

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION
MOTORCOACH EXPO 2008



Motorcoach Expo '08 set all sorts of records as a healthy industry and San Francisco combined to push attendance and exhibit space to record highs. See special section that begins on Page 12.

Final charter service regulations are issued by FTA

WASHINGTON D.C. — The Federal Transit Administration has issued the final version of its new charter service rules that are supposed to end years of feuding and legal scrimmaging between private motorcoach operators and public transit systems over charter bus service provided by transit agencies.

Overall, the final rules make few major changes from the initial proposal that was released almost a

year ago, but they do spell out in the clearest language ever what public transit agencies can and cannot do when providing service that may be considered charter in nature.

Among the scores of changes, the massive rules overhaul provides for establishing an electronic registration of private charter bus providers on a new FTA Website, replacing the old "willing-and-able" process; includes a provision

allowing private bus operators to request a cease-and-desist order when a transit agency violates the rules, and sets up more detailed complaint, hearing and appeal procedures.

Additionally, the regulations contain provisions that allow public transit agencies to file complaints against private operators that do not negotiate in good faith or act vindictively in responding to a charter service notice issued by a

public transit agency.

The regulations are to become effective April 30.

Among the revisions since the rules were proposed last February is a revised definition of charter service that prohibits transit agencies from providing bus service if:

- A third party pays for any part of the service.
- The service is irregular or of limited duration.
- The transit agency charges a

fare that is above its normal everyday rate. (See article on Page 10.)

The rules and changes the FTA made to its initial proposal generally have met with favor from many in the motorcoach industry.

"The rules were very well received by the Legislative and Regulatory Committee of the United Motorcoach Coach Association," said Ken Presley, the trade group's vice president of industry relations.

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Operators are left holding the bag for Texas services

AUSTIN, Texas — A South Carolina motorcoach operator that was hired by the state of Texas in August for possible evacuation duty in connection with Hurricane Dean is owed more than \$100,000 with no immediate prospects for payment.

There are believed to be a handful of other operators also being stiffed by the state.

Sandra Haigler, vice president of Lancaster Trailways of the Carolinas in Lancaster, S.C., is caught in a funding screw-up that one industry source calls the "Texas Hurricane Hat Dance."

A Texas official says the state legislature authorized a "disaster contingency fund," but never followed through with an appropriation. He offers a detailed explanation of what happened, with some hope for a solution in the future.

Haigler reports having received two payments, totaling \$12,893.91, leaving an unpaid balance of \$106,362.64, plus interest accruing at 9.25 percent under the state Prompt Payment Act.

She says she understands there are five other bus companies that

have not been paid.

Ken Presley, vice president of industry relations at the United Motorcoach Association, says Lancaster was one of several bus operators called in by the Texas Procurement Division in anticipation of Hurricane Dean evacuations Aug. 20-21.

"It appears the state authorized Texas Procurement to obtain these vehicles and never funded it," Presley says. "From the UMA standpoint, this will cause great harm to emergency responders' efforts to obtain vehicles for future evacuations."

Presley's advice to motorcoach operators who may be asked to help out in future emergencies?

"At this point, they almost have to insist on being paid up front. Government officials have to be very concerned that motorcoach operators will refuse to respond in situations where the operators have to advance so much capital," he said.

Presley says the vast majority of expenses billed by Lancaster

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Fatal crash forces operator to sell

OTTAWA, Ohio — The Ottawa-based bus company whose motorcoach crashed in Atlanta last March, killing seven people, including members of the Bluffton University baseball team, has been sold and is now operating under a new name.

Executive Coach Luxury Travel had been owned and operated by Rick Stechschulte for 10 years but it was unable to maintain its business viability because of problems obtaining insurance.

"Everybody around here knows

what happened," Stechschulte told *Bus & Motorcoach News*. "The insurance knocked us out. It was about six times the price. It was strictly from the accident. We came out clean in all the inspections, and we ran for six months and got the highest inspections we could have got. We were good to go."

Except for the huge nut created by soaring insurance premiums.

"It was astronomical," Stechschulte said. "We just couldn't afford to stay in business. We'd have had to raise our rates so high it

just wouldn't have been practical."

Stechschulte declined to give dollar figures other than to say his insurance rate soared six fold over what it had been.

On March 1, one of Stechschulte's coaches was traveling through Atlanta on Interstate 75, carrying 34 passengers, most of who were members of the Bluffton University baseball team. The team was on its way to Florida for a series of spring games.

At 5:30 a.m., the coach depart-

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Feds slam company after fatal crash

FORREST CITY, Ark. — The driver of a motorcoach that was involved in a fatal crash in eastern Arkansas in late November had amphetamines in his system, impairing his ability to operate the bus safely, state prosecutors have charged.

Felix B. Tapia, 28, of Brownsville, Texas, has been accused of four felony counts of negligent homicide while under the influence of drugs in the crash that killed four people, and injured dozens more along Interstate 40 near Forrest

City. The bus was making a charter trip from Chicago to Texas.

An arrest warrant was issued for Tapia, and bail set at \$50,000.

Simultaneously, the company that employed Tapia, Tornado Bus Co. of Dallas, has been declared an "imminent hazard" by the Federal Motor Safety Administration and ordered to cease all commercial operations.

Fletcher Long, the prosecuting attorney for the First Judicial Circuit of Arkansas, said investigators discovered that Tapia got his

amphetamines in Mexico. However, Long said he did not know whether the drugs were prescribed for Tapia. But regardless of whether they were legal or illegal, Long said, prosecutors believe they impaired his driving ability.

An amphetamine is a prescription stimulant commonly used to treat the daytime drowsiness conditions of narcolepsy and chronic fatigue syndrome.

It also is used illegally as a recreational drug, and as an athlete-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ▶

The advertisement displays several bus seat models on a textured, light-colored background. The models are labeled as follows:

- 2+1 BRASIL**: A light blue seat with a footrest.
- TORINO STANDARD**: A blue and red patterned seat.
- TORINO VIP**: A blue and red patterned seat with a high backrest.
- PATRIOT**: A light blue seat with a yellow and white patterned backrest.
- FEATURES**: A small inset image showing a seat with a tray table and a reading light.

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THE DOCKET

Diesel prices will stay high through March

WASHINGTON — The price of diesel fuel during the first three months of this year will average at least \$3.40 a gallon before tailing off later in the year to near \$3, the Department of Energy predicts.

Diesel fuel averaged just above \$3.40 in January, and will be close to that price this month and next, the DOE said in a forecast.

Diesel will then gradually taper down from \$3.38 in April to \$3.12 in December, the forecast said.

It will dip to \$3.09 in January 2009 before gradually rising again next year, peaking in the \$3.20s in April, May and June, DOE said.

Gasoline prices are also projected to average above \$3 per gallon this year and into 2009, with monthly average prices peaking near \$3.50 per gallon this spring, DOE said.

Higher average crude oil prices will assure the elevated price levels, the DOE said.

California gets tougher about idling rules

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The California Department of Motor Vehicles has apparently added violations of state idling regulations to the list of reasons it can deny registration of commercial vehicles.

Currently, the state can block commercial vehicle registrations or renewals if the owner has outstanding traffic citations.

Now, according to several state

sources, the California DMV may refuse commercial vehicle registration, renewal or transfer if the owner has been cited for violating the state's anti-idling regulations.

The state can reject registration if the vehicle's owner or operator has been cited "until the violation has been cleared, as determined by the State Air Resources Board," a state government memo states.

Karen Caesar of the California Air Resources Board also confirmed that local police have the authority to write citations to enforce idling restrictions.

"If you have outstanding citations (tickets) for violating any of our mobile emissions regulations, not just our anti-idling reg, it can block your registration or your registration renewal," Caesar said.

One major trucking association has expressed outrage over the issue, accusing the state of circumventing due process. "I think this is illegal," said Rick Craig, director of regulatory affairs for the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association. "There is such a thing as due process in this country. A citation is proof of nothing."

Pennsylvania bans fees for investigations

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell has signed a bill into law that prohibits municipalities from charging fees for police investigations of motor vehicle wrecks.

Municipalities that have been levying the fee charge drivers or insurance companies.

The township of Radnor, a suburb of Philadelphia, voted in 2006 to levy fees against nonresidents involved in wrecks. The township later repealed the ordinance after an outcry.

The new law, previously HB131, takes effect the middle of

this month.

Meanwhile, Erlanger, Ky. (population 16,000) has adopted an ordinance allowing the city to charge nonresidents for its cost to handle vehicle crashes.

The fees laid out in the ordinance include \$7 for every 15 minutes an officer is at the scene, plus \$154 for every Erlanger police car that responds to an accident.

News accounts say the ordinance was written because a large percentage of accidents involve nonresidents and are costly to deal with. The city reportedly expects the ordinance to generate about

\$250,000 annually.

Erlanger is off Interstates 71/75 in northern Kentucky, south of Cincinnati, Ohio.

One Erlanger insurance agent told a Kentucky Website that he wasn't sure insurance companies would pay the fee and speculated it would be challenged in court.

Another new law in Pennsylvania will keep red light cameras posted along a 14-mile stretch of U.S. Route 1 in Philadelphia.

Since 2005, red light cameras along Roosevelt Expressway have been credited with a sharp reduction in traffic-related injuries and

deaths. The cameras are posted at eight expressway intersections. Violators face \$100 fines.

The new law extends the program along the 12-lane boulevard through 2011.

Proposals made to revamp Va. 'bad driver' fees

RICHMOND, Va. — Virginia lawmakers are considering at least six bills that would revamp or get rid of so-called bad driver fees that were adopted last year. (See July 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The fees and the accompanying fines, which have become one of the most contentious issues in the state in years, were adopted as part of a massive \$3 billion transportation bill approved in 2007.

The bills that have been introduced this year would either eliminate the fees and provide refunds to those who already paid them or amend the rules to reduce the number of offenses subject to the harsher penalties.

Since the law took effect July 1, public opposition about the fines for certain driving violations has led many lawmakers to call for changes.

The fees for violations made by "bad drivers" are payable in three annual payments ranging from \$250 to \$1,000. They are expected to generate \$65 million a year for transportation.

Offenses that could result in the fines include drunken or reckless driving. But there also are bigger penalties for overweight vehicles and higher registration fees. The penalties and fees only apply to Virginia residents; non-residents are immune.



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Missouri bill would mandate English-only CDL tests

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — A bill in the Missouri House calls for commercial vehicle driver's license applicants to prove they have a firm grasp of the English language to obtain a CDL.

House Transportation Chairman Neal St. Onge introduced a bill (HB 1420) that would require the written test be offered only in English. Applicants' ability to understand traffic signs and signals written in English also would be required. They would be prohibited from using interpreters or translators while taking the test.

St. Onge said he's concerned that people are allowed to drive commercial vehicles on Missouri roads without a command of the English language. He pointed out that federal regulations require applicants to be able to read and speak English sufficiently to get a CDL.

Opponents contend there are no studies that suggest English proficiency makes better drivers. They also voiced concern that adopting the strict standards would push certain companies to go "under-

ground" to hire people to sit behind the wheel of trucks.

Advocates for the English standard say it's a matter of safety.

"It's a great thing," said Rick Craig, Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association director of regulatory affairs. "All states should be doing it."

He also said that making the English requirement standard for both portions of the test is vital. "It's the only way you're really going to know for sure (applicants can communicate in English)."

Craig said that states allowing interpreters to aid test takers cloud the results. "How do you know the interpreter isn't giving them the answer?" he asked.

A separate bill is intended to get tough with businesses that hire illegal immigrants. The measure (HB 1381) targets companies that "knowingly" employed, recruited or hired illegal immigrants.

Violation of the rule could result in the suspension of a company's state and local business license and registration.

Supporters say such a law would make the state less attractive for illegal immigrants. Opponents say it is the federal government's

responsibility to enforce immigration laws.

Another bill of note (HB 1422) would authorize the state to imple-

ment the Unified Carrier Registration Act. The UCRA is the process that replaces the old Single State Registration System.

Tolls in New York climb

NEW YORK — Tolls on the New York Thruway, as well as those on New York City bridges and tunnels, went up last month.

