

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

January 15, 2004

THE NEWS RESOURCE FOR THE BUS AND MOTORCOACH INDUSTRY



System is improved to rid highways of uninsured operators

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has quietly stepped up its program to get uninsured motorcoach operators off U.S. highways.

The initiative was revealed by FMCSA Deputy Administrator Warren E. Hoemann late last month in a communication to the United Motorcoach Association.

"The FMCSA has listened to the motorcoach industry about carriers operating without insurance," Hoemann reported to UMA President and CEO Victor Parra. "That is contrary to law and the public interest, and is unfair to responsible carriers.

"So, we began revamping our process for revocation of insurance. We aren't done yet but the results speak loudly," Hoemann added.

In the past, it took the FMCSA an average of 87 days to revoke a carrier's operating authority from the time the carrier lost its insur-

ance. For 57 of those days, a carrier's operating authority was active despite the absence of insurance.

Two major factors contributed to the delay. First, the pace of administrative processing was slow. Second, federal and state enforcement personnel often did not know a carrier's insurance had been revoked.

As of early last month, the FMCSA had chopped 21 days off the process.

Now, the procedure takes 66 days overall, and the carrier's operating authority is active for 36 days absent insurance.

This month, Hoemann says the FMCSA "will cut another 30 days off the insurance revocation process — a reduction of 51 days from just a couple months ago.

"The new 36-day process will allow a carrier to hold operating authority without insurance for only six days," asserts Hoemann.

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D.C. parking study is targeted

WASHINGTON — Motorcoach operators who've studied a new federal report on the problems associated with tour buses operating in Washington, D.C., say some of the solutions contained in the report would be disastrous for coach companies.

"They could be devastating to the motorcoach industry," asserted one operator whose business is

focused on serving the D.C. tourism industry.

Not only does the proposal contain elements that would hurt coach operators financially, but the ability of tour groups to stay together and maintain group security would be seriously jeopardized.

Of particular concern is a proposal to develop a Downtown Circulator that would "distribute"

tourists within the so-called Monumental Core of Washington. The circulator could easily lead to elimination of coach operators' ability to drop off and pick up groups at or near attractions.

In other words, the proposed circulator would substitute for or reduce the role of tour buses as a primary mode for distributing tour

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Tough, tough challenges continue to dog motorcoach industry

Operating a tour and charter motorcoach company is a lot like farming. Both are outdoor activities. Both are a challenge every day. Both operate in an environment over which they have little or no control. And, neither is an exact science.

The goal in both fields is to do the best you can every day with the hand you are dealt.

In 2003, that wasn't easy for either farmers or motorcoach operators.

Soaring insurance costs forced

countless coach companies out of business.

Soaring fuel prices during the first half of the year shaved margins.

The war in Iraq and on-going terrorist threats played havoc with consumer confidence, keeping millions of potential travelers at home and out of buses.

Anemic coach values limited the ability of operators to find financing, sell surplus equipment without incurring huge losses, or get decent trade-in allowances to

ease the path to newer buses.

Lowballers continued to set price levels in many markets.

And everywhere you turned,

2003
Year In Review

state and local governments were attempting to balance their budgets, in part, on the backs of motorcoach operators.

States stepped up collection of corporate franchise taxes from

out-of-state carriers, increased commercial vehicle registration and driver license fees, increased fuel taxes, imposed sales taxes on coach services, and — in one major state — eliminated the rolling stock tax exemption.

Thousands of operators were able to keep their buses rolling only by being strong, aggressive, smart, tough, resilient, innovative, versatile and resolute. Anything less spelled doom.

The year began with the 108th Congress convening with

the Democrats in the minority for the first time in 50 years. The partisan bickering and gridlock of recent years worsened as the year wore on, culminating in Congress' inability to pass a new highway and public transportation bill by the time the old law expired Oct. 1.

New Jersey led the parade of states that boosted minimum corporate taxes or stepped up collection of corporate taxes from out-of-state operators. Not to be out-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 ▶

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All Aboard America! grows in New Mexico

SANTA FE, N.M. — Success of a new park-and-ride service in northern New Mexico has prompted the contractor, Industrial Bus Lines, to beef up its fleet with the addition of nine new Van Hool coaches and six ABC-branded M1000 midsize buses.

Industrial Bus Lines, which operates under the name of All Aboard America! and is based in Mesa, Ariz., is using the new coaches to provide park-and-ride service between Santa Fe, Los Alamos, Espanola and Albuquerque, N.M.

More than 80 departures are operated weekdays between the cities, stretching from Espanola on the north to Albuquerque on the south, a distance of about 85 miles.

Industrial Bus Lines/All Aboard America! is a third-generation, family-owned company that has operated since 1936. Prior to deregulation in the early 1980s, the majority of the company business was providing line-haul and shuttle service, notably in southwest Texas where it still maintains two divisions — El Paso and

Midland/Odessa.

Since 1983, the company has diversified into charter and tour operations, plus offering sightseeing trips, casino route services, convention and special event transportation, and professional sports team movements.

The company operates full-service maintenance facilities in Phoenix, Midland/Odessa, Santa Fe and El Paso, supporting a total fleet of 65 vehicles.

Company President Jack Wigley is a board member of the International Motorcoach Group.

The new Van Hools added to the All Aboard America! fleet are equipped with Allison B500 transmissions and REI audio/visual systems. Eight of the coaches have 400-horsepower Series 60 Detroit Diesel engines and Amaya Gaudi seats. The ninth coach has a 400-horsepower Cummins.

The M1000s are equipped with Cummins ISB engines, Allison 2400 transmissions, Amaya seats and enhanced noise abatement packages. They also have Ricon in-step wheelchair lifts.

Start-up of Illinois association to be marked by celebration

CHICAGO — Formation of the Illinois Motorcoach Association is being marked this month with a reception called the "Kick-Off Celebration."

Members of the association, along with invited guests that include tourism officials and politicians, will gather in The Signature Room on the 95th floor of the John Hancock Building. The event will be from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 14.

Among the featured speakers

will be Victor Parra, president & CEO of the United Motorcoach Association, which pushed for formation of the association.

One of the key organizers of the association, Donald Ferrone of Prairie Trailways and Chicago Sightseeing, has arranged special overnight rates for IMA members at the Lenox Suites Hotel.

