit Augusta, Ga.

Augusta (Ga.) Public Transit has taken delivery of three Blue Bird Ultra LF buses, increasing to 18 the number of Blue Birds in the agency's 26-bus fleet currently operating in the Augusta Public Transit fleet. The sale was handled by National Bus Sales.

"There is no mystery why we continue to do business with Blue Bird and National Bus Sales," said

Heyward Johnson, director of Augusta Public Transit. "Both companies provide outstanding service and support. That's why our partnership has lasted seven years, and why I expect it to last long into the future."

Augusta Transit's 35-foot, 102-inch wide Blue Bird Ultra Low Floors are equipped with Cummins ISB 230-horsepower diesel engines, Allison B300R transmissions, Meritor independent front suspensions, all-wheel disc brakes, Luminator LED signs, GFI fareboxes and seats for 31 passengers.

Runways Airport Svc. Jacksonville, Fla.

Runways Transportation Co. is starting its airport/university shuttle service with two specially equipped Sprinter shuttles from Daimler-Chrysler Commercial Buses. The new service operates from a retail center and the University of Florida in Gainesville to Jacksonville International Airport, about 80 miles away.

"There is a need for this service," said Darrell Smith, president and chairman of Runways Transportation. "The shuttle will greatly benefit the University of Florida's 47,000 students, friends and family, as well as people in transit to the university's Shands Hospital.

Smith said he chose Sprinters because he needed smaller vehicles



that offered good ride quality. "Most of our trips will take a hour-and-a-half to two hours," he noted.

Runways' Sprinter shuttles are equipped with forward-facing, reclining seats with tray tables, wheelchair lifts and child restraint systems.

They also have dual-panel, outward-opening 36-inch wide doors, Mercedes-Benz diesel engines and five-speed automatic transmissions.

For information about Runways Transportation go to www.mwy.com.

Transportation Services Division El Monte, Calif.

The City of El Monte, Calif., which provides transportation services for more than 500,000 passengers annually, is getting eight new SLF 200 compressed natural gas buses.

The 32-foot, low-floor vehicles, manufactured by DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses, are to begin service Feb. 1. They were purchased through BusWest, the DCCB distributor headquartered in Santa Fe Springs, Calif.

The buses will sport a new paint scheme selected through a public contest.

The El Monte buses have 42-inch wide front and rear doors, air

suspensions, Bostrom Talladega LSO driver seats, Altro Transfloor non-slip flooring, and Ricon foldover wheelchair ramps.

Power is supplied by Cummins B Gas Plus 5.9-liter engines hooked to Allison B300R transmissions. The seats are Freedman CitiSeats, the air conditioner is a Carrier RM35, and the wheels are Alcoa.

"Originally, El Monte planned to purchase six new CNG-fueled transit buses," said Brent Phillips, transit sales manager at BusWest. As a result of competitive pricing, they were able to purchase two more, Phillips added.

Brakes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Regardless, though, Farrell said he hears regularly from enough motorcoach operators and has seen enough in his travels throughout the United States and Canada to recognize that there is a serious lack of proper brake inspections in the industry.

"I find a lot of misconceptions in North America from all levels of fleet operators, to mechanics, to Department of Transportation inspectors on how to properly and accurately check drum brakes," he held.

A major challenge with the inspection of drum brakes, which have either manual or automatic slack adjusters, is that a mechanic has to get underneath a coach to properly examine the brake adjusters, and that's very difficult to do outside of a well-equipped garage.

"You just can't get underneath a coach with a creeper because they're too low to the ground," said Farrell. "You have to have a pit or a lift, and then — to do it right — it really takes two people."

Farrell says the vast majority of

motorcoach companies in the U.S. and Canada operate only one to three coaches and very few have the necessary equipment — pits or hoists — in their garages to do proper brake inspections. "I talk to a lot of operators and ask them what they do, and they say they sometimes jack up a bus to get under it to measure the stroke," he said. "But a lot of them just don't go through the trouble."

Creating even more problems, says Farrell, is the fact that many mechanics have their own ideas about what brake measurements work best on certain makes and models of coaches. "Everybody seems to have a different theory or measurements in mind that they would like to see when someone steps on the brake to see what the throw is," he said. "If it does not meet their own personal criteria then they say it is a bad brake, when, in fact, if they just followed the CVSA regulations, it would not be a bad brake at all."