Tolls on the thruway increased by 10 percent, and the thruway authority is proposing additional 5 percent increases for next year and 2010, and \$4 to \$8 increases for E-ZPass annual permits.

In New York City, cash bridge and tunnel tolls jumped by as much as 50 cents, a 33 percent increase or more, while vehicle operators who use E-ZPass will pay as much as 3.8 percent more.

The discount for commercial vehicles using E-ZPass rises to 25 percent from 20 percent.

The thruway toll hike, combined with those proposed for the next two years, touched off predictable criticism from state lawmakers, some of whom suggested bringing the thruway authority under the control of the General Assembly and requiring legislative approval of future toll increases.

Authority officials say the toll hikes are needed, in part, to make up for lost revenue caused by slower-than-expected growth in traffic, and to pay for repairs on the 55-year-old, 623-mile-long highway system whose main line stretches from New York City north to Albany, west to Buffalo and south to the Pennsylvania border.

N.J. governor wants huge toll hike

TRENTON, N.J. — New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine favors a sharp increase in tolls on toll roads to help pay off state debt.

Corzine was quoted as saying the hikes would be substantial but that alternatives would be worse.

Confirming a previously disclosed schedule, Corzine said

tolls on the New Jersey Turnpike, Garden State Parkway and Atlantic City Expressway would increase 50 percent in 2010 and then 50 percent every four years through 2022, one newspaper reported.

Tolls also would be imposed on part of Route 440.

New Mexico eyes idling limits

SANTA FE, N.M. — New Mexico is the latest state to consider adopting an idling limit for commercial vehicles.

The New Mexico Environment Department is working on a proposed idling limit for commer-

cial vehicles weighing 16,001 pounds and more.

Florida, Minnesota and Colorado all have moved to develop idling limits in recent months as part of broader greenhouse gas emission reduction initiatives.

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Texas

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

reflect labor and fuel costs and use of equipment.

"Operators will tell you the razor-thin margins they have simply do not justify a huge financial outlay and the time spent waiting to be paid," Presley said.

He says the Department of Homeland Security, the Transportation Security Administration and — more specifically — the Federal Emergency Management Agency need to look into how their resources were allocated.

"It is our understanding that federal money was allocated to Texas," Presley says. "Part of the problem may involve matching funds. We're still looking for clarification. The federal government certainly has problems in participating with the states if (the states) are not going to pay their share of the bill."

Haigler sent an e-mail to Ted Maddry of the Texas Governor's Division of Emergency Management, asking what funding the state would use if another emergency occurred. Here is a portion of Maddry's e-mail response:

"Sandra, I appreciate your contact and your observation about our source of funding for unanticipated emergency events, natural or otherwise. I will attempt to answer your question by referring to the state

statute that covers the State's Emergency Management Program.

"The statute is the Texas Government Code... (and) sections 418.071 through 418.073 address the finance authority and the 'contingency fund' for disaster response and the entity that is charged with managing the 'contingency fund.' If you read further in the law you will observe that there is a procedure established and organization flow for obtaining assistance at the local government level to the state agency level.

"The most recent legislative session added additional requirements and authority and one of the key changes to the statute was the creation of the 'Mutual Aid Assistance System.'"

Maddry refers to the "reimbursement of costs" section of the law and states:

"While we received partial reimbursement from FEMA for our costs associated with Hurricane Dean preparations, the reimbursement was not sufficient to cover the total cost. The funding issue was made more difficult to resolve due to the fact, that while the Legislature authorized the creation of the contingency fund, an appropriation of funds was not made. Thus, like many other examples at all levels of local, state and federal government operations, our legislative bodies create programs that are not funded, thus frequently

megabus.com drops L.A.-Phoenix runs

LOS ANGELES — megabus.com has discontinued its service to Los Angeles from Phoenix and Tempe, Ariz.

Not enough people were making the 380-mile, seven-hour trip — even with ticket prices starting at \$1.50 — to make it viable for megabus.

Phoenix has a long tradition of frequent flights and relatively cheap air fares to southern California. The long distances of the southwestern U.S. tend to discourage travel by bus.

Meanwhile, megabus.com continues to make waves elsewhere.

A popular blogspot has cited megabus for having the "Best Strategy for Reducing Greenhouse Gases, If Such Matters."

the programs are in name only and may create misunderstandings within the public that is being served."

Maddry states that his office is trying to obtain emergency funding to pay the remaining obligations resulting from Hurricane Dean. He suggests that Haigler might ask:

"Why did we initiate preparedness and emergency response actions if we did not have the funding to support the response effort

The blog said megabus.com "is providing cheap, safe, clean and quick intercity bus travel and attacking the market by making it silly to drive between major cities."

"We know for a fact that people who would not take a bus otherwise are taking megabus," said the blog. "And their latest promotion is to reduce their \$1.50 teaser fares to 50 cents."

Megabus also is giving away 100,000 free seats between mid-January and mid-March.

In the United Kingdom, megabus.com has added a new customer service — hotel bookings through LateRooms.com. megabus customers can book both travel and accommodations using the mega-

bus.com Website.

The partnership arrangement enables customers booking coach travel around the U.K. to have access to more than 6,500 hotels on www.megabus.com, with reductions of up to 70 per cent off standard prices, the companies said.

LateRooms' technology enables last-minute booking for hotel rooms in megabus' key U.K. destinations of London, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Glasgow, Manchester and Cardiff.

"It's important that the savings customers make through booking with megabus.com are not wiped out by extortionate hotel prices at their destination," said Duncan Barraclough, partnerships manager for LateRooms.com.

anticipates a favorable response in the near future.

Indicating his frustration with the situation, Maddry says to Haigler: "I don't know if you have any children of high school or college level age, but if so this experience would make an excellent subject for a term paper or public administration case study on the operations of the government."

Haigler's tongue-in-cheek response: "Well I guess he shut me up!!"

Operator sells

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ed the left lane, which also was an HOV lane, onto an exit ramp. The HOV-lane exit is unusual because it veers left. The coach traveled at highway speed up the ramp, which ended in an elevated "T" intersection with Northside Drive, an overpass road above I-75.

Because of its high rate of speed, the bus failed to negotiate the intersection and collided with the overpass' concrete rail, resulting in the ejection of four passengers. The coach then jumped the bridge rail, rotated clockwise, and fell onto the interstate, landing on the driver side and ejecting six more passengers.

Investigators have blamed the

crash on the driver's failure to realize the ramp was an exit and not a continuation of the interstate, and on the highway design. The exit was marked, though there has been criticism of the signage, which has since been upgraded.

As a result of the crash, the driver, Jerome Niemeyer, his wife Jean, and five passengers died. Seven others were seriously injured.

Fallout from the tragedy has included introduction of legislation in Congress, the Bluffton University Safety Act of 2007, which calls for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to conduct comprehensive scientific research to determine the direction of future regulatory requirements for motorcoaches and motorcoach travel.

However, the NHTSA has not waited for the legislation to make its way through Congress and has embarked on a test program to examine the crashworthiness and structural integrity of motorcoaches, along with seat restraint systems.

The program also is analyzing motorcoach fire safety.

The first crash test of a full-size motorcoach into a rigid barrier at 30 mph took place in mid-December at the Vehicle Research and Test Center in Ohio.

The crash of a late model coach marked the first time the federal government has ever crash tested a motorcoach.

A number of lawsuits also have been filed against Executive Coach for using a bus without seat belts;

the Georgia Department of Transportation "for failing to provide adequate road signs on Interstate 75," Bluffton University for failing to contract a bus without seat belts, Van Hool for manufacturing the bus without seat belts, and the construction company that built the HOV exit.

Stechschulte sold his company to Excursions Trailways of Fort Wayne, Ind., and its principals, partners Tom Bazow and Patrick O'Brian.

Bazow said Executive Coach and his company have had a good working relationship. "Rick approached us about selling," said Bazow. "We'd been in talks before and we worked together for seven years. When we were oversold, we would contract out with Executive

Coach. At times we shared drivers. We both have the same standards and we offer the same type of service."

Bazow credited Executive Coach with having run "an excellent operation with quality equipment, drivers and employees."

Bazow and O'Brian have set up a new company, Excursions Trailways of Ohio, replacing Executive Coach. The combined Excursions' operations have a total of 40 drivers and 10 Prevost motorcoaches in Fort Wayne and Ottawa. Bazow said his company joined Trailways in May 2005.

Meanwhile, Stechschulte continues to own and operate Specialty Builders, a construction company, which shared space with the bus company.

Tornado bus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

ic performance enhancer.

If convicted, Tapia could face 3 to 10 years in prison on each count.

On Nov. 25, Tapia was driving a Tornado coach, carrying 46 passengers, and crossed a median from the westbound lanes of I-40 and collided with a pickup truck in the eastbound lanes. An oncoming semi-trailer truck then collided with the coach.

The dead included the driver of the pickup and three bus passengers.

In late December, after conducting a new compliance review, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration ordered Tornado be shut down because of its lousy safety practices.

The agency said Tornado posed a public safety hazard because of its "state of unacceptable safety compliance," its "failure to adequately establish safety

management systems" and failure to oversee its drivers' "duty status and hours of service." Among other things, FMCSA officials found what they called "an alarmingly high pattern" of false log book entries. And the company would routinely assign drivers routes that would take up to 17 hours of driving time.

A review of Tapia's records by FMCSA investigators showed that on the day of the crash he had exceeded the maximum number of

hours-of-service and listed the presence of a co-driver when there wasn't one.

Since 2001, Tornado has been the subject of four other compliance reviews, which resulted in fines totaling \$57,680 for violating hours-of-service requirements and falsifying driver duty records.

In addition, during the past six years the company has been fined on four separate occasions a total of \$5,410 for safety violations discovered during routine roadside

inspections.

The FMCSA out-of-service order states: "Despite the imposition of these penalties, Tornado's method of operation remained unchanged. The immediate and severe hazard to safety stems from Tornado's egregious indifference to the hours-of-service requirements."

The order shutting Tornado down can be viewed at www.fmcsa.dot.gov/about/news/news-releases/2007/Order-OOSO-2007-01.pdf.

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WASHINGTON — An audit by the inspector general of the U.S. Defense Department found a “high risk” that department employees in metro Washington were flagrantly abusing transportation benefits.

Auditors identified more than 14,000 Defense employees who filed incomplete enrollment applications, and nine out of 14 employees from a selected sample overstated their benefit by an average of \$42 monthly.

Additionally, employees who should have been withdrawn from the program because of a change in status continued to receive benefits despite their ineligibility.

“These findings indicate a high risk that DoD employees will not file forms to indicate status changes or to withdraw from the program, will commit fraud to receive benefits more than once in the same distribution period, and will obtain and concurrently hold

both transit subsidy benefits and subsidized parking benefits,” the report said.

In response to the findings, David Chu, Defense undersecretary for personnel and readiness, said the department is revising its employee transit benefit policy and would soon issue new guidelines.

Transportation benefits are enormously popular among federal workers in centers like metro Washington, helping defray commuting and parking costs for tens of thousands of employees, for whom such fees can easily top \$12 a day.

Federal agencies in the capital region, which includes Washington and nearby counties of Maryland and Virginia, are required to provide the subsidies for employees who use mass transit or participate in van pools.

The benefits are aimed at reducing traffic congestion and

pollution by encouraging employees to use mass transit.

They are supposed to equal an employee’s personal commuting costs up to \$110 per month. Last year, Defense spent nearly \$36 million on the transit benefits for 33,770 employees.

The IG investigation was a follow-up to a report last April by the Government Accountability Office that found federal employees were fraudulently selling Metro fare cards on eBay, inflating transportation expenses and falsifying applications to obtain benefits for which they were ineligible.

“These employees are likely the tip of a much larger number of violations of law,” said Gregory D. Kutz, managing director for forensic audits and special investigations at GAO, in written testimony submitted to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

Kiss your business good-bye...

MAYS LANDING, N.J. — Atlantic County, N.J. has earned a dubious ranking: It’s one of six “judicial hellholes” nationwide, according to a tort reform organization.

