

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Organization is key to successful compliance review

Compliance Review: Two words that represent a major event in the life of most motorcoach companies.

Also, two words that operators are increasingly likely to hear as the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and many states step up their commercial vehicle safety inspection programs.

In fiscal 2006, there were

15,166 federal and state compliance reviews of truck and bus operators, a 21 percent increase over fiscal 2005, when 12,575 CRs were conducted.

While the increase in compliance reviews is noteworthy, the number of destination and roadside inspections of buses and motorcoaches really soared during fiscal 2006.

The FMCSA says there were 124,740 destination and roadside inspections of buses during the year, a 122 percent increase over the 56,089 inspections conducted in fiscal 2005.

But it is the comprehensive nature of the compliance review that is the event most likely to strike fear in the heart of — or evoke an emotional response from

— a motorcoach operator.

A compliance review can represent a large portion of a company's SafeStat score, and an unsatisfactory rating can result in an immediate out-of-service order, shutting down the business. That happened nearly 500 times in fiscal 2006 to truck and bus companies following a compliance review.

Be a Boy Scout

For operators, a compliance review is like a game of roulette — you never know when your number is going to come up. The best advice: Be Prepared (like a Boy Scout) — at all times.

Ken Presley, vice president for industry relations at the United Motorcoach Association, says that

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Ready to cruise. Next month, the world's biggest and "most elegant" river cruise ship, the American Queen, debuts as the flagship vessel of a new company, Majestic America Line, that was formed last year as the largest operator of U.S.

river and coastal cruises. The new ship, which will ply the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, has accommodations for 436 passengers. It features six decks, is 418 feet in length, and is powered by a 45-ton paddlewheel. See story on Page 15.

4th-quarter coach sales soar, climb to 4-year high

Sales of new motorcoaches climbed during the fourth quarter of last year, boosting deliveries for all of '06 to their highest level in four years, figures released by *National Bus Trader* magazine show.

A total of 760 coaches were sold during the three months ended Dec. 31, a 20 percent increase over fourth-quarter '05 sales of 633.

National Bus Trader Editor Larry Plachno said the fourth-quarter '06 sales represented "the highest quarterly figure we have seen since we started keeping quarterly records" in 2001.

The strong quarter pushed total sales for the year to 2,381 new coaches, that's up 323 units, or 15.7 percent, from 2005.

The last time annual new-

coach sales topped 2,300 units was in 2002 when they totaled 2,402. The previous quarterly high was 724 coaches, also in 2002.

In the intervening years, annual sales were 1,771 in 2003, 1,668 in 2004, and 2,058 in 2005.

(The biggest sales year since 1985 was 1998 when 3,657 new coaches were sold. The poorest year was 1991 when the total

plummeted to 1,132 new coaches.)

The fourth is traditionally the best quarter of the year for new-coach sales, and a variety of factors may have accounted for the solid '06 period, including "early buying" to avoid the reduced-emissions '07 engines; a healthy industry and business environment — purchasing a new coach remains an emotional decision for many

operators (if business is good they 'feel good' about buying), and strong public-sector deliveries.

Tax considerations are not believed to have been a factor in '06 as they occasionally have been in the past.

The best sellers

The top-selling model in the

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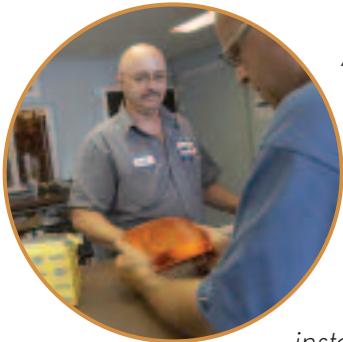
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'Criminal' ticket issue heats up again in NYC; better have an attorney

NEW YORK — For the second year in a row, New York City has sent a not-so-subtle message to tour-and-charter bus operators that it doesn't want their coaches and their sightseeing passengers in the city.

The message is being delivered in the form of "criminal" parking citations that are being sporadically issued to operators, particularly during the year-end holiday season.