Additionally, he said many mechanics often make the situation worse by installing automatic adjusters on one axle and leaving manually adjusted brakes on the

other two axles. "Now that really confuses people," he says. "You need a balance of everything to be the same."

The solution? "Proper training and proper equipment," he emphasizes. "I think fleet operators need to wake up and pay special attention as to how to properly have their brakes checked on vehicles."

To help, Farrell in January will embark on a 20-city tour of Coach USA locations where he will provide technical training designed to show mechanics and operators how to properly and accurately check the brakes on their coaches. "If our product is on part of the brake, then we certainly want to make sure that it is checked properly," he said. "Some hard education for the element of safety needs to really come cross."

More training sessions at other motorcoach businesses could be in the offing after he completes the Coach USA tour, possibly in late February. "The knowledge of checking brakes correctly is an item that needs to be spread across many more people because most of them just don't know how to do it properly," he said.

Truckers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

several large truck fleets, including Overnite Transportation Co., FedEx Express and J.B. Hunt Transport Inc., and the American Moving and Storage Association offered conditional support for the technology. Their backing was contained in the comments they submitted to the FMCSA.

At the same time, the American Trucking Associations, taking a cue from its big members, also edged closer to supporting EOBR technology, but the association did not fully endorse making it a requirement.

"ATA policy continues to sup-

port voluntary industry adoptions, use and evaluation of EOBR technology, as well as a performance criteria approach," the ATA said in its comments to the FMCSA. "Some ATA members, however, are beginning to voice qualified support for EOBR use, but they continue to express a number of legitimate concerns that need to be addressed."

J.B. Hunt told the FMCSA it supports mandatory requirements for electronic on-board recorders but only if all carriers are required to install them simultaneously, with no phase-in.

One trucking group that voiced its continued opposition to an EOBR mandate was the Truckload Carriers Association. However, the

TCA said the FMCSA could encourage the voluntary use of the technology with "strong tax incentives and legal protections."

Several groups filing comments on the issue shared the TCA's concern about legal protections and said a condition of their support for EOBR technology would be that the data be used only for HOS enforcement.

Meanwhile, the motorcoach industry's two associations, the American Bus Association and the United Motorcoach Association remain resolutely opposed to mandated EOBRs. Excerpts from the comments they filed with the FMCSA are elsewhere on this page.

ABA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

also be discoverable during judicial proceedings to the detriment of the motor carrier. If EOBRs were mandated, ABA would urge the Department of Transportation to request that Congress provide FMCSA with authority to impose limitations on distribution of EOBR generated data similar to those that prohibit the National Transportation Safety Board from disclosing information obtained from voice or video recorders of aircraft or surface vehicles. In fact, more stringent provisions would certainly be needed, since the current statute (Section 1114(d) of

Title 49) allows the release of the information during a hearing."

Finally, the ABA says its members report that the cost of installing EOBRs would be "\$1,500-\$3,000 per vehicle, along with the additional cost of \$10,000-\$80,000 for computer system upgrades, global positioning systems, high communication costs, and other associated hardware and software, etc.

"This would result in an approximate net cost of as much as \$120,000,000 to equip all 40,000 intercity buses, and a cost of \$280,000,000 for the necessary system upgrades to each of the 3,600 intercity bus companies that would have to comply with an EOBR mandate."

Fatigue

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

and coach drivers because they are transporting people.

Brock said that transporting people just might give coach drivers an advantage because people talk, play music and might recognize when a driver is becoming fatigued because the coach may start drifting on the highway or there are rapid acceleration changes. Passengers could alert the driver when they see such signs, possibly avoiding an accident.

"I would really like to see a research study on motorcoach drivers and fatigue and see what they do over time," he said.



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Schedule of Events

Sunday – Tuesday, February 20-22, 2005

IMG Maintenance & Safety Forum

Tuesday – February 22, 2005

2:00 PM - 5:00 PM **State Association Summit** **NEW**
6:00 PM - 9:00 PM **Welcome Reception**

Wednesday – February 23, 2005

9:00 AM - 4:30 PM **Maintenance Interchange**
9:00 AM - 10:00 AM **Motorcoach Industry Panel**
 (Building a Strong Foundation)
10:00 AM - 10:45 AM **Legislative and Regulatory Update**
11:00 AM - 4:15 PM **Education Sessions** **NEW**
 (Concurrent Sessions)

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Marketing and Sales:
Selling 101- The Sales Process