“Personal injury lawyers seem to have gained a monopoly in Atlantic County,” declares the American Tort Reform Association in its “Judicial Hellholes 2007” report.

According to the group, Atlantic County is “known for particularly plaintiff-friendly laws, admitting junk science in court and hosting lawsuits from all over the country...”

It is the first time Atlantic County has landed on the group’s list of places where you do not want to be sued.

Atlantic County is in the southeast corner of New Jersey and among its municipalities are Absecon, Atlantic City, Egg Harbor City and Township, Linwood, Pleasantville and Ventnor City. Mays Landing is the county seat.

The other five judicial hellholes identified by the association are: South Florida; Rio Grande Valley and Gulf Coast, Texas; Cook County (Chicago), Ill.; West Virginia, and Clark County (Las Vegas), Nev.

Static fire at fuel pump is said to be real danger

WASHINGTON — Cell phones won’t start a fire at a filling station pump — that’s a myth, but static electricity can spark a fire during fueling, according to the American Petroleum Institute and the Petroleum Equipment Institute.

While static electricity flash fires at a fuel pump are extremely rare and are preventable, they can happen and are more likely to occur

in cool, dry conditions, especially in fall and winter, say the two associations.

“Static electricity — the same thing that shocks you after you drag your feet on carpeting — can ignite gasoline vapors at the pump,” says the Petroleum Equipment Institute. The same is possible at diesel pumps, though diesel is a less volatile fuel than gasoline and, there-

Bill would require agencies to consider ‘indirect’ impacts

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Small Business has unanimously approved a bill designed to require federal agencies to give greater consideration to small businesses when adopting new rules and regulations.

The Small Business Regulatory Improvement Act (H.R. 4458) is supposed to close loopholes in the implementation of the federal Regulatory Flexibility Act, which has been on the books since 1980.

U.S. Small Business Administration Chief Counsel for Advocacy Thomas M. Sullivan said the proposed law would provide “needed assistance to small entities.”

According to Sullivan, the bill would assure fair treatment of small businesses in the regulatory process by requiring federal agencies to give consideration to foreseeable “indirect impacts” of proposed regulations and to periodically review existing regulations.

Plus, it would codify Executive Order 13272, “Proper Consideration of Small Entities in Agency Rulemaking.” Sullivan

said the executive order requires agencies to notify the Office of Advocacy when a proposed rule is expected to have a significant impact on small business.

“Our biggest concern with the (Regulatory Flexibility Act) is that it does not require agencies to analyze indirect impacts,” said Sullivan. “Agencies are required to consider the direct economic impact of a regulatory action on small entities, but that analysis can overlook obvious side effects and fail to provide decision-makers with a full understanding of a rule’s likely impact on small entities.”

“H.R. 4458 contains the needed improvements to require this analysis,” he added.

Sullivan’s Office of Advocacy is the self-described “small business watchdog” of the federal government, examining the role and status of small business in the economy and representing the views of small business to federal agencies, Congress and the administration. It also is the source for small business statistics, and funds research into small business issues.

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For more information, go to the
Petroleum Equipment Institute’s
“Stop Static” page at www.api.org.

Greyhound Lines expands priority boarding system

DALLAS — Greyhound appears to have found a winner in the priority boarding/seat assignment system it began testing late last year. (See Dec. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The program, which has been expanded to more than 30 major cities across the U.S., allows passengers to pay \$5 to reserve a specific seat on select departures and board before other passengers.

From the passengers' perspective, the system helps alleviate the stress of wondering if they'll get a seat on the bus they want to take, or have to wait for the next bus.

It also makes it much more likely passengers will get their preference of either an aisle or window seat. Since the system lets passengers pick their seat, riders also can say goodbye to the risk of getting stuck next to the bathroom.

And for those passengers traveling with a child, it helps guarantee they will not have to ask another passenger if he or she would move so they can sit with their child.

For Greyhound, having less-stressed customers could mean they'll be more likely to take the bus again.

However, from a customer perspective, the program, as currently practiced, has shortcomings. No. 1, passengers cannot arrange priority boarding over the Internet. It's only available at the bus station, which means waiting in line at some point

unless a passenger drops by the station during a non-busy time.

Customers can go to a Greyhound station up to 30 days in advance of their travel date to purchase the priority boarding. Or, those willing to take their chances can purchase priority boarding up to 45 minutes before their trip.

Also, reserved seating is only sold one way, meaning customers must go through the reservation process twice for round trips. And it is only valid on the exact date and schedule for which customers have booked their trip.

For a passenger's priority seating reservation to be honored, he or

she must be at the gate at least 20 minutes before departure time.

Still, Greyhound President and CEO Dave Leach said the company continues to see strong customer response since the concept was introduced in November.

"So, we wanted to expand to more markets as quickly as possi-

ble," said Leach. "Now customers have more opportunities in dozens of locations to have first choice and a guaranteed seat on many of our schedules."

A list of eligible cities and schedules can be found at www.greyhound.com. Click on the "Priority Seating" banner.

Reformulated fuel treatment from Penray

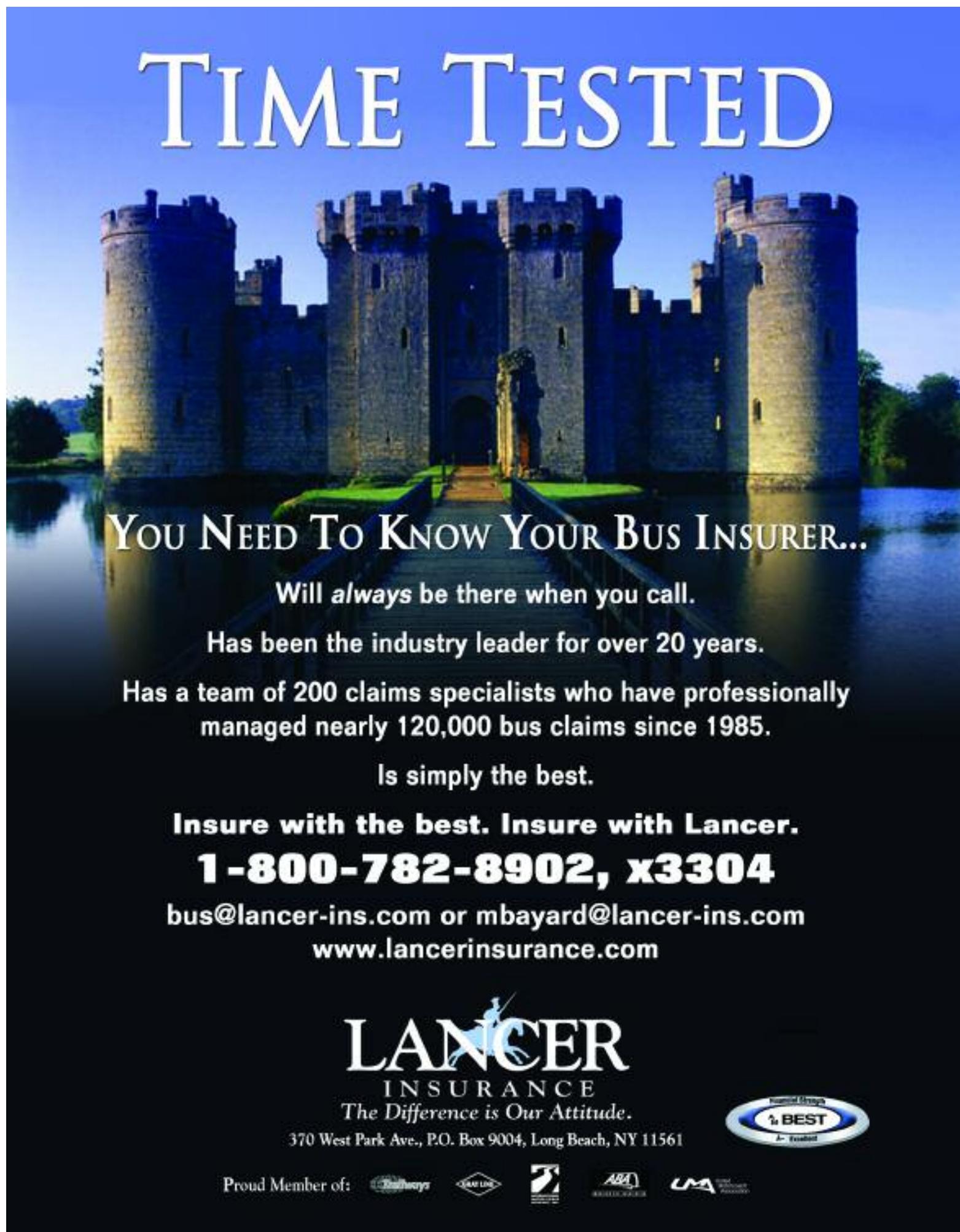
ELK GROVE VILLAGE, Ill. — Penray has reformulated its Winter Pow-R Plus BioDiesel fuel treatment with additives designed to help improve cetane, lubricity and fuel economy, as well as reduce emissions.

"Biodiesel is here and Penray's new Winter Pow-R Plus BioDiesel fuel treatment provides the best solution in the industry," said Joel Gresmer, national sales manager of Penray.

The fuel treatment is ultra-low-sulfur diesel compliant, and formulated to work in B2 to B20 biodiesel.

Penray says its fuel additive improves cold weather starting by preventing fuel gelling and ice crystal formation, reduces cold filter plug point by as much as 30 degrees Fahrenheit, stabilizes fuel, and prevents corrosion.

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



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Charter rules

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

However, he said the committee wants to study them in more detail before issuing a final verdict on how well they can be expected to prevent publicly funded transit agencies from competing for charter work with private motorcoach carriers.

The rules and supplementary information run to 45 pages of small type in the Federal Register.

Last, best hope

Private bus companies and public transit agencies have been at odds for two decades over complaints by coach operators that many transit managers ignore the current charter service regulations and use buses paid for with taxpayer money to unfairly compete for charters. The transit agencies maintain they are filling a public need for transportation in their communities.

"We got a lot of what we wanted, but I believe we could have gotten more," said American Bus Association Senior Vice President Clyde Hart, adding that operators should review the rules soon because requests to reconsider any of them must be filed with the FTA by Feb. 13. "This won't happen again for a lot of years and this is our best shot to get as much as we can," said Hart.

The revamping of the rules is the first done by the federal government since 1988.

The ABA announced late last month it "will likely file" a petition for reconsideration but it did not spell out what it wants changed.

Mike Waters of Coach America/Franciscan Lines in San Francisco said it appears to him the private coach industry got much of what it needed, although there still could be some issues. "But overall, we all are fairly happy with what we got."

Waters was one of several coach operators that served on a joint public-private negotiating committee that worked for months to come up with charter rules recommendations for the FTA.

Positive FTA approach

James Seal, a consultant who has worked with the California Bus Association and is an expert on charter service regulations, said he was encouraged by what he termed the "positive position" the FTA displayed in trying to find ways to prevent public transit agencies from taking away high-value charter service from private carriers.

"This will mean a much stronger footing for private operators to preserve this market," he added.

Most of the changes the FTA made to its initial proposal came from the more than 300 comments it received last year following the release of the first version of the new rules in February.

Significant among them was the addition of the word "exclusivity" — called "closed door" service by many in the bus business — to the formal definition of charter service. The word is part of the definition in the existing rules, but was eliminated in the first version of the new rules.

Transit agencies wanted it back in

because they often used it as a loophole to perform charter service. They simply extended or modified some of their regular routes to provide charter service for a special event, and then maintained that the work was not charter service because the routes were "open door" and were not run exclusively to serve people attending the events.

While the FTA agreed to restore use of the word in the rules, it also made another significant change that appears to trump transit agencies using "exclusivity" as a loophole.

It added a provision that permits transit agencies to set up temporary or irregular routes to provide transportation services to events but only if they charge their regular bus fare. If they charge a "premium" rate, or if a third party such as the event sponsors subsidize all or part of the routes, the runs are considered charter and must be performed by a private charter company.

"This could work in our favor," noted Presley.