The tickets were a hot topic at the State Association Summit at Motorcoach Expo 2007 last month in New Orleans, and prompted a two-page letter from outgoing American Bus Association Chairman Ron Eyre to New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, asking him to work with the association and the police to find a solution.

As *Bus & Motorcoach News* reported last March, the industry's on-again, off-again battle to find legal parking and unloading areas in New York City took an ugly turn last year when police began issuing criminal parking citations to parked or stopped buses.

But, as Eyre noted in his letter to Bloomberg, just as often as not the intent of the citations seemed to be to intimidate drivers who were simply picking up or dropping off travelers in the appropriately designated areas on the New York City parking map.

Rather than being ticketed for alleged violations of a city parking ordinance, however, the citations were for "criminal" violation of state law. Specifically, they allege violation of the state Bus & Passenger Carrying Vehicle Safety Regulations (N.Y. Transportation Law Section 140 (2) Title 17). In other words, they raised an alleged parking infraction to a criminal safety violation.

And criminal citations in New York are handled very differently

Correction

In the Feb. 1 issue, the first name of Brian Scott of Escot Lines in Largo, Fla., was misspelled, and the last name of Dave Bolen of New World Tours in Bristow, Va., was misspelled. Both, who were quoted in articles as part of our Motorcoach Expo 2007 coverage, are members of the *Bus & Motorcoach News* Advisory Board. We fired our proofreader.

than traditional parking tickets.

First, they are processed in a criminal court.

Second, state law requires that a corporation must be represented by counsel at all stages of a criminal court proceeding. That, of course, means that in addition to the potential \$500 fine, an attorney fee of \$350 to \$500 or more is likely to be incurred.

One New York operator said that those operators who have appeared in court with an attorney have generally had the charges thrown out. But when operators show up without an attorney, the criminal court judges won't hear the case.

Of course, failing to show up in court can result in a criminal summons or bench warrant.

There also have been reports that the criminal tickets have turned up on company safety ratings, and drivers refusing to take trips to New York City for fear of getting one of criminal parking tickets.

The New York Police Department apparently won't listen to anyone about the problem. Operators reportedly have been told to take the issue to the state legislature in Albany.

"Our primary concern," Eyre said in his letter to Bloomberg, "is that this activity could result in a severe disruption of motorcoach operations in the city and safe operating procedures, as drivers may be forced to circle the city streets or drop passengers at great distances from their destinations to avoid these tickets."

"In more extreme cases, some out-of-state operators may end up avoiding New York City entirely as a destination for their charter and tour groups."

"On any given trip," wrote Eyre, "the bus company president might serve as the driver, and they can't afford to miss a group tour or bus trip to contest a court case where they did nothing illegal. The bus must roll."

Most of the criminal parking tickets have been issued in the Midtown area of Manhattan. Operators have reported getting them while buses were parked in the Lincoln Center area, Times Square, and theater district. Some specific locations have included 54th St. and 12th Ave., 155 W. 55th St., 51st or 52nd St. and 8th Ave., and 50th St. and 11th Ave.

New York transits violate rules

NEW YORK — Two New York transit agencies have been found guilty of violating Federal Transit Administration rules and ordered to stop providing the disputed service.

The Westchester Department of Transportation provided illegal charter service for the busiest two days of the Barclays Classic golf tournament last June at the famed Westchester Country Club in Rye, N.Y.

In the other case, a long-time violator of FTA charter rules, Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority in Rochester,

was found guilty of providing illegal school bus service and ordered to stop.

Service Tours, a charter operator based in Yonkers, N.Y., filed a complaint last year with the regional office of the FTA, accusing The Bee-Line System (which is operated by Westchester County) of providing illegal charter service for the Barclays tournament. (See Aug. 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Although the county commissioner of transportation denied the allegation, the New York regional administrator for the FTA agreed

with Service Tours, and ordered the Westchester Department of Transportation to cease and desist from providing the "impermissible charter service."