Further information about the event is available by calling Melinda Crawford at (217) 525-5177.

Coach USA growth is slowed

The parent company of Coach USA says its tour and charter operation remained weak during the first six months of fiscal 2004, but other segments of the business showed signs of strength.

Stagecoach Group PLC of Perth, Scotland, reported that revenues on continuing operations at Coach USA were down 3.1 percent, to \$396.9 million, during the six months ended Oct. 31. Operating profit during the period was \$26.9 million, giving an operating margin of 6.8 percent, up from 4.7 percent for the same period a year earlier.

During the most recent six months, Coach USA disposed of large segments of its tour and charter operation, plus its transit business and major pieces of its taxi unit. The remaining segments include diversified bus operations in New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and eastern Canada.

Roughly 60 percent of the ongoing operations are traditional bus services and contract work. "In the northeast, we are benefiting from the development of Jersey City" as an office center

for major corporations, Stagecoach said. Commuter travel to and from New York City also remains strong.

The company's New York sightseeing service, which relies heavily on double-decker buses, "has performed extremely well over the last two years," and a similar but smaller operation in Chicago is growing, the company said.

The Coach USA school bus operation in Wisconsin also is showing healthy growth and the company is focused on winning new contracts.

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THE DOCKET

Hours-of-service rule tests truck operators; feds phase in changes

WASHINGTON — Believe it: The best thing to happen to the motorcoach industry in 2003 was the decision by the Bush Administration to apply its revised hours-of-service rule only to truckers, leaving coach drivers untouched.

That decision in April means coach companies across the U.S. aren't having to cope with the enormous economic, operational and personnel issues now confronting the trucking industry.

On the first day of this month, truckers became subject to the new hours-of-service rule that represents the biggest change for that sector of the ground transportation industry since deregulation in 1980.

The new rule is having a profound impact on driver work life, driver productivity, how drivers are paid, how truckers price their freight shipments and shipper-consignee behavior.

The ramifications even extend to worries about already overcrowded overnight rest areas, and whether shippers and carriers might have to change loading practices.

In short, the new rule has left many truckers confused. Trucking industry publications have been filled with articles in recent weeks about all of the questions being raised by the new rule and its implementation.

The U.S. Department of Transportation is executing a plan it hopes will educate truck drivers about the new rule. State and federal officials expect to spend the next two months waging their education effort, while at the same time enforcing egregious violations of the revised rule. The education and enforcement plans are supposed to ensure long-term compliance and understanding of the rule.

The new hours-of-service rule for truckers represents the first major rewrite of the hours-of-service regulations in more than 60 years. The revision was designed to synchronize truck drivers' work and rest schedules better with the body's circadian rhythm to reduce fatigue and ultimately save lives.

The new rule cuts the overall driver workday by one hour to 14, and extends actual allowed driving time by an hour, to 11, but tighter language on consecutive working hours has many truckers saying it will change a long practice of drivers going off the clock while waiting at a freight dock and then logging back in when they hit the road.

Truckers may not drive after being on duty for 60 hours in a seven-consecutive-day period or 70 hours in an eight-consecutive-day period. This on-duty cycle may be restarted only after a driv-

Federal Hours of Service Rules

Comparing the rules for truck and bus drivers

	Motorcoach Drivers	Truck Drivers
Off-Duty Hours	8 consecutive hours	10 consecutive hours
Total On-Duty Hours	15 hours non-consecutive (Driver may work longer than 15 hours, but may not drive until obtaining 8 hours off-duty.)	14 consecutive hours (See description of new short-haul driver exemption below.)
Total Hours (On-Duty + Off-Duty)	23 hours (Rule does not operate on "daily" cycle. Rather, it is a continuum.)	24 hours
Driving Hours	10 hours	11 hours
Mandatory Rest Break During Shift	None	None
Cumulative On-Duty	60 hours in 7 days, or 70 hours in 8 days* (* for carriers that operate 7 days a week)	60 hours in 7 days, or 70 hours in 8 days* (* for carriers that operate 7 days a week)
Cumulative On-Duty "Restart"	None	Voluntary 34-hour restart at any point in a driver's 7- or 8-day cycle
Sleeper Berth: Splitting Off-Duty Time	Team and Solo Drivers: 2 periods totaling 8 hours, neither period may be less than 2 hours.	Team and Solo Drivers: 2 periods totaling ≥ 10 hours, neither period may be less than 2 hours
On-Board Recorders	Voluntary Use	Voluntary Use
Federal Exceptions & Exemptions	14 exemptions and exceptions	All 14 existing exemptions remain. New short-haul driver exemption allows local drivers to operate up to 16 hours one day a week.

er takes a "weekend" off, that is, at least 34 consecutive hours off.

The old rule, which is the one that still applies to motorcoach drivers, allowed 10 hours of driving within a 15-hour, on-duty period, and required only eight hours of off-duty time.

A number of large trucking companies have announced increases in driver pay, both to attract drivers to help make up for

the rule change and to keep pay levels for current drivers from falling because of reduced hours.

During the next 45 days, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is asking states to write warnings instead of citations for all but flagrant violations of the new rule.

State officials also are being encouraged to use every stop during January and February as an

opportunity to educate drivers about the rule. In addition, federal inspectors will coordinate education and enforcement efforts from regional offices across the country.

Detailed information about the rule is available at www.fmcsa.dot.gov and FMCSA has a toll-free telephone line to answer drivers' questions. The number is (800) 598-5664.

Revamped driver licensing bill becomes law in Illinois

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — Motorcoach drivers no longer need a state school bus license to transport children on school-related trips in Illinois.

A new law eliminating the requirement went into effect Jan. 1. That law replaced legislation that became effective a year ago, mandating school bus licenses for coach drivers.

It took nearly six months to convince the Illinois legislature to throw out the controversial school bus licensing requirement.

The United Motorcoach Association, working with Illinois operators, initially spearheaded the effort to overturn the law. The American Bus Association joined the drive, along with additional operators and industry suppliers. A lobbying organization, Consulting 4Biz, was hired to push the campaign.

The entire effort eventually led to the formation of the Illinois Motorcoach Association, which is being managed by Consulting 4Biz.