Changes clarified

Another major change involved a provision that, for the first time, allows public transit agencies to provide charter service to government officials on government business. The initial proposal limited such charter work to 80 hours a year. Under the change, transit agencies will be able to petition the FTA for permission to extend those hours under extenuating circumstances.

The FTA also modified its view on allowing transit agencies in rural settings to do charter work under certain circumstances.

The initial provision identified them as being located in "non-urbanized areas" and said they could provide regular charters if a private company imposed minimum trip duration or have deadhead time that exceeded the total trip length.

Under the revised version, rural operators were listed as those in "small urbanized areas under 200,000 population" and said they could do regular charter work if the private company's deadhead time was longer than the charter trip. The minimum trip time was removed, which could make it easier for a private company to get the charter work.

Seal said he's concerned that some rural transit agencies that receive 5311 and 5310 federal funds may believe they are exempt from the charter rules, partially because of the way a question was worded in a question and answer portion of materials it issued with the new rules. "Nothing could be further from the truth," he stressed.

Most of the other rules remained as they were in the initial proposal.

Important Website

They will require motorcoach operators to register on a new FTA Website to be eligible for charter work offered by transit agencies, and the transit agencies will be required to notify registered operators by e-mail when they announce a charter service opportunity.

Seal noted that the use of the Web probably will require special training sessions to teach operators how to use the system effectively.

FTA tackles tough semantic job, defining what is 'charter service'

A key provision of the new charter service rules is the definition of "charter service."

For 20 years, the definition of charter service has been at the heart of the dispute between public transit agencies and private operators.

The two sides — even in months-long, across-the-table negotiations — could not agree on what service by public transit agencies should be considered charter service.

After wrestling with the issue on an almost continuing basis since May 2006, and for years before that, FTA attorneys and administrators have come up with a definition that on its face appears to be the best ever.

Here is how the new regulations define charter service as it applies to public transit agencies:

"'Charter service' means, but does not include demand-response service to individuals:

"(1) Transportation provided by a recipient (transit agency that receives FTA money) at the request of a third party for the exclusive use of a bus or van for a negotiated price. The following features may be characteristic of charter service:

"(i) A third party pays the transit provider a negotiated price for the group;

"(ii) Any fares charged to individual members of the group are collected by a third party;

"(iii) The service is not part of the transit provider's regularly scheduled service, or is offered for a limited period of time; or

"(iv) A third party determines the origin and destination of the trip as well as scheduling; or

"(2) Transportation provided by a recipient to the public for events or functions that

occur on an irregular basis or for a limited duration, and:

"(i) A premium fare is charged that is greater than the usual or customary fixed-route fare; or

"(ii) The service is paid for in whole or in part by a third party."

A couple of examples will illustrate the effectiveness of this definition:

Community leaders want the local transit agency to provide bus service for attendees at a PGA golf tournament that is to be held at a local course. The charter definition would preclude such service on several grounds:

- The tournament organizers had a hand in determining the route.

- The route is not part of the transit agency's regularly scheduled service.

- The route is dropped after the tournament.

- The tournament organizers subsidize the service.

- The transit agency charges more than its normal \$1 or \$1.25 fare.

Or, the city is hosting a convention or other special event at the local convention center or arena. The city wants the local transit agency to run shuttles to and from the event. The service probably would be precluded unless:

- Any Joe Sixpack can hop on and off the buses, using the service.

- The shuttle covers a regularly scheduled route.

- The normal fare is charged.

- The service continues after the convention or event ends.

- The group hosting the convention or event had zero input into determining the service, and didn't give the transit agency any money for providing the service.

In addition, private operators and transit agencies will be able to seek advisory opinions from the FTA if they question whether a pending charter service can be performed by a transit agency. Also, private operators will be able to seek cease-and-desist orders before the work is done if they question a transit agency's right to do a certain charter.

Most of the rules were developed by the Charter Bus Negotiated Rulemaking Advisory Committee, which was made up of representatives from private motorcoach companies, transit agencies, trade groups and others who met monthly between May and December 2006. Issues on which the advisory committee was unable to reach consensus were decided by the FTA based on the exchanges that took place during the meetings.

The rules were published in the Jan. 14 issue of the Federal Register. The best way to find the rules is to go to the FTA web site. Go to www.fta.dot.gov/laws/leg_reg_179.html.

Learning the system

That page not only has one-click links to the rules but also to the proposed "Regis-

tration Website" where private operators will sign up to get charter service notes from public transit agencies. Operators should begin familiarizing themselves with the Website because it will become critically important in the future.

There also is a "Q&A" link on the FTA Web page. Some who have read the new rules say that going through the questions and answers is a good way to get an overview and sense of the rules and many of its elements.

After reading the Q&A, operators should be better prepared to tackle the complete rules, leaving the long supplementary information and background for last. However, the supplementary information is instructive because it spells out how the FTA came up with the rules and its analysis of all of the input it got from public transit administrators, private operators and others. Some of the stuff from the transits likely will make many private operators' blood boil.

Letters seeking further changes to the final rule, or what the FTA calls "Petitions for Reconsideration" must be filed with the agency by Feb. 13.

Transit agency ordered to stop charter services

CHICAGO — A Wisconsin transit agency has been ordered to halt its limited charter operations after federal regulators found that its annual charter service notice was deficient.

Janesville (Wis.) Transit System had been accused — in a complaint filed by the United Motorcoach Association with the Federal Transit Administration — of illegally requiring private carriers interested in doing charter work to have two-door urban transit-type buses equipped with air conditioning and a wheelchair ramp.

While the transit agency denied it was in violation of the federal charter service rules, FTA Regional Administrator Marisol Simon found that the charter notice was improper and ordered the agency to halt any “impermissible” charter service that it had been doing. The charters involved transporting city officials and city employees.

In the eyes of the FTA, when it comes to charter service notices, public transit agencies can only specify buses or vans. Not particular types of buses.

Meanwhile, a handful of other transit agencies that found themselves in hot water with the FTA last year after UMA, private carriers and others filed charter service rules complaints against them are cleaning up their acts this year.

Three transit agencies have announced they will not be doing any charter work this year. According to UMA, the three are City of Rome (Ga.) Transit Department, Pee-Dee Regional Transportation Authority in Florence, S.C., and the Virginia Regional Transit Administration in Purcellville, Va.,

“UMA forced us to do it,” said VRTA Chief Executive Mark Mc-

Gregor, referring to a charter service rules violation complaint the trade association filed with the FTA.

He said the transit agency now refers all telephone calls it gets from the public inquiring about possible charter service to its Website where there are links to three private carriers they can hire.

“We don’t even recommend anyone any more.”

McGregor said the decision not to do any charters has resulted in a rash of complaints from residents, many of them upset over not being able to afford private carrier prices for short charter trips.

Kathy Shealy, director of transit

operations in Rome, said her agency has received similar complaints from city residents who were upset when told the agency cannot provide them with charter service. “They can’t understand why they can’t use our service for small jobs,” she said. “And, it is a hardship on city government offi-

cials who can’t use us either.”

She said the agency would consider a charter job only if it were under a contract with a private carrier, no other charter company was interested in doing the work, and the job met FTA rules. “We know the rules and regulations and we follow them,” she added.



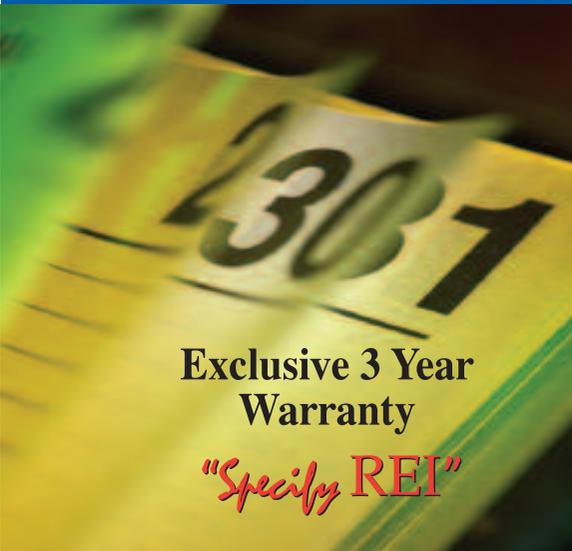
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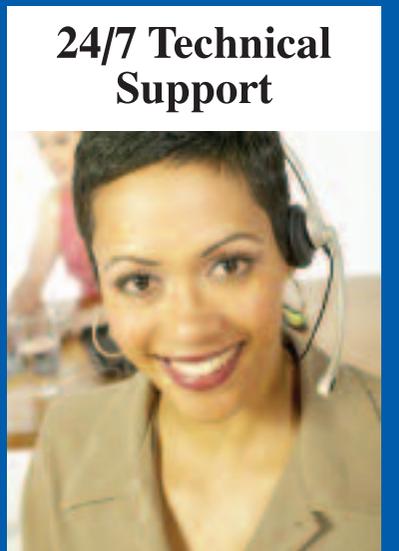
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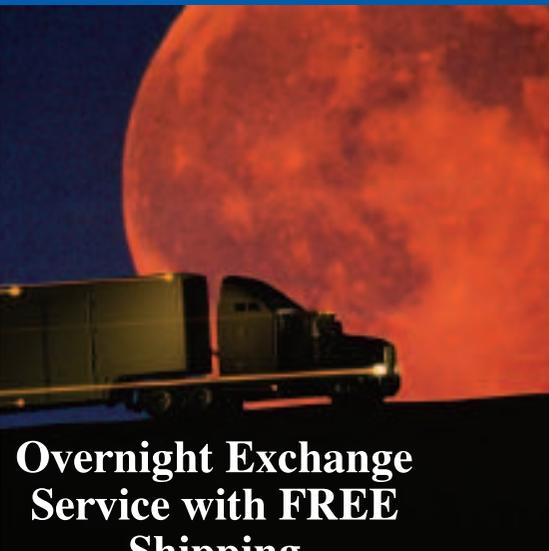
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People

Larry Hundt, president of Canadian Trailways in Kitchener, Ont., has been added to the board of directors of the Trailways Transportation System. Hundt is a midterm replacement, with his interim term expiring at the end of this year.

Hundt began his 35-year motorcoach industry career while a student at the University of Waterloo, running weekend bus shuttles for students wanting to go into Toronto. Eventually, he built his own company, which today has a fleet of 41 motorcoaches.

Hundt is eager for Trailways and other bus companies to emphasize the green aspects of motorcoach operations with government officials and consumers.

MOTORCOACH EXPO 2008

Greyhound Lines orders 50 Prevost X3-45 coaches

SAN FRANCISCO — In a seismic shift of near-San Francisco proportions, Greyhound Lines has confirmed it has ordered 50 Prevost X3-45 coaches that it will put into regular line-run service.

The order is the first significant new coach purchase by Greyhound in a half-dozen years, and seemingly further distances Greyhound from MCI, whose buses Greyhound used almost exclusively for nearly 15 years before purchasing a total of 13 C2045 Van Hools in 2004 and 2006.

Greyhound has roughly 1,250 MCIs in its fleet, the most recent being 290 G4500 models that were purchased early in this decade.

Since then, and except for the Van Hools, Greyhound has relied on refurbishing its MC-12 and D-model MCIs to keep its fleet updated.

That is about the change with the addition of the Prevost X3-45s.

Industry sources say delivery of the new coaches is scheduled to begin in the spring, and there is the possibility of additional coach orders in the future.

Greyhound spokesman Dustin Clark, who confirmed the purchase, said he could not comment on whether there would be future purchases.

The Greyhound Prevosts will be wheelchair-lift accessible, equipped with Amaya seating for 56 passengers, and have fire suppression systems.

Greyhound reportedly picked the X3-45 because its height is more than 12 inches less than the more popular H3-45 Prevost.

Prevost executives attending UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month declined to comment on the Greyhound order, and Clark demurred when asked to expand on other aspects of the purchase.

Meanwhile, Prevost unveiled several new features at Motorcoach Expo, including an electronic stability control program, with roll-over and under/over-steer protection.

Also new is Prevost Liaison, an advanced vehicle management system that uses wireless technology and the internet to connect fleet operators with coaches and drivers anytime, anywhere.