Service Tours president, Sal DePaolo, hopes the FTA will penalize the county for providing the service and costing his company a substantial amount of shuttle bus revenue.

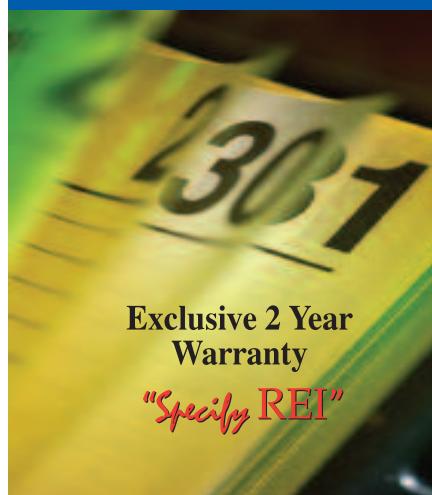
In the Rochester case, the complaint was not filed by the local school bus contractor, Laidlaw Education Services, but by the union representing drivers for Laidlaw.

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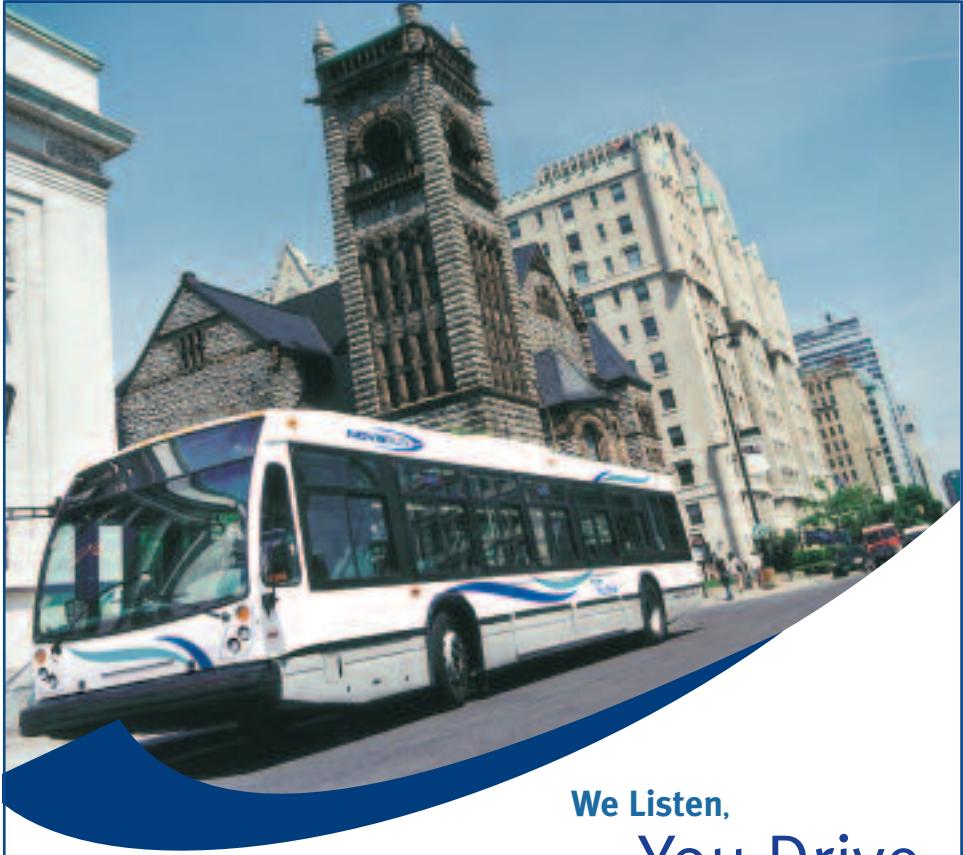
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THE DOCKET

CDL fraud continues unabated

KANSAS CITY — A dozen people who obtained commercial driver licenses from a southern Missouri trucking school gave false home addresses, and state officials in Missouri acknowledge they have no way of stopping the practice.