The law that went into effect Jan. 1, House Bill 2840, provides that as long as motorcoach drivers have current valid commercial driver licenses they can transport children on school activity trips.

The law also imposes specific requirements on schools that contract for charter bus service with Illinois-based operators. A clause must be inserted in charter contracts requiring coach drivers providing transportation be fingerprinted, have a criminal background check, and have passed a

medical examination, including drug testing.

Out-of-state operators that contract with Illinois school districts must affirm that their drivers have submitted to background checks and a medical exam.

The law also permits individuals to operate a chartered bus transporting students if he or she holds a valid school bus driver permit, provided the permit was issued before Dec. 31, 2003.

A second piece of legislation, Senate Bill 150, also was adopted.

That bill is identical to HB 2840 except for a provision that spells out how the law's fingerprinting requirements are handled and permitting the state police to seek reimbursement for the cost of processing fingerprint requests.

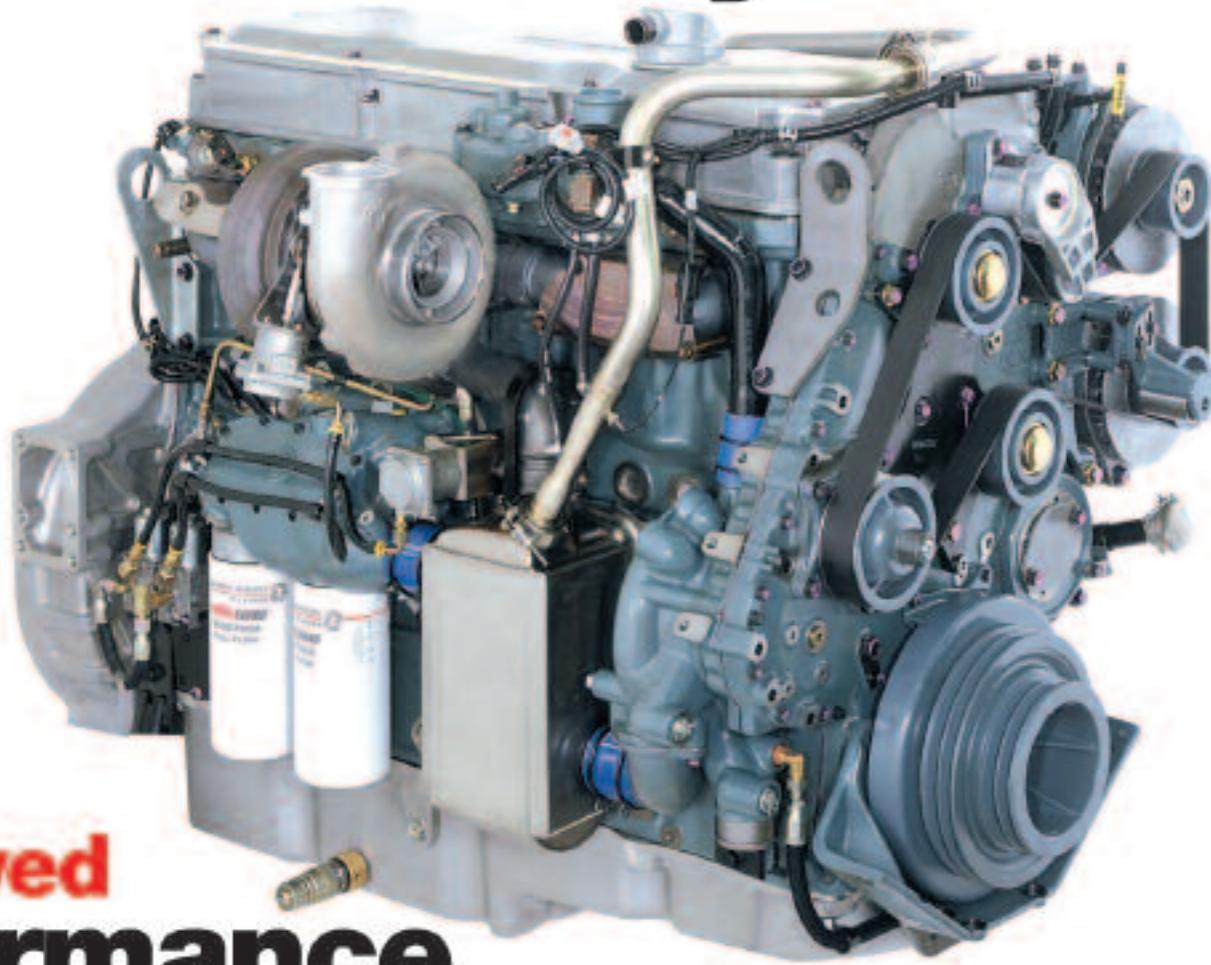
Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich is expected to sign the Senate bill, which is supposed to supercede the House version. However, a spokesman for the Illinois Office of the Secretary of State said the Senate bill does not contain an implementation date.

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THE DOCKET

Nebraska bumps fuel tax higher; two states ponder hike

LINCOLN, Neb. — The state fuel tax went up 0.2 cent a gallon in Nebraska on Jan. 1.

The increase means Nebraska's tax on diesel fuel and gasoline is now 24.8 cents a gallon.

In Nebraska, the state Department of Roads establishes fuel tax rates and adjusts them to assure sufficient funding for highway projects. The last increase was Jan. 1, 2003, when the fuel tax was nudged to 24.6 cents from 24.5 cents a gallon.

The tax is reviewed twice annually and adjusted as necessary. The Jan. 1 increase will remain in effect for at least six months; it will be re-examined prior to June 30.

Higher taxes in Alabama?

MONTGOMERY, Ala. —

When legislators meet next month in Montgomery, the state road building industry may be there to greet them with a proposal to increase fuel taxes.

A lobbyist for road builders says Alabama may lose millions of

dollars in federal transportation grants if it doesn't boost state taxes on diesel fuel and gasoline by a nickel a gallon.

The current Alabama tax on diesel fuel is 19 cents a gallon, while the gasoline tax is 18 cents.

The federal government grants states \$4 for every dollar raised in state fuel taxes.

Tax hike in Pennsylvania?