And, borrowing a page from the auto industry, Prevost has developed a new steering wheel that puts an array of controls at the driver's fingertips.

Controls used frequently by drivers — such as cruise control, shifting, engine brake, pneumatic or electric horn, and electric sun



50 Prevost X3-45 coaches will soon be sporting Greyhound's signature livery.

visor — have been moved to the steering wheel.

Those controls that might be shared — with a tour director, for example — are located to the driver's right, for access by either. A pneumatic steering column and angled steering wheel keep recessed dials readable regardless of wheel position.

The Prevost Liaison system continuously monitors coach electronic systems including the

engine, transmission, vehicle controller, ABS system, diesel particulate filter, electronic stability program and other components using an onboard control unit.

If the system encounters an active fault code for a significant length of time, it transmits critical data via satellite to either the Prevost Action Service System, Prevost's round-the-clock 24/7 roadside assistance service, or directly to the fleet owner's office,

PDA, or electronic device such as a BlackBerry.

Prevost Liaison's Sentry package is standard for two years on new coaches equipped with Volvo D13 engines. It monitors driver and vehicle performance, producing a variety of reports. Location reports, for instance, let operators see the entire route history of each coach they operate. Weekly reports can track fuel use, distance traveled,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ►

Double-Deck Delight

Van Hool sees eager market for two-level coaches

SAN FRANCISCO — The Van Hool intercity double-decker coach has been on the road in the United States for less than six months but already is becoming a big hit in the motorcoach industry.

ABC Companies, which distributes the TD925 touring coach in North America, said orders have been coming in at a steady pace since September when megabus.com introduced them on some of its Midwest express runs out of Chicago.

The company has new orders for upwards of 50 of the 81-seat buses and interest continues to rise, according to John Oakman, who spearheads the TD925 program for ABC Companies and who has been driving a demonstrator model around the country. He made a stop here for last month's UMA Motorcoach Expo where the bus

was a feature at the ABC convention-floor booth.

New buyers include a Las Vegas operator who ordered 15 for tourist runs to the Grand Canyon, operators in the northeastern U.S. who picked up 8 and two others, in Virginia and Miami, who purchased two each.

In addition, megabus.com, which started the run with 18 buses, has ordered another 18.

Oakman said the coach draws so much attention on the road that he has given up stopping for coffee on his visits around the country because so many people come out to look at it and what to clamor on board.

Dale Moser of Coach USA and megabus.com said his customers have had nothing but nice things to say about the bus, testimony that helped the company decide to dou-

ble the number for its fleet.

In fact, he said, on at least one occasion customers who rode one of the double-deck buses on a trip were upset when a traditional coach was used for their return trip. "They didn't want to get on the other coach," he said.

The TD925 has front and rear staircases, ADA access, seatbelts in every seat, TV monitors, backup cameras and upper-deck cameras. It has a Cummins engine and a ZF AS-tronic 12-speed automatic.

ABC Companies announced at Expo that it has partnered with Saucon Technologies to offer its fleet tracking and communication system, the Saucon TDS.

The system uses Web, wireless and telemetry technologies to help operators manage and monitor many critical activities associated

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 ►

Setra says it had record \$ 417 coach sales in '07

SAN FRANCISCO — Daimler Buses North America reports record sales of its Setra S 417 motorcoach last year, despite an industrywide decline in sales.

The company sold 136 units in 2007, a 10 percent gain from previous year sales, according to Andreas Strecker, president and chief executive of the Greensboro, N.C., company that sells Setra motorcoaches, Orion transit buses and Sprinter shuttles.

The increase in sales came at the same time motorcoach sales in the United States fell by about 300 units, dropping to just under 2,200 last year from nearly 2,400 in 2006.

"We're very optimistic we will set another record in 2008," he said during a press conference at UMA Motorcoach Expo here.

To meet the expected sales gain, Strecker said he expects Daimler shareholders to infuse

more money into the company so production can be increased.

Patrick Scully, chief commercial officer of Daimler Bus North America, joined in the optimism, pointing out the company has sold out its first six months of production.

To bolster customer service and keep up with the increased number of Setra coaches on the road, Daimler Buses opened a service center in New York last year that's equipped to service all of the company's products.

The company also continued its practice of bringing to the floor of the trade show two coaches that had been sold and turning them over to their new owners. This year's S 417 coaches went to Arrow Stage Lines of Omaha, Neb., and ProTran in Fort Washington, Md.

The Arrow coach included a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ►

MOTORCOACH EXPO 2008

Strategic partnership is arranged between UMA, BusRates.com

SAN FRANCISCO — The United Motorcoach Association and BusRates.com have announced a strategic partnership that will allow UMA operator members to join BusRates.com at reduced rates.

The partnership is expected to help UMA members grow their businesses because of the proven lead generating capabilities of BusRates.com, while the deal will provide BusRates.com with additional resources that will help it achieve wider market and internet penetration.

The partnership was announced at the opening session of UMA Motorcoach Expo here late last month.

BusRates.com, which was founded four years ago by company president Mark Greer, strives to be the most current, complete and categorized database of charter bus companies available on the internet.

It is a leading resource for anyone needing to charter a bus but it is particularly valuable to the travel professional, offering help on all aspects motorcoach chartering.

Currently, upwards of 80,000 visitors and more than \$20 million in potential charter work pass through the BusRates.com Website monthly.

“Partnering with BusRates.com will bring greater exposure to UMA operators, as well as help inform customers of the fact that UMA operators are typically higher in quality than other bus companies,” said UMA President and CEO Victor Parra.

“UMA operators that decide to

post on the BusRates.com site should receive a windfall of new customers at a cost that could be considered a steal,” Parra added.

Aside from delivering more business to UMA-member bus companies, the partnership also should help advance the cause of making the bus chartering experience better for customers, said Greer.

“Increased reach on the internet, as well as increased consumer awareness will point more customers towards quality UMA operators and make the customers’ experience better for them,” he said.

And, from the bus owner’s perspective, “one way to reduce unpaid trips and increase communication with the customer is to work with your customers directly, and that is truly the underlying mutual goal of this partnership,” Greer added.

Working directly with customers is one of the hallmarks of BusRates.com. Unlike bus brokers, which frequently attempt to keep customers as far away from the bus operator as possible, BusRates.com directly links bus companies and potential customers. It is for that reason and others that BusRates.com is held in such high regard by hundreds of coach operators.

“The partnership creates an additional incentive for bus companies to join UMA,” said Greer. “Non-members that post on BusRates.com will want to be able to display the UMA membership logo to attract customers. Increased UMA membership will improve

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ▶



Eight coaches on display at UMA Motorcoach Expo were outfitted with signage promoting the Green Operators Council ‘Go Coach’ message.

‘Go Coach’ is the message

Operators launch national marketing initiative

SAN FRANCISCO — A grassroots effort to develop a generic marketing program — based on the “green” aspects of motorcoach travel — that virtually all coach operators could participate in was officially launched at UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month.

The 11 operators from across the U.S. who are fostering and promoting the idea plan to form a non-profit industry marketing council with a mission to build and execute a public awareness campaign that emphasizes the environmental benefits of coach travel.

The idea is as simple as this: Motorcoaches take people out of

cars, reducing emissions, congestion and fuel consumption. And the industry needs to stand up and inform people of that fact because no one else will.

By doing that the industry stands a good chance of convincing many people to park their autos and hop on board a bus for at least part of their travel.

And one easy and cost-effective way to promote the industry and its environmental message is to put a common graphic on the back (or sides) of as many motorcoaches as possible and direct people to a Website that tells the industry story and builds awareness that riding a

motorcoach is smart and painless environmental activism.

Todd Holland of Ramblin Express in Colorado Springs is acting as spokesman for the 11 operators who have formed the Green Operators Motor Coach Council and he announced the initiative at a press event at Motorcoach Expo.

“You will be hearing more and more about the Green Operators Motor Coach Council, GOCoch, and its Website — GOCoch.org ... in coming months throughout our industry,” said Holland.

“With the gracious initial support of MCI, and very soon after

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ▶

Feds eye new technologies to bolster coach safety

SAN FRANCISCO — Federal transportation safety officials are looking to high-tech equipment to help keep motorcoach travel the safest mode of transportation in the United States

And they suggest motorcoach operators do the same.

That was the word from National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Mark Rosenker and Federal Motor Carrier Safety

Administration Deputy Administrator Dave Hugel who called on operators to give serious consideration to the array of electronic equipment now on the market that can help prevent accidents.

The two delivered their recommendations in speeches last month on the opening day of the UMA Motorcoach Expo here.

“It costs a little more but what you get is a payback a million times

over,” said Rosenker, pointing to such equipment as collision warning systems, electronic stability controls and rollover stability devices.

He said the NTSB, which investigates transportation accidents and makes safety recommendations to federal regulators, feels so strongly about technology playing a major role in highway safety that it recently added the use of high-tech

equipment to its “most wanted” list.

Hugel agreed on the importance of using high-tech equipment on motorcoaches and urged operators attending Expo to spend time on the convention floor examining some of the equipment that vendors were featuring.

“I join with Chairman Rosenker and urge you to look at it and see what we can do to improve this

already safe industry,” Hugel said.

Rosenker, who became NTSB chairman in 2006, said his agency is determined to help the motorcoach industry remain safe by finding the cause of bus crashes and making recommendations that it believes could prevent similar accidents from occurring in the future.

“Our objective here is not to do just accident investigations, but to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ▶



Louis Hotard



Marcia Milton



Gladys Gillis



Darren Berg



Doug Hansen



Tom Goebel



Greg Lammers

Coach operators are honored at gala Vision Awards

SAN FRANCISCO — The 2008 UMA Motorcoach Expo marked a milestone last month with the 5th annual Vision Awards Banquet held to honor the motorcoach industry's best-and-brightest operators.

One of the highlights of the evening was the awarding of the inaugural Green Highway Award, which was created by Motor Coach Industries and UMA to recognize the positive environmental aspects of motorcoach travel by honoring an operator that demonstrates an aggressive commitment to "green stewardship."

Other high points included recognizing ABC Companies for endowing the Clancy Cornell School of Business within the Bus & Motorcoach Academy. Cornell was acknowledged for his life-long dedication and contributions to the bus industry.

Rob Lucas, senior vice president of the March of Dimes, recognized Trailways, Motor Coach Industries and the United Motorcoach Association for their strong support of this past fall's "Every Baby Has a Story" national bus tour.

The '08 Vision Awards Banquet was conducted in the historic Bill Graham Civic Auditorium, which has been a prime venue for legendary musicians for decades, as well as the site of the 1920 Democratic National Convention and the home of the NBA San Francisco Warriors in the mid-1960s.

The civic center is perhaps best known for hosting performances by great rock stars of the past three decades, including Jimmy Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jefferson Airplane, the Rolling Stones, the Grateful Dead, and Journey.

For the motorcoach industry, the Vision Awards Banquet has become the premier event for hon-



oring coach operators, and the social highlight of UMA Motorcoach Expo. It is a festive evening, and invariably contains a few surprises.

This year's most unwelcome surprise was a San Francisco street person who decided to crash the party and enliven the evening by walking to the middle of the room and ranting incoherently about contemporary social issues. He was politely thrown out. Only in San Francisco.

In his remarks, UMA President and CEO Victor Parra thanked those attending for making UMA Motorcoach Expo 2008 the best-attended show ever, complemented by record exhibitor displays on the Expo show floor.

The next day, a record amount of exhibitor space was reserved for UMA Motorcoach Expo 2009 in Orlando.

Six major industry awards were presented during the Vision banquet. Here are the winners:

UMA Safety Leader of the

Year: Louis Hotard, director of technical services for ABC Companies. Hotard, who comes from a distinguished motorcoach industry family, has quietly but effectively supported industry safety initiatives and programs for years through his job, the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance and other activities and organizations.

In accepting the award, presented by Matthew Daecher of Daecher Consulting Group, Hotard admitted to suffering from CBIS, or chronic bus industry syndrome, a little-publicized affliction whose symptoms include a life-long commitment to improving motorcoach safety and performance.

BusRide Motorcoach Industry Achievement Award: Marcia Milton, president and founder of First Priority Trailways of District Heights, Md.