Finance:
Raising your Rates

Operations:
Instilling a Safety Culture

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Marketing and Sales:
How to get the phone ringing using cost effective marketing channels

Finance:
Profit Power

Operations:
Process of securing contract work

3:15 PM - 4:15 PM

Marketing and Sales:
Making your website an integral part of your marketing and sales effort

Operations:
Recruiting and training new drivers

12:00 PM - 1:45 PM

Operator Luncheon **NEW**

4:30 PM - 7:30 PM

Marketing Lessons from Other Industries
Exhibit Hall Open - "Sneak Preview"

Thursday – February 24, 2005

8:00 AM - 9:00 AM **Networking Opportunity**
9:30 AM - 10:30 AM **Education Sessions** **NEW**
 (Concurrent Sessions)

Marketing and Sales:
What operators want in vendor relationships

Finance:
Margin versus markup misconceptions

Operations:
Airport access issues and fees

10:30 AM - 5:30 PM

Exhibit Hall Open
Vision Awards Banquet

Friday – February 25, 2005

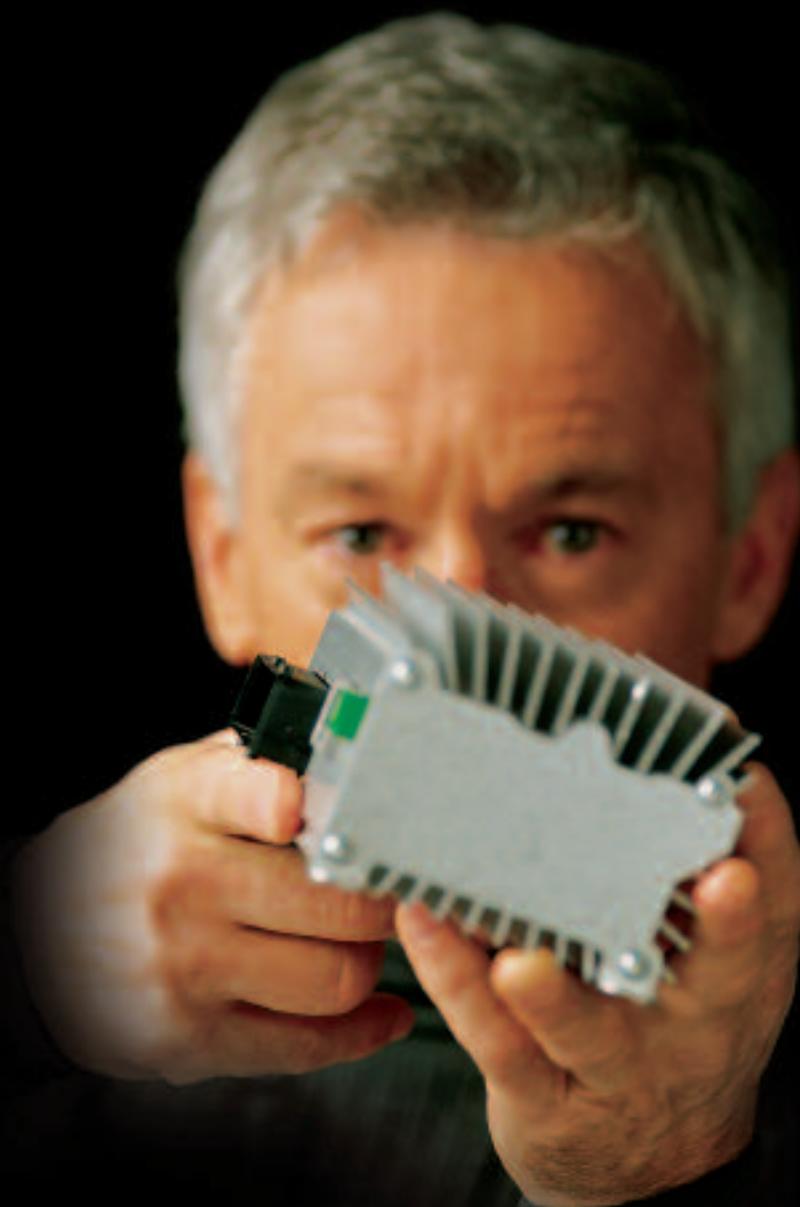
9:00 AM - 12:00 PM **Exhibit Hall Open**

Saturday – February 26, 2005

8:00 AM - 3:00 PM **Ray Dupuis Memorial Golf** **NEW**
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