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Budget problems are the top priority but Pennsylvania legislators likely

will also consider a fuel tax increase when they convene in a few days.

Key Democratic and Republican legislators reportedly have signed on to the idea of a fuel tax hike but Gov. Ed Rendell has yet to commit. One legislator was quoted as saying legislators are, in fact, waiting for the governor to take the lead on the issue.

An increase of 5 cents a gallon would push Pennsylvania's fuel tax to 31 cents a gallon. An 8-cent-a-gallon increase also has been proposed, which would leave Pennsylvania with the steepest fuel tax in the nation.

Recent studies have painted a grim picture of Pennsylvania roads and bridges. The last fuel tax increase came seven years ago.

N.Y. wrestles with no-tax Indian fuel stops

ALBANY, N.Y. — State officials have chafed for years as Indian tribes in New York sold tax-free cigarettes and motor fuel, including diesel.

During the 1990s, New York made halting attempts to regulate these tax-free sales to non-Indian purchasers but abandoned the effort in recent years.

Now, the state is once again proposing regulations that would

limit these sales. However, at least one tribe, the Seneca (Iroquois), is threatening to take the state to court if this happens.

The state appears to be approaching the issue cautiously, and has extended the comment period on its proposed regulations, which are not likely to go into effect before March.

The issue is important to coach operators because the tribes

widely advertise their lower fuel prices and ensnare many drivers into buying tax-free fuel.

Carriers, assuming the tax was paid, apply for and receive a credit from the state. However, they learn under audit that they owe tax twice. The state has made matters worse by refusing to circulate a list of Indian truck stops and other retailers so operators can avoid the problem fuel stations.

FMCSA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"The revocation letters will be tied into our enforcement program so personnel in the field can watch the carrier's operations."

That's not the end of the story, says Hoemann. More changes are coming.

"The FMCSA will cross-match insurance revocations with inspection and crash databases, generating automated claim letters for field enforcement action.

"Where a carrier shows inspection or crash activity during the time its insurance is suspended, FMCSA will know the carrier is operating without authority and enforcement will be swift. These matches will be done electronically, supplementing field observations of carrier operations."

The United Motorcoach Association, the American Bus Association, this newspaper and others in the coach industry have

strongly advocated that the FMCSA crack down on bus companies operating without insurance.

"This is great news and represents great progress by the FMCSA," said Parra.

During the past two years, there have been a number of fatal crashes involving buses that were not insured. For example, in September a tractor-trailer plowed into a cutaway bus near Chicago, killing 8 and injuring another 15. While the bus wasn't at fault in the crash, it nevertheless wasn't properly insured and should not have been operating.

Such operators frequently are able to undercut rates charged by responsible operators because they aren't paying any or all insurance costs. And when they crash, everyone loses.



Warren Hoemann

D.C. parking

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

groups in and around the sites and locations that are the most popular with visitors.

Such an idea has been suggested before, but coach operators worry the new study will provide renewed impetus for the proposal among D.C. bureaucrats.

While operators strongly oppose the circulator idea on a number of grounds, their key concern centers on passenger and group security and convenience. The door-to-door service currently provided by tour coaches is particularly valued by school groups and senior travelers. Forcing these groups to climb onto a public circulator would make it difficult, if not impossible, to keep the groups intact and assure their security.

The proposed circulator likely would be operated by the D.C. public transit system, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, known as Metro.

Last month, the year-long study of tour bus parking issues in Washington was released by the District of Columbia Tour Bus Management Initiative, a public-private partnership set up to address the long-standing issues related to coaches operating in the capital. (See Jan. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

There will be a public meeting devoted to the study at 5 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 14, in the John A. Wilson Building at 1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Room 412. The public entrance is from D Street.

The first two hours of the meeting will be a discussion of the study. From 7 to 8 p.m., individuals and groups can make formal statements about the report.

Coach operators and representatives of the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association are expected to attend the hearing.

The 12-month study was conducted by the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Transportation. It was completed in October but didn't surface publicly until last month when it was posted on the Web site of the D.C. Department of Transportation.

Volpe researchers and engineers were asked by the D.C. Tour Bus Management Initiative to develop recommendations for solving motorcoach parking and management issues in the district.

They accomplished that, but a key solution outlined in the study would be financially ruinous for coach companies, say operators who either sat in on a briefing last month or have seen the report.

"A lot of things would hurt us," said one. "The circulator is a major dislike," said another.

Among other things, the proposed circulator likely would:

- Reduce the role and even the need for private tour bus operators for thousands of visitors, resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost revenue.
- Reduce or eliminate privately operated bus circulators and trolleys.
- Force coach operators bring-

ing tour groups to Washington from distance cities to drop off passengers at staging areas or transfer points.

One coach company executive said he thinks that planning for a Downtown Circulator operated by Washington Metro is further along than has been acknowledged publicly. "It's a lot further along than people say."

Another operator offered a similar opinion, saying he did not know of anyone from the private sector who has been invited to attend any meetings that may have been called to discuss planning for a circulator.

An obvious question arising from the study is whether some of the "solutions" outlined in the report are in fact designed to deter tour buses from bringing groups to Washington, particularly groups of seniors and school children.

Clearly, fewer groups and fewer tour buses would mean fewer parking and bus management problems for the capital.

It's a question without an answer right now, but it will certainly be on the mind of those attending this month's meeting.

To examine the study, go to the District of Columbia Department of Transportation splash page at: <http://ddot.dc.gov>. Look for the heading Information. Click on Transportation Studies. Click on Tour Bus Management Initiative. Finally, click on Tour Bus Management Initiative Report.

The report is not convenient to download; it's in several pieces in a PDF format.

Iowa agencies 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 operators to take the time to respond to these notices:

Coralville, Iowa. Deadline: Jan 31, 2004. Write to: Kevin L. Doyle, Assistant Transportation Planner, Johnson County Council of Governments, 410 E. Washington St., Iowa City, IA 52240. Phone: (319) 356-5253.

52240. Phone: (319) 356-5253.

Iowa City, Iowa. Deadline: Jan 31, 2004. Write to: Kevin L. Doyle, Assistant Transportation Planner, Johnson County Council of Governments, 410 E. Washington St., Iowa City, IA 52240. Phone: (319) 356-5253.