Metro Magazine Motorcoach Operator of the Year: Gladys Gillis, chief executive of Starline Luxury Coaches of Seattle.

Green Highway Award, spon-

sored by Motor Coach Industries.

MTR Western of Seattle. In presenting the inaugural award, Patricia Ziska, MCI vice president and chief customer officer, said MTR Western and its president and founder, Darren Berg, had taken an industry leading role in promoting the green benefits of motorcoach travel, as well as set an example of corporate environmental stewardship.

MTR Western was founded in 2002 and is the 17th largest motorcoach operator in the U.S., according to *Metro Magazine*, with a fleet of 145 coaches. Among its green initiatives is a Website, www.itsgoodtobegreen.com, that communicates the company's environmental initiatives.

UMA Vision Award/Small Operator (fewer than 15 coaches): Paradise Trailways of Hicksville, N.Y., and its general manager Doug Hansen. Hansen and Paradise Trailways, which operates 10 coaches, played a key role in the development of this past fall's high-

ly publicized March of Dimes national "Every Baby Has a Story" bus tour that crisscrossed the U.S. (See Nov. 1 and Nov. 15 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

UMA Vision Award/Large Operator (15 or more coaches): Lakefront Trailways of Brookpark, Ohio, and its president, Thomas Goebel and vice president, Jack Goebel. Lakefront is the largest operator in Ohio and the 20th largest in the U.S. with a fleet of nearly 120 motorcoaches.

UMA Treasurer Jeff Polzien, who chairs the association's Vision Awards Committee, said both Paradise Trailways and Lakefront Trailways distinguish themselves by their operations and community involvement.

The Maintenance Interchange Maintenance Competition

was conducted for the second year in a row. Those individuals attending the interchange were invited to participate in a competition involving a written test and a timed diagnostic inspection. The competition was conducted at Coach America/Franciscan Lines maintenance facilities in San Francisco.

The winner was Greg Lammers of Cavalier Coaches in Owatonna, Minn. Lammers is the fleet manager at Cavalier and has been with the company for 31 years. He was awarded a plaque and \$500 by Kevin Whitworth of Whitworth Bus in Dayton, Ohio, who coordinates the Maintenance Interchange and Maintenance Competition.

Tying as runners-up in the competition were Steve Tesconi, director of maintenance at Royal Coach Tours of San Jose, Calif., and Craig Fong, foreman, for Coach America/Franciscan Lines. Tesconi has been with Royal Tours for nine years, while Fong has been with Franciscan Lines for 15 years.

BusRates.com

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

the association's ability to represent the industry in Washington, as well as in the discovery of new ways to deliver better service."

In the days following the announcement, Greer said he spoke with operators who had misgivings

about the partnership. "So much for BusRates.com being a hidden gem," one operator told Greer.

"There appears to be concern among currently posting members on BusRates.com that inviting the other members to join will dilute their current traffic levels. There is no reason for concern because as the number of advertisers increas-

es, so does the amount of traffic.

"A random company in Atlanta that received 19 quote requests in September of 2007, received 13 the year before for the same month and 7 the year before that in 2005.

"More advertisers also makes the site more informative and useful to its visitors which would increase usage and return rates —

another way to increase customers without paying for more traffic," Greer explained.

"Partnering with UMA helps make BusRates.com the best site it can be for customers. It is also worth noting, that neither UMA nor BusRates.com is intended to create competition among bus owning companies. Rather it was created as

a collaborative effort to work together.

"As a marketing alliance, together we can advertise head to head with national broker outfits on the internet, and get the word out to customers that the advertising slogans used by brokers — "At no cost to you" and "We are not brokers" — are completely false."

20 Groups' innovator finds plenty of support at Expo

SAN FRANCISCO — Business consultant Duane Spader gets pretty excited when he talks about 20 Groups.

And, with good reason.

That's because members of the United Motorcoach Association, who are taking part in one of the several 20 Groups he developed for the trade organization in the past two years, regularly tell him that joining a 20 Group is the best thing they have ever done for their businesses.

For Spader, that's just about all he needs to hear to get him going, spreading the word to other motorcoach operators who might benefit from the same experiences.

"There has never been a 20 Group meeting that I have gone to that I did not learn something new," he said in one of his high-octane presentations at the UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month.

He told a luncheon group at the conference that joining a group can help them better understand their business so they can make better decisions to help grow their operation.

20 Groups involve 20 non-competing companies getting together at each others businesses, on a rotating basis, for two-day meetings three times a year to exchange financial information and discuss business problems and solutions.

The owners, who also trade reports each month on a very confidential basis, can learn how their businesses stand up against similar operations, including showing where they are weak and where they are strong.

"You can see what you're good at and what you need to concentrate on," Spader said.

For small companies that do not have the time or money to invest in a full 20 Group, Spader has developed mini 20 Groups that brings together 10 operators who conduct their meetings via conference telephone calls rather than attend out-of-town meetings.

Spader, founder of The Spader Companies in Sioux Falls, S.D., said members frequently are tentative at the outset about sharing financial information, but feel comfortable about it after two or three months, especially when they begin seeing the benefits.

"It's almost like joining a nudist camp for the first time," he said.

Members of the 20 Groups stress the system and process really does work and they urge others

to look into joining one.

"I knew what my costs were, but not what they were supposed to be," said Jack Wigley of All Aboard America! in Mesa, Ariz. "The 20 Group allows me to see what they are supposed to be."

Gladys Gilles of Starline

Luxury Coaches in Seattle, said the 20 Group showed her how to build a business that could run without her being there.

"It is the best thing our business and our family have ever done," added Autum Dipert Brown of Dan Dipert Coaches in the

Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Others have stressed that after each meeting, they bring something home they can quickly implement in their own businesses and they learn something useful every time their 20 Group gets together.



Duane Spader



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Reported by American transport companies that installed collision warning systems.

** <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/facts-research/research-technology/report/forward-collision-warning-systems.htm>. ** <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/facts-research/research-technology/report/lane-departure-warning-systems.htm>



The show floor at Motorcoach Expo '08 was a beehive during much of event, with lots of activity Thursday and Friday at the booths of coach manufacturers.



The Welcome Reception at Motorcoach Expo is the first chance most attendees get to renew old friendships or meet new people. Daniel Wagner of Holdsworth Fabrics, center left in blue shirt, was among those on hand.



ABC Companies' new chief operating officer Tom DeMatteo, left, enjoys a laugh with recently retired ABC executive Chuck Avery, center, and Hugo de Roo of Van Hool, N.Y.



A 'cool' Victor Parra, president and CEO of the United Motorcoach Association, kicked off the Expo Vision Awards Banquet by harkening back to the peace-and-love days of San Francisco in the late 1960s-early 1970s and the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium where the banquet was held.



Comparing notes with Canadian operators John Wilson of Wilson's Transportation in Victoria, B.C., left, and Brendan McCullough of McCullough Coach Lines, also in Victoria, center, was Brian Crow, president and CEO of Motor Coach Canada and the Ontario Motor Coach Association.



Bill Bergstrom of Coach America and Jeff Jensen of Aon, a risk management, reinsurance and consulting company, talk prior to the start of an Expo educational session.



Education session attendees George Childers of Magic Carpet Ride in Vero Beach, Fla., left, and Mike and Becky Sellers of Texoma Tours in Sherman, Texas, engage in a lively discussion.



Mitch Guralnick of MCI, left, joins MCI CEO Tom Sorrells and his wife Shari at the Vision Awards Banquet. As the long-time chairman of UMA's Meetings Committee, Guralnick plays a key role in the success of Motorcoach Expo.



Bob Lynch, left, and Jim Morgan of Saddle River Tours in Wallington, N.J., focus on presenter during Expo session.

Attracting new customers is seen as key to success

SAN FRANCISCO — Motorcoach operators face tough business challenges every day.

None, though, may be more important for long-term success than getting new people on board their buses.

That was the consensus of three veteran and successful operators who participated in a wide-ranging discussion on the future of the industry at the opening session of last month's UMA Motorcoach Expo here.

Dave Bolen of New World Tours in Bristow, Va.; Dale Moser of Coach USA and megabus.com in Chicago, and Jack Wigley of All Aboard America! in Mesa, Ariz., stressed the importance of attracting new customers rather than simply trying to win over another carrier's riders.

"The value is in those hundreds of millions of people in cars and planes," Moser stressed, adding he would rather have 5 percent of those than 50 percent of somebody else's business.

The low-cost intercity service that megabus.com began offering in the Midwest in 2006, and



Dave Bolen

expanded to the West Coast last year, was built on getting people to take the bus for short city-to-city trips rather than drive their cars or fly commercial airlines.

Wigley emphasized that the motorcoach industry today is about making first-time riders, as well as those who have not ridden for many years, aware of what contemporary bus travel is all about. "It would blow them away," he said.

Bolen agreed and said one of the keys to attracting new customers and retaining existing clients is by finding out what they want out



Dale Moser

of a motorcoach experience.

It was that approach, he said, that helped convince him to introduce high-tech entertainment and communications equipment on his coaches that offers a wide variety of services ranging from making reservations for a restaurant just down the road, to purchasing tickets for a play or sports event being held in a city two days away.

Finding out what customers want and then setting up and adjusting the business to meet those needs also has played a major role in the success of megabus.com,



Jack Wigley

according to Moser. He said it was customer input that helped the company decide to make its reservations and ticket purchases available only on the Internet.

The three panelists suggested, too, that promoting motorcoach travel is becoming increasingly more important and operators should consider new ways to market their businesses to win over new riders and bolster revenues.

"And once we get them on the bus, I guarantee that they'll be back," maintained Moser.

The discussion also tackled

other challenges operators should be prepared to address.

Among them was making sure that as job duties change and expand, all of their employees continue to work as a team and help move the company forward.

"Some employees will embrace change and others won't," said Bolen, who told of a former driver who refused to learn how to operate the new electronic equipment on his buses.

The problem turned positive, however, because the driver had to be replaced during the middle of one trip by a driver who knew how to use the equipment. His knowledge impressed the passengers so much they have become return customers.

"It started out as a complaint but turned into a compliment," said Bolen.

The panel presentation, which has become an established feature of Motorcoach Expo, was moderated by Victor Parra, president and CEO of UMA, and Steve Klika, president of International Motor Coach Group of Overland Park, Kan.

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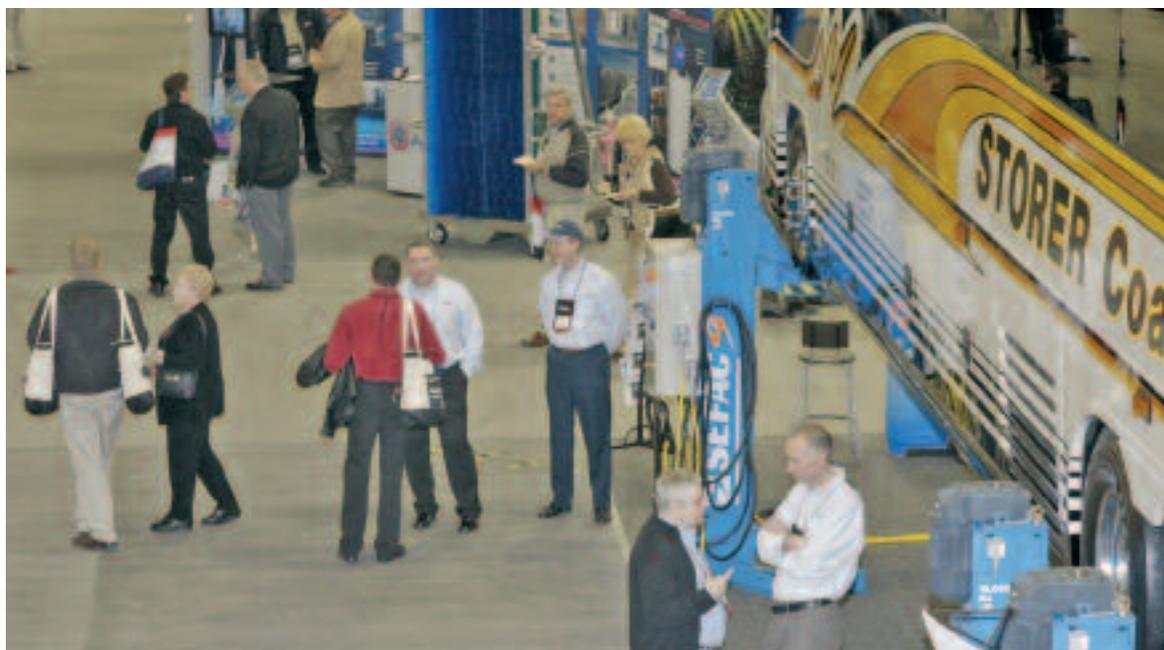
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The expansive show floor at Motorcoach Expo '08 allowed demonstrations of every sort, including the portable lifts brought in by SEFAC, maker of mobile column lifts.

Clancy Cornell, chairman of ABC Companies, seated left, signed copies of a new book that recounts the history of ABC and the Cornell family. Shaking hands with Cornell is Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City. Polzien also is secretary of the United Motorcoach Association.



Participants in the annual Expo Maintenance Interchange, conducted by Kevin Whitworth of Whitworth Bus in Dayton, Ohio, listen intently as a maintenance issue is discussed.



To mark its 70th year in business, long-time coach industry supplier Radio Engineering Industries, better known simply as REI, had a Van Hool coach wrapped with a celebratory message.

California emissions crackdown for buses begins in October '08

SAN FRANCISCO — California clean air officials who have been introducing regulations governing diesel engines for a wide range of vehicles over the past seven years, have finally reached motorcoaches.

The Air Resource Board in October plans to adopt motorcoach emission standards for particulate matter and oxides of nitrogen that will be phased in over a 13-year period beginning in 2010.

Details of the introduction and the proposed regulations were presented to operators during the State Association Summit at UMA Motorcoach Expo last month.

"We need your help in understanding what these regulations are," said Tony Brasil, manger of the state board's in-use control measure section.

He urged California bus operators and others who visit the state to learn more about the rules by taking part in one of several workshops that will be held this month.

Meetings are scheduled for Feb. 4 in San Diego and El Centro, Feb. 6 in Redding and Feb. 11 in Berkeley. Information about the meetings, including some that will be Web cast, is available at <http://www.arb.ca.gov/msprog/onrdiesel/onrdiesel.htm>.

"The better you understand these rules, the better they will work," Brasil stressed.

In 2000, the board has been turning out new regulations for diesel-fueled vehicles ranging from urban buses, to garbage trucks, to off-road vehicles in an effort to bring the state into compliance with federal clean air regulations. The Los Angeles basin and California's Central Valley, which includes the San Francisco Bay area, are the only two metropolitan areas in the country that continually fall below government standards for ozone levels.

Under the regulations being proposed for motorcoaches, 1997

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Coach safety

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

do accident prevention so it will keep this industry the safest in the United States," he stressed.

Ironically, his remarks came only a few hours before a resort-owned motorcoach crashed and burned on Interstate 15 near Jean, Nev., injuring more than two dozen of its 40 passengers.

Hugel brought operators up to date on what motorcoach safety activities the FMCSA has been pursuing lately, including increasing the number of compliance reviews it conducts, establishing formal safety inspections in all 50 states, increasing data collection, and speeding up the number of audits it conducts of new carriers and others.

In addition, he said the agency is conducting studies on the causes of bus crashes and what impact driving hours have on driver fatigue.

The bus crash causation study, which has been underway in New Jersey for more than two years, is expected to be completed in May. The study involves examination of 39 crashes, including 19 in which the driver or bus was to blame and 10 in which the driver involved had out-of-service violations.



Mark Rosenker

Dave Hugel

The fatigue study is reviewing various driver schedules and hours behind the wheel to determine their impact on drivers.

Hugel also told operators the FMCSA has developed a pamphlet dealing with pre-trip safety guidelines that will help operators develop the messages the agency has recommended they give their passengers before each trip. The pamphlets are expected to be available from the agency sometime this month.

The operators also heard from Paul Pitzer, chief of the policy branch of the Transportation Security Administration, who urged them to always keep security issues in the forefront.

He said while they may be easy to forget, they are much like insurance, which is purchased in case of an accident. "Security is here 'just in case' something happens," he said.

Using internet wisely is valuable marketing strategy

SAN FRANCISCO — Mark Greer, founder of BusRates.com, the online database of charter bus companies, used internet statistics to make the point that a Website is critical to effectively marketing a motorcoach company.

Greer conducted an educational session, called "Maximizing Your Website," at UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month.

During his presentation, Greer provided tips and techniques for getting the most out of the internet as a business tool.

According to Greer, more than 80 percent of North American motorcoach operators have Websites and the companies that don't have one probably should.

On Google alone, there are 1.8 million bus-related searches each month.

Not all of the traffic comes from potential clients looking for a charter, but when a serious shopper comes along, the benefit of being a Web-savvy operator is having the ability to turn that browser into a paying client.

Greer said motorcoach operators can do that by:

- Providing plenty of pictures. Coach operators have plenty to show. Pictures of their buses, the interiors, the staff and the facility can add interest to a Website.

- Using FAB (feature-advantage-benefit) statements, rather than subjective statements. "Our drivers have more than 5 years of experience so they know how to ensure your trip will go smoothly." That looks and sounds much better than saying "We have great drivers."

- Avoiding selling on price. Operators should use their Websites to teach customers what to ask about safety and business practices, among other aspects of booking a charter.

Greer said operators can develop a strategy for bringing internet traffic to their Websites. There are three ways to do it:

- Organically. That is, putting up a Website and letting the search engines find your site (slow but free).

- Paying for placement on directory Websites like YellowPages.com (expensive but effective immediately)

- Optimizing a Website on high-ranking directories like Google or Yahoo (effectiveness varies).

Greer provided suggestions for getting the most out of each approach, including using the internet to evaluate traffic levels.

Once a Website has attracted a client, preliminary contact is occasionally made via e-mail. Greer emphasized that how an operator communicates electronically can make or break a deal. Some tips are:

- Invest in a professional e-mail domain. Having "john@smithchar-

ter.com" is much more professional than "smithcharter@aol.com," for example.

- Answer requests promptly and in sufficient detail to convince the customer you are serious about gaining their business.

- Prepare a standard e-mail response in the form of a letter that

includes the company letterhead or logo, and introduces your company and its services and amenities.

- Reassure the customer by providing your DOT number and your safety and insurance information.

- Make your response to their request a ready-to-sign proposal.

- Offer to answer any addition-

al questions they may have, and follow up if the customer does not respond within 7 days.

Greer's own company, BusRates.com, was established to help operators be successful by driving charter business in their direction through use of an online database.

A customer can search a loca-

tion for charter providers, then use the contact information provided and the customer and the operator can take it from there.

The United Motorcoach Association has formed a new partnership with BusRates.com to provide this service as a UMA member benefit. See article on page 12.

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Green operators

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ABC, Prevost and Setra, as well as industry and association leaders and vendors, a band of geographically and operationally diverse operators are in the process of establishing a nonprofit foundation, with the overriding, ongoing, long-term goal of promoting motorcoach travel to the public.

"Even a 1 or 2 percent increase in passengers and clients nationwide would tremendously benefit us all," said Holland.

"In the simplest sense, our vehicles take cars off of the roads," Holland continued. "We cater to commuters, travelers, charter and tour passengers, who would be driving or flying.

"Our industry is even 'greener' when considering the new engine technologies, alternative fuels and many other 'green' operational practices we can and will be doing in the future, such as carbon offset,

limited-idling, recycling and the like. "We envision future national awareness campaigns centered around motorcoach travel being safe, fun, and even luxurious, given the features and amenities our modern motorcoaches now have."

Holland said the Green Operators Motor Coach Council is not another trade association.

"Our industry has those bases covered, and we are moving forward with the full support and coordination of both UMA and ABA, as well as numerous state associations. Further, this is not in conflict with any other industry group and their own efforts to promote our industry and their respective members.

"International Motor Coach Group, Trailways and Motor Coach Canada, support and are involved in our preliminary efforts, and we anticipate engaging Gray Line, the National Association of Motorcoach Operators, the National Motorcoach Network, and all other



On hand for the announcement of the Green Operators Motor Coach Council was Steve Klika of International Motor Coach Group, left; Brian Annett of Annett Bus Lines, in red shirt; Joan Libby of Cavalier Coach Trailways, and Todd Holland of Ramblin Express in Colorado Springs. Annett, Libby and Holland are members of the council.

industry groups.

"The industry support is there, and the timing is right with our 'green' message," said Holland.

"As operators, we have thousands of rolling billboards that can be the medium to splash a com-

mon, consistent and coordinated message across the country. We have a strong presence in our respective local markets, and we have a positive story to tell about the benefits of motorcoach travel — especially and initially our 'green' benefits," said Holland.

Next steps for the council include establishing a nonprofit foundation, launching a nationwide search for a person to lead the effort on a full-time basis, and continuing work on a campaign. The group's Website will communicate its plans as they are developed.

Setra

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

TopSky glass roof that runs the length of the center aisle, airline-style tray tables, laptop connections, a galley and scenic view cameras. The ProTran coach had a rear window, leather seating, a galley, satellite television, a scenic view camera and four 19-inch monitors. Both vehicles featured 2007 Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines.

"With our continued success in the premium segment of the motorcoach market, the Setra S 417 provides the benchmark in customer experience with its breathtaking design and unmatched comfort," said Scully.



Daimler Buses N.A. Chief Commercial Officer Patrick Scully, left, and CEO, Dr. Andreas Strecker, provided a company progress report at Expo.

Aftermarket kits bolster Sprinter

INDIANAPOLIS — Firestone Industrial Products Co. has announced that its Ride-Rite air helper spring kits are now available for new-model Sprinter vans.

Firestone said the kit offers maximum load support and ride comfort by using air pressure to adjust the Firestone helper springs to compensate for varying loads and road conditions — "maintaining a quality ride at all times."

"The new Dodge Sprinter has more interior space, can seat up to 10 passengers and has extra storage facilities available when it is used as a minibus," said Paul Gibson, manager of Firestone Industrial Products' Ride-Rite division.

"Firestone's Ride-Rite air helper springs keep the Sprinter's leaf springs from sagging under the extra weight and causing possible damage."

Additionally, because Firestone's Ride-Rite kit works by keeping the vehicle level, it helps maintain brake effectiveness, reduce tire wear and bottoming out, level off-center loads (individual inflation valves allow for separate side-to-side adjustment) and increase vehicle stability.

A pair of Ride-Rite air springs can provide up to 5,000 pounds of load-leveling capacity. Firestone offers an accessory system that enables drivers to make air pressure adjustments by pushing a button installed on the dashboard.

For more information, go to www.ride-rite.com

Rostra RearSight camera available

LAURINBURG, N.C. — Rostra Precision Controls Inc. has developed a back-up camera sys-

tem for the Dodge Sprinter.

The new Rostra RearSight kit consists of a heavy-duty, waterproof color image camera that mounts above the rear doors to provide drivers with a wide-angle view behind the vehicle.

The camera features auto infrared for night vision and a harness which allows users to easily adjust the camera's angle.

Inside the vehicle the system uses a 3.5-inch TFT-LCD monitor that mounts into the headliner with a special mounting stem and bracket. The monitor features dual video inputs — for navigation, interior camera and/or DVD — and a wide-angle view with reverse override.

Rostra says the Dodge Sprinter van RearSight installs in 30 minutes; it recommends professional installation. For more information, go to www.rostra.com.

Volvo Financial opens in Canada

AURORA, Ont. — Volvo Financial Services North America has opened an office here to support financing of Prevost motorcoaches, as well as other Volvo- and Mack-brand equipment, in Canada.

"Our investment in these facilities is a reflection of Volvo Financial Services' commitment in continuing to provide our Canadian dealers and customers a high level of service and support," said Martin Weissburg, president and CEO of Volvo Financial Services North America. "We take pride in being part of not only the Volvo Group but also the growth and vitality of Canadian markets."