University of Iowa CAM-BUS, Iowa. Deadline: Jan 31, 2004. Write to: Kevin L. Doyle, Assistant Transportation Planner, Johnson County Council of Governments, 410 E. Washington St., Iowa City, IA 52240. Phone: (319) 356-5253.

Bus recalls

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has announced safety recalls of buses built by two manufacturers.

When a safety defect is found, manufacturers are required to mail a recall notice to all purchasers, owners and dealers. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration urges owners to wait until they receive notification from the manufacturer before contacting dealers to schedule repair work.

Up-to-the-minute information on safety recall campaigns, or information on the recall history of a particular make and model bus is available by calling the agency's toll-free Auto Safety Hotline at (888) 327-4236 or by going to www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

Here's information on the latest recalls:

International Truck and Engine Company

Recalled models: International 3000, 1993-2003; International FE, 1993-2003, and International

People

Daniel Ustain, chief executive of **Navistar International Corp.**, will become company chairman next month. Ustain, who joined Navistar International 30 years ago, will replace John Horne, who is retiring. Ustain succeeded Horne as CEO last February. Horne has been at Navistar International for 37 years. Warrenville, Ill.-based Navistar produces International bus chassis, diesel engines and trucks.

Kristin Persson has joined **Ridwell Suspensions** of

Springfield, Mo., as advertising director. She has 10 years of marketing, advertising and market research experience. Ridwell produces bus, motorcoach, truck and trailer suspensions.

Bendix Commercial Vehicle Systems, a manufacturer of air brake and control systems and major supplier to the coach industry, has appointed **Joseph McAleese** its chief executive. McAleese, who was promoted to president in March of 2002, assumes the position previously held by Robert Oswald, who continues as chairman.

Kirk Van Tine has been named acting deputy secretary of the **U.S. Department of Transportation**. President Bush nominated Van Tine to be deputy secretary but the Senate recessed last year before acting on his nomination. Naming him acting secretary allowed Van Tine to assume the job immediately.

Joleen Domaracki has been promoted to tourism sales manager/USA and Canada at the **Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau**. Rachel Crippin Clark has been named director of public relations for the bureau.

RE, 1993-2003

Number involved: 24,134 buses

Defect: On certain commercial, school and transit buses equipped with adjustable steering columns, the steering shaft pinch bolt interferes with the rubber boot that protects it.

Over time, the bolt may wear a hole in the boot. If the bolt catches on the hole, movement of the steering wheel may be restricted which could lead to a crash.

Remedy: International is work-

ing on a remedy. Owners should have been notified by now. Owners may contact International (800) 448-7825.

Mid Bus Inc.

Recalled model: Mid Bus Guide, 2001-2003

Number involved: 2,750 buses

Noncompliance item: Certain school buses fail to comply with the requirements of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 217 "Bus Emergency Exits and Window Retention and Release."

The rear door latch has insufficient lubrication, requiring more force to open the door than permitted by the standard. The increased opening load on the latch might present a problem in the event of an emergency.

Remedy: Owners are being advised how to lubricate the emergency door latch or, if they prefer, a dealer will perform the lubrication. Owner notification has taken place. Owners may contact Mid Bus at (877) 358-6055.

San Diego is location for Trailways meet

FAIRFAX, Va. — Building profitability and business success will be major themes at the 68th annual Trailways Conference & Meeting next month in San Diego.

The four-day gathering, Feb. 25-28, at the Hilton San Diego Resort is for Trailways members, guests and industry suppliers.

Each day of the meeting will feature networking sessions designed to help attendees discover better ways of doing business, develop new products and services, and form new partnerships.

There also will be an Exhibitors Showcase.

The event concludes with the annual safety awards gala.

Trailways is one of the nation's oldest travel and transportation providers. Additional information about the conference, including exhibiting information, can be obtained by calling (703) 691-3052, or going to www.trailways.com.



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OPINION

Thank you FMCSA

The deputy administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, Warren E. Hoemann, had great news for the motorcoach industry after the holidays.

As the story on page 1 reports, the FMCSA is overhauling its procedures to speed up its process for getting rid of rogue carriers that are operating without auto liability insurance. This issue has been a top priority of responsible coach operators and their trade associations for years.

The new team at the FMCSA is to be commended for listening to the industry and moving diligently to remove this blemish from the industry.

Motorcoach industry executives can help the FMCSA do its job better and faster by reporting operators they know are conducting business without proper insurance or operating authority. For example, when your insurance agent informs you the operator down the road has had its insurance cancelled. Or, you notice a competitor is using the license plate from his family minivan on his coach.

The FMCSA has offices in every state where bad actors can be reported. For a complete list of FMCSA offices, go to www.fmcsa.dot.gov. Click on field offices and follow the link.

* * *

The professional bus and motorcoach industry's premiere event is just 25 days away. Motorcoach Expo 2004 opens its doors Saturday, Feb. 7, in the

friendly confines of the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta.

If you haven't made your plans to attend, we urge you to act today to register, reserve a hotel room and make travel arrangements.

Continuing the successes of recent years, Expo 2004 will deliver business-building messages from leading professional speakers, news you can use from Congress and key regulators, and the latest and greatest coaches, equipment and services. Dig out your Dec. 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News* for a full schedule of events and speakers, or go to the Expo Web site, www.uma.org/expo.

Back for its sixth year at Expo is the Maintenance Interchange, an important opportunity to find solutions to your toughest maintenance-related problems.

Free to those who are attending Expo with a full registration, the Interchange features a day long operator-to-operator roundtable discussion of critical maintenance issues and topics. Participants share problems and solutions in a no-holds-barred environment. No problem goes unresolved and no vendors are allowed to attend.

To register for both the Expo and Interchange, turn to page 12 where there's a complete registration form. To register for just the Maintenance Interchange, turn to page 13 for a registration form for that event.

See you at Expo.

Fuel tax refunds for '03: It's money in your pocket

WASHINGTON — In an era when every penny counts, obtaining your fuel tax refund for 2003 is smart business.

As much as 17 cents of every gallon of qualified diesel fuel you purchased for your full-size coaches last year can go back into your pocket — if you are an eligible operator.