The new Ontario office employs 50 people.

Volvo Financial Services North America is the finance arm of the Volvo Group, one of the world's largest providers of commercial transportation equipment and the corporate parent of Prevost Car and Nova Bus. It provides financial services for the truck, construction equipment, bus, aerospace and marine industries.

In a separate announcement, Volvo said it had formed a new legal entity, Volvo Group Canada Inc., which will hold ownership of its subsidiaries, Prevost Car and Nova Bus. The organizational change is essential a paper transaction, meaning the new entity does not impact the operations or business of either Prevost or Nova Bus.

Prevost

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

miles per gallon attained, idle time and fuel used, as well as other factors measuring operating safety and efficiency.

Additional Prevost Liaison features include online fuel tax tracking for all vehicles, with automatically generated filing documents, and notification when coaches approach their destinations.

Prevost also has adopted a new tire pressure monitoring system for its coaches. The system was designed and developed by BERU, a German manufacturer, and it is similar to systems found on Formula 1 race cars as well as luxury autos, including BMW.

The BERU monitors tire conditions and alerts the driver if a sudden or gradual loss of pressure is

detected, helping to avoid tire-related breakdowns or accidents.

Prevost said it picked the BERU system, in part, because it is more user friendly than other systems.

On display at UMA Motorcoach Expo were Prevost coaches outfitted with new interior designs called the H-Series Collection. The collection, which is available as an upgrade from Prevost's regular fabric and leather choices, features three trim levels:

- The Essential Line offers casual interiors in three different colors.

- The Exclusive Line features leathers, synthetic suedes, and decorative piping in three colors.

- The Ultimate Line feature high-level materials, including perforated leathers, aluminum finishes and wood appointments in four decor choices.

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UMA board picks officers; directors elected by members

SAN FRANCISCO – Godfrey LeBron of Paradise Trailways in Hicksville, N.Y., has been elected to a two-year term as chairman of the United Motorcoach Association.

LeBron has served as vice chairman for the past two years and has been active in a wide range of association activities, including being chairman of the important Legislative and Regulatory Committee. The company operated by he and his wife, Lauren, has 10 coaches.

LeBron succeeds Brian Scott of Escot Bus Lines in Largo, Fla., who has served as chairman since January 2006. Scott remains a director of the association.

The election of LeBron and his succession as chairman came at the semi-annual meeting of the UMA board at the conclusion of Motorcoach Expo 2008 here last month.

Tom Ready of Ready Bus Lines in LaCrescent, Minn., was



Godfrey LeBron

elected vice chairman for 2008-09, while Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Tours in Oklahoma City was re-elected secretary and Dave Bolen of New World Tours in Bristow, Va., was re-elected treasurer.

In voting this past fall, UMA members re-elected Bolen and Polzien to the board for three-year terms.

One new member joined the



Tom Ready

UMA board at the January meeting. James Brown Sr. of Magic Carpet Tours Bus Service in Richmond, Va., was elected from UMA Region II. Brown is a former president of the Virginia Motorcoach Association and his company, Magic Carpet, has a fleet of nine coaches.

UMA Region II includes much of the Midwest and Upper Midwest, plus Atlantic Coast and



James Brown Sr.

Southern states.

Also re-elected to the board for three-year terms were Larry Benjamin of Northfield Lines in Northfield, Minn.; Steve Brown of Brown Coach in Amsterdam, N.Y., and Mike Neustadt of Coach Tours Ltd. in Brookfield, Conn.

Retiring from the board was long-time member Rick Hillard of Cedar Valley World Travel in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Hillard is a



Brian Scott

former chairman of UMA.

Also re-elected to the board was associate-member representative Michelle Silvestro of National Interstate Insurance in Richfield, Ohio. She was elected to a second three-year term.

The first order of business for the reconstituted UMA board was to revisit the association's strategic plan and revise the committee assignments for members.

California

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

and older model coach engines will be required to meet 2007-model engine emission standards

by the end of 2010; coach models between 1998 and 2002 will have to meet them by the end of 2011; 2003 and 2004 models will have to meet them by the end of 2012; and 2005-6 models will have to meet

them by 2013.

In a second phase, pre-2004 models will have to meet the higher 2010 model-year emission standards by the end of 2017; 2004 to 2006 models by the end of 2018;

2007 models by the end of 2019; 2008 models by the end of 2020 and 2009 models by the end of 2021.

The state will give operators in the first phase the option of aver-

aging their fleets by bringing 25 percent of their coaches in compliance by 2010, 50 percent by 2011, 75 percent by 2012 and their entire fleet by 2013.

Brasil said operators will be able to meet the standards by retrofitting their coaches with exhaust filters that could cost between \$9,000 and \$22,000, depending on the type of emissions they are attempting to control.

He called on operators to pass on the word about the regulations so as many motorcoach companies are aware of them and their impact as possible.

Double-deck

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

with their fleet operations, including insurance costs, maintenance expenses, down time, driver log accuracy, tire air pressures and overtime.

ABC also unveiled a new book, *From Small Business to Industry Leader – the Cornell Family Business Story*, which traces the history of ABC and its founding family. The company was started by Chairman Clancy Cornell, who was at Expo to autograph copies of the book.

The book uses vintage photos and interviews with industry friends, family and ABC staff to shape a generational story of how a young boy's fascination with buses led to the creation of the company.

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There's real value in national and regional meetings

By Dave Millhouser
ABC Companies

Susan and I had been married three days when we embarked on our honeymoon.

Always the romantic, I was taking her to New Orleans — to a bus convention — in a demonstrator coach. In fact, she was helping drive the bus.

It seemed, at the time, an excellent way to introduce my bride to the industry where I'd spent my adult life.

Some operators dismiss national and regional industry meetings as "vacations," and a poor use of time and money. They see these gatherings as big parties, with minimal redeeming value.

Certainly there are parties, dinners, trips to attractions, and a variety of other distractions... but in an environment surrounded by your peers and suppliers.

Every one of the people you meet is a potential life saver if your bus breaks near his town. You're far more likely to get help from someone who has eyeballed you than a stranger you just called (usually in

the middle of the night). People like helping friends.

Even if you've got perfect maintenance and coaches that never fail, everyone in the room has lessons and stories you can adapt to your company. Heck, you may even be able to contribute something.

It's painting with a broad brush to say so, but as a rule the folks who are members of the associations and attend conventions represent the best of our industry.

One reason the suppliers spend so much time and effort on these gatherings is the economies of scale. They can see lots of the people that matter to them, all at once. You can piggyback on their investment, and see all the same folks, on their dime.

It's also a chance to showcase

their stuff, let everyone see new products and innovation. It's your chance to see it all in one place. You can compare products and ask questions.

There is an accelerating trend towards providing educational sessions at industry gatherings. The national meetings have traditionally provided content, but in recent years both the quality and quantity seems to be growing. Regional and state meetings have followed suit, and many have evolved from being primarily social events into valuable educational opportunities.

The secretary/treasurer of one struggling regional association decided to add a substantial amount of content to what, for years, had been an outing. Attendance leaped, with the promise of continued

growth. Clearly the attendees felt the meeting was valuable.

Education is expensive, but this seems to be a real bargain. These sessions are often timely, a chance to keep up with current events, technical information and legislative activity. By design they are aimed at the specific issues that are most likely to affect your business in the near future.

One benefit of attending meetings is the opportunity to experience the locale. You can enjoy being a tourist, while checking it out as a destination for charters and tours. It's easier to sell a destination you've experienced.

Sometimes it's great fun to be with your colleagues outside their normal environment. You often get to see them in a whole new way.

One of the highlights of the 1986 UMA Motorcoach Expo meeting that doubled as my honeymoon was an event that oc-



Dave Millhouser

curred on the 13th floor of the New Orleans Hyatt. A distinguished, and much loved, pillar of the industry locked himself out of his room, and was stranded, behind a potted plant, at the entrance to the (glass) elevator in his boxer shorts.

That image alone made the convention a resounding success, and we all certainly saw him in a new light.

It's been 22 years, and Susan and I are still together. She refuses to drive a bus anymore, but seems to have forgiven me for the honeymoon.

Dave Millhouser is a marketing consultant for ABC Companies. Contact him at: dave_millhouser@hotmail.com.

Calendar

February 2008

2-7 America Bus Association Marketplace, Virginia Beach. Info: Go to www.buses.org, or call (202) 842-1645.

26-27 Toll Roads 2008, Hotel Palomar, Arlington, Va. Info: Go to www.worldrg.com, or call (800) 647-7600.

March 2008

4-5 California Bus Association Spring Maintenance Seminar, Classic Charter, Visalia, Calif. Info: www.cbabus.com or call (800) 664-2877.

5-7 Trailways Annual Conference and Meeting, Los Angeles Hilton at Universal City, Los Angeles. Info: Go to www.trailways.com, or call (703) 691-3052.

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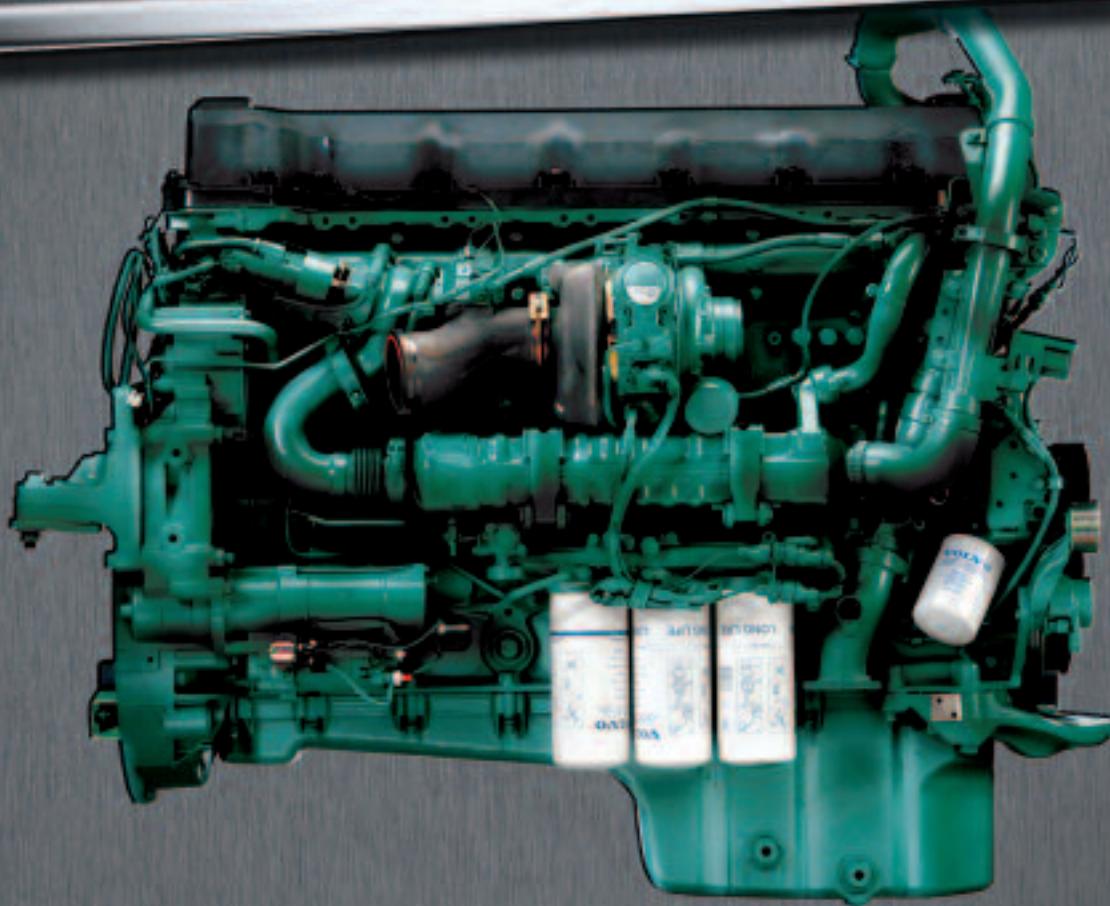
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