The 17 cents represents that portion of the 24.4 cents per gallon in federal excise taxes that Congress says coach companies can recapture. The remaining 7.4 cents per gallon remains with Uncle Sam.

Although we refer to the 17 cents per gallon as a refund, the IRS calls it a tax credit which you may collect in cash.

The Internal Revenue Service forms you must file to claim your 17 cents per gallon refund have not changed in recent years. Form 4136 is used for full-year and fourth-quarter refunds, and Form 8849 is used for claiming any cumulative refund of more than \$750 through the first three quarters of the year.

Remember, Form 8849 can only be used for refunds due from the first three tax quarters; you must use Form 4136 for fourth-quarter and full-year refunds.

Lastly, Form 720 is used if you must pay the IRS taxes due for fuel you purchased tax-free (red-dyed fuel) during the year. The submissions must be sent to the

IRS Cincinnati Service Center, P.O. Box 12267, 201 W. Rivercenter Blvd., Covington, KY 41019.

Tax codes, forms

Here are applicable Tax Code citations, definitions and guidelines:

The federal excise tax on a gallon of diesel fuel is 24.4 cents. Tax Code 86427(b) allows qualified commercial operators to claim a tax credit (which you may receive in cash) of 17 cents per gallon.

If you operate under a contract for a fully tax-exempt entity (school district or municipality), you may be eligible for the return of all 24.4 cents. Have your accountant check.

A "qualified" local bus or intercity bus, in terms of this federal provision, is any (a) diesel-powered vehicle, (b) designed with a seating capacity of at least 20 adults (excluding the driver), and (c) operated for compensation and available to the general public.

You may benefit by filing a Form 637 with the IRS, pre-identifying your company as a qualified tax-reduced buyer. Ask your accountant to advise you.

You also should be eligible to receive a refund of the 10 percent federal excise tax on tires. Successfully filing of Form 637 may allow you to avoid paying this tax at the

time of tire purchases.

To file for unclaimed refunds for as many as three years past, it is recommended you use IRS Form 1120X, the amended business tax form. Be sure you have supporting receipts on file.

Some state fuel taxes may be refundable. Check with your state or one of the commercially available state guides. Do not expect to capture state fuel tax refunds through the International Fuel Tax Agreement system. Funds are processed directly by each state.

Help through the Net

The IRS Web site, www.irs.gov, provides easy access to printable tax forms, instructions and lots of guidance. Virtually every form is there in printable form, using Adobe Acrobat. The Acrobat file reader is available as a free download, using a link provided on the IRS Web site.

It is strongly suggested you get a copy of IRS Publication 510, Excise Taxes. It is available from your accountant, most governmental tax form repositories and on the IRS Web site.

One final note: There are few accountants who are expert in the motorcoach industry. Many accountants who encounter the fuel tax refund for the first time will question your ability to qualify. Photocopy this article and share it with your accountant.

How to contact us:

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Year in Review

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

done by any state, New Jersey did both. It more than doubled its corporate minimum tax and it aggressively pursued operators who may not have been contributing their pound of flesh to New Jersey tax collectors.

In mid-February, the industry gathered at Motorcoach Expo 2003 in Orlando to lick its wounds, as well as learn new ideas for meeting the challenges confronting it at every turn. Expo provided a blend of professional development speakers, business building seminars, valuable networking sessions and a trade show floor full of vendors hungry for business.

Eastern and northeastern operators returned home from Expo to learn that the District of Columbia city council had increased some parking fines from \$20 to \$500.

Illinois operators launched a lobbying effort to revise an onerous law that required coach drivers in Illinois to have school bus drivers licenses before they could transport children on school-related trips. (See story on page 4.)

The worst winter storm in seven years hit the Northeast, shutting down scores of coach operations for days.

The Iraq War sent fuel prices off the Richter scale, pushing them 33 percent higher than a year earlier. The war prompted groups everywhere to cancel charters or seek postponements.

ExecConnect America, a luxury coach service operating daily between Pittsburgh and Cleveland, suspended service after nine months in business.

Coach USA began an earnest effort to sell off pieces of the company, calling on and holding briefing sessions with potential buyers from coast to coast. Eventually, Coach USA's parent company would succeed in selling whole regions and segments of the company. (See story page 3.)

Operators across the U.S. worked diligently to cope with the impact of the Iraq war and consumer fears. Refinancing, SBA loans, probing for new niches, revising strategies and aggressive marketing and selling helped operators fight the affects of the war and a poor travel environment.

Spring brought some good news to the industry: the Bush Administration decided motorcoach drivers would be exempt from an overhaul of the hours-of-service rule. Only truckers would

Great Idea For 2003

Kellogg's cereal boxes promote tourism

Call it the best idea we wish we'd come up with for the motorcoach industry in 2003.

Forty million Kellogg's cereal boxes are on their way to America's kitchen tables with an important mission and message: to jump start the \$525 billion U.S. travel and tourism industry and to tell Americans that it's time to start traveling again.

The promotion involves a new alliance called America's Greatest Cities, involving Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia,

San Francisco and Seattle.

Cereal boxes for 10 different Kellogg's adult cereal brands promote one city per box. The back panel on each box highlights popular attractions, hotels and activities. A 100-mile American Airlines AAdvantage certificate can be cut out.

In addition, a sweepstakes is awarding vacations to each of the seven cities for hundreds of winners. A drawing is being held each month, with the final drawing on April 7, 2005, when the promotion ends.

Each of the program partners is marketing the promotion in a number of ways, including by e-mail newsletters, direct mail, grocery store circulars, and in-store promotions.

"The Kellogg promotion is a great example of the power of partnership," said Bill Utter, vice president of the Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau. "Our involvement allows us to encourage travel in a creative way and market Chicago to consumers that we ordinarily might not be able to reach."



have to bear that burden. (See story page 4.)

But coach operators in eastern Canada were dealt a disastrous blow when a health scare called SARS spread from China to Ontario, resulting in widespread cancellations of bus and air travel, conventions and school.

A tourism icon, Cypress Gardens, closed.

The Bush Administration unveiled a \$247 billion highway and public transportation bill that was modest when compared to plans worked up in both houses of Congress.

Blue Bird Corp. announced it planned to make a strong drive to be more competitive in both the motorcoach and commercial bus markets. Blue Bird also named Jerry Bust president and CEO, and appointed Wayne Joseph vice pres-

ident and general manager of the coach and RV division.

A coach driver in New York was sentenced to 10 years in prison after the bus he was driving crashed, killing five people. The driver admitted he gambled most of the night and got almost no sleep before loading 44 passengers for a trip home.

The New York Daily News investigated the bus services serving the Chinatowns of New York, Boston and Philadelphia and found that a nasty little war for customers and turf was being fought.

Laidlaw changed CEOs at its Greyhound Lines subsidiary, hiring a top executive from Krispy Kreme Doughnuts, Stephen Gorman, and easing Craig Lentzsch out the door. Lentzsch landed on his feet, however, becoming CEO of CUSA, a

new company formed to buy two regions of Coach USA. Now, Lentzsch is competing with his former employer in Texas and other markets.

Annette Sandberg was sworn in as administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, giving the safety agency a full-fledged director for the first time in seven months.

The largest blackout in U.S. history hit the upper Midwest and Northeast, resulting in transportation problems throughout the region. Coach companies saved the day for hundreds of thousands of travelers.

The U.S. Transportation Security Administration awarded first-ever federal grants to improve coach industry security. A total of 57 companies, plus the United Motorcoach Association and the

American Bus Association, were awarded grants.

The FMCSA issued rules that brought 15-passenger commercial vans under Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations.

Daily luxury motorcoach service was initiated between Boston and New York City.

New state motorcoach associations were formed in Alabama, Illinois, Louisiana and Texas/Oklahoma/New Mexico.

The FMCSA began accepting applications for exemptions from its rules that ban some diabetics from operating commercial vehicles, including buses.

Seventy-four coach companies were awarded grants from the Federal Transit Administration to help make their fleets more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

The Quebec Bus Owners Association established a "certified carrier" program to recognize operators that meet rigorous quality standards.

UMA and ABA announced they plan to jointly develop a comprehensive security training program for thousands of motorcoach operators.

It was revealed that the FMCSA is developing a Web site to provide consumer-type information to buyers of passenger transportation services.

Wildfires in Southern California were costly to motorcoach operators in the region.

Prevost Car named Gaetan Bolduc president, and Gilles Dion president of its Nova Bus subsidiary. Claude Picard was named vice president of marketing at Prevost and Nova Bus. Dann Wiltgen was named national director of U.S. coach sales.

Gene Hall was named vice president of private sector sales at Motor Coach Industries.

Drew Tuller joined Upstate Tours in New York as vice president and general manager, while David Eaton was named general manager of Conway Tours in Rhode Island.

Setra of North America named Robert Jones as vice president of sales and marketing, and hired Al Abram as vice president of customer finance.

Peter Pan Bus Lines and MCI marked their 70th anniversaries.

The year ended on a sweet and sour note. Ridership reportedly was picking up or holding steady in many regions, but an increase in the terrorism threat level sprayed cold water on some of the new-found optimism.

ABA Marketplace kicks off Jan. 16 in New York City

NEW YORK CITY — The American Bus Association Marketplace 2004 kicks off Jan. 16 for six days. The event brings together North American motorcoach and tour owners and operators with ABA-member travel industry representatives.

Nearly 600 motorcoach operators were pre-registered this year.

The heart of Marketplace is

ABA Foundation sets new course, picks governors

WASHINGTON — The American Bus Association Foundation begins the year with a new mission, plus new officers and board of governors.

The foundation's more focused mission is to advance the quality and development of the motorcoach travel industry for its members and the public it serves.

Strategic priorities supporting the mission will concentrate on areas that will be of critical importance to the industry as it rebounds from more than two years of declining business, including scholarship and image-education initiatives and research designed to build knowledge about the motorcoach travel industry.

Peter J. Pantuso, president and CEO of the American Bus Association and a member of the foundation board, said: "The ABA Foundation is ... tasked with advancing education initiatives for those interested in joining the industry, along with enhanced research and awareness. Its success is vital to the industry."

Chosen from the foundation board of governors to lead the group and to spearhead newly-formed committees that will set the agenda for the foundation are: Bert Askwith, Campus Coach Lines, who will serve as chairman emeritus; Jot Bennett, Capitol Trailways, who will serve as chairman; Ron Eyre, Eyre Bus Service, who will serve as treasurer; Charlie Zelle, Jefferson Lines, who will serve as chair of the research advisory committee, and Sara Fuller, Birmingham Convention & Visitors Bureau, who will serve as chair of the fundraising committee.

Other board of governors members include Frank Henry of Frank Martz Coach Co.-Martz Trailways; Tom Sorrells of Motor Coach Industries, and Juliana Carneiro of Hard Rock Café International.

pre-scheduled appointments for attendees from motorcoach and tour companies to learn about destinations, attractions, lodging and restaurants as possible stops for

charters and tours. More than 45,000 appointments were pre-scheduled this year, a big increase over last year.

ABA is expecting total atten-

dance will approach or surpass last year, when nearly 2,500 converged on Indianapolis.

In addition to the appointment sessions, Marketplace also includes

educational programs, exhibits and 15 functions.

Marketplace is taking place in the Javits Center. Marketplace 2005 will be in Chicago.

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EXPO 2004

Vision Award Gala Banquet: Special Notice

New at Motorcoach Expo 2004 is the Vision Award Gala Banquet that will celebrate 20 years of Expos.

The banquet -- and reception preceding it -- will be Monday, Feb. 9, in the Georgia World Congress Center. The reception is at 6:30 p.m., dinner at 7 and networking and gaming at 9.

Here's how it will work:

The Expo Exhibit Hall closes at 5:30. Shuttles will transport Expo attendees to their hotels, picking them back up starting at 6 p.m., and returning them to the convention center for the banquet. Shuttles back to the

hotels will run all evening until 11 p.m.

Attire for the evening is cocktail dresses for women and dark suits or black tie for men. Because it is February, appropriate coats should be brought to Atlanta.

Spotlight On New Exhibitor

Flying J Truck Stops

Established as a small petroleum marketing company in 1968 with four retail gasoline stations, Flying J has grown to become the largest retail distributor of diesel fuel in North America. Flying J is a new exhibitor at Motorcoach Expo.

Of the 10 million privately held companies in the U.S., Ogden, Utah-based Flying J is No. 45 among Forbes' 500 largest private firms, with annual sales exceeding \$4.6 billion.

Flying J's network of 163 state-of-the-art travel plazas and fuel stops are located along major highways in 41 states and three Canadian provinces. Another 19 facilities are under construction or in various stages of the permitting process with openings scheduled throughout the next two years.

Visit Flying J at Booth 917.

Spotlight On New Exhibitor

NATSO Inc.

Headquartered just outside Washington, D.C., NATSO is the national trade association representing travel plaza and truckstop owners and operators. It is a first-time exhibitor at Motorcoach Expo 2004.

NATSO represents more than 1,100 travel plazas and truckstops nationwide. Among other things, NATSO:

- Serves as the official source of information on travel plazas.
- Acts as the voice of the industry with government.
- Conducts the industry's only national convention and exposition.

The travel plazas and truckstops that NATSO represents are modern, clean, multi-million dollar businesses offering an array of facilities and services to professional drivers and the traveling public.

Visit NATSO at Booth 715.

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**February 8-10, 2004
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Attendee Registration Form

Make copies for additional registrations. Expo Exhibitors: Do Not Use This Form.

Registrant Information

First Name _____ Last Name _____ Badge Name (First or Nickname Only) _____

Company Name _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Country _____

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Industry Role: (Check Only One) Operator Attendee Tour Planner Press (Editorial Staff Only)

Non-Exhibiting Supplier* Government Other (please note): _____

If you are an Operator Attendee:

What equipment does your company operate? Bus/Coach Wheelchair Accessible Equipment

School Buses Transit Minibus/Van Limousine Other (please specify): _____

Your primary purchasing role is: Buy Recommend N/A

I am interested in: Coaches Other Related Equipment Services Destination Info

Registration Fees

	UMA Members:		Non UMA Members*:	
	Regular (before 1/15/04)	On-Site (after 1/15/04)	Regular (before 1/15/04)	On-Site (after 1/15/04)
<input type="checkbox"/> Full	\$275	\$325	\$325	\$375
<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse	\$200	\$250	\$250	\$300
<input type="checkbox"/> Child	\$100	\$125	\$100	\$125

*Non-members can join UMA for only an additional \$175 and save on registration costs. Call 800-424-8262 for more details.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION - PLEASE READ: Children under age 10 are free. Child rates are for ages 10-17. Anyone who wishes to gain entry to all Motorcoach Expo exhibits and functions must be fully registered and in possession of a name tag administered by show management. Loss or destruction of a badge will result in a \$200 replacement fee. **CANCELLATION POLICY:** There is a \$50 processing fee for all cancellations. This fee is assessed on a per person basis. There is no refund for cancellations made after 12/31/03. All refund requests are up to the discretion of Expo Management.

Payment Information

Credit Cards: Check Visa MasterCard American Express

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Make Checks Payable to: UMA Motorcoach Expo

Fax Credit Card Payments to: 703-838-2950

Mail all others to: Motorcoach Expo, 113 South West Street, 4th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314-2824

Comments? Questions?

Call 800-424-8262 or www.motorcoachexpo.com

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Date Entered: _____

Member _____

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Member # _____

Question:

Why do hundreds of operators go to Motorcoach Expo?

- A.** To see the latest equipment available.
- B.** To learn the best business strategies to gain a competitive edge.
- C.** To find solutions to their most pressing problems.
- D.** To meet up with their favorite colleagues and have fun.

Answer:

ALL OF THE ABOVE

Don't miss out on the motorcoach industry event of the year. Rates will go up soon, so use this ad to REGISTER NOW!

Visit www.motorcoachexpo.com for more information



Maintenance Interchange is scheduled for Expo '04, day-long session planned

One of the important educational programs at Motorcoach Expo 2004 is the Maintenance Interchange. This day-long event is an open and frank discussion between motorcoach owners, operators and maintenance personnel. Vendors, suppliers, manufacturers and sales personnel are not invited and are not allowed to attend.

Although vendor representatives may be invited to answer questions at the close of the day, this is strictly an operator-to-operator exchange and its success depends on keeping it as such.

Also important is that participants help the organizers. Participants are asked to identify their toughest motorcoach maintenance problems. All of the problems will be compiled into a package and the complete list mailed back to participants well ahead of their departure for Atlanta. When participants receive the proposed list, they are urged to look it over carefully and come to the Maintenance Interchange prepared to give solutions to the problems they have already solved. If time allows, additional problems will be discussed towards the end of the day. If you provided your toughest problems last year, please review the list and see if there is something new you can add.

Interchange Registration Form

Sunday, February 8, 2004

NAME _____

COMPANY _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

ADDITIONAL PERSONS _____

COST

Free to Full Registrants

\$100 if you do not plan to attend other Expo events

Important: Deadline to sign up is February 1

Let us know what your toughest motorcoach maintenance problems are:

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United Motorcoach Association

113 S. West Street, 4th Floor • Alexandria, VA 22314-2824

800-424-8262 • Fax: 703-838-2950

The Interchange will be from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. at the Georgia World Congress Center. A noontime break will allow attendees to attend the Operator Lunch. Registration is limited to the first 100

persons who sign up. The Maintenance Interchange is free to full Expo registrants. For those attending just the Interchange, the cost is \$100. The deadline for registering is Friday, Jan. 30.

Volvo to close Denmark plant

GOTHENBURG, Sweden — Volvo Buses, the No. 2 large-bus manufacturer in the world and half-owner of Prevost Car Inc., will close its bodybuilding plant in Aabenraa, Denmark, during the second half of this year.

About 200 employees will be affected by the closure.

Volvo Buses reports it has suffered losses in recent years as a result of the tourism slump and tight municipal budgets in Europe and other markets, including Denmark.

Consequently, the company has significant overcapacity at its European plants. To improve profitability, Volvo is restructuring its manufacturing organization and moving to reduce labor expenses. It's doing this by concentrating production of finished buses in a smaller number of plants and using its Polish plant as a high-volume facility.

Worldwide, Volvo Buses reduced its workforce by about 800 in 2003.

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