An analysis by *The Kansas City Star* found at least a dozen individuals, all licensed through the South Central Career Center Truck Driver Training School in West Plains, Mo., claiming to live at the same location in Kansas City.

The newspaper revelation is the latest example of what appears to be an ongoing problem that federal and state regulators seem powerless to stop. Lax licensing rules and a lack of oversight make it relatively easy to get a CDL and to commit fraud while doing it, officials acknowledge.

A 2005 U.S. Department of Transportation report found that CDL fraud schemes had been investigated in 23 states during the previous five years.

The scammers who got CDLs from the Missouri driving school all said they lived at the address of a used-car lot. The owner of the small auto-sales business said he had never heard of the drivers.

One person who obtained a license through the driving school by falsely claiming to live in Kansas City crashed a tractor-trailer into an Oklahoma state patrolman's car in October, killing both drivers. The truck driver's actual home address was in Ohio.

Atlantic City bus fee is increased

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — The South Jersey Transportation Authority has increased the Atlantic City bus permit entry fee to \$2.80 from \$2, effective March 1.

The fee is required for all motorcoaches entering Atlantic City; the increase is the first in 14 years.

Starting March 1, new permits must be purchased, or the old "pink permits" operators may have in inventory must be exchanged for new ones at a cost of 80 cents each.

"For example, if an operator has 10 pink permits in its inventory that it wants to exchange, the

operator must send us a check for \$8, plus a shipping and handling fee of \$3, or a total of \$11," said Rose-Marie Rodriguez, tourist services administrative manager for the transportation authority.

The exchange period runs from March 1 through July 31.

Permits can be exchanged via mail only, with no walk-ins or cash purchases accepted. Sale of the old permits ends Feb. 28.

All permits must be purchased in advance, no less than two weeks prior to the scheduled bus arrival date. Purchases must be made by

check or money order payable to the South Jersey Transportation Authority. The authority is at 25 S. New York Ave., Atlantic City, NJ 08401.

A permit order form is available from the authority on its Web site: www.sjta.com.

To get questions answered, call Rodriguez or Charlotte Woods at (609) 344-4149 or (888) 565-7582, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The annual bus and fleet medallions are not affected by the fee increase.

Louisiana, Nevada establish 511 road phones, Web sites

Both Louisiana and Nevada have established 511 traffic and road condition telephone numbers and Web sites.

The Nevada Department of Transportation established a 511 weather and road condition-information telephone number, and a Web site, www.nevadadot.com.

Phone calls to the number — 511 — can be made free, round the clock. Outside the state, call (877) 687-6237 to reach the information, again toll-free.

Louisiana travelers can access

real-time traffic and road condition updates by dialing 511, or by visiting a Web site, www.511la.org.

Louisiana is the 27th state to launch the 511 service, which is a nationwide effort to provide consistent and reliable roadway information.

The 511 Traveler Information Service — available to most wireless and landline users — was established by the Federal Communications Commission in 2000 to provide information on construction, roads and critical incidents.

Yosemite permits for 2007 announced

YOSEMITE, Calif. — The 2007 Bus Commercial Use Authorizations for Yosemite National Park have been mailed to all bus operators that held a valid permit during the past three years.

If a bus or coach operator has not received a packet, owners or managers should contact the park's

commercial tours permit manager, Ruth Middlecamp.

Commercial Use Authorizations are limited authorizations to provide specific visitor services within the boundaries of a national park. They are replacing the old Incidental Business Permits.

Middlecamp can be contacted

Wiper, ice laws in Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Vehicles traveling in Pennsylvania must now turn on their headlights whenever their windshield wipers are operating in inclement weather, according to the state Department of Transportation.

The new law applies when the wipers are fully on and when they are in intermittent mode.

Violators may be fined \$25, but fees and other costs will increase the amount to about \$100. The law went into effect Jan. 29.

A separate law passed in May imposes substantial penalties against drivers if snow or ice flies off their vehicles and injures or kills someone. Fines can range from \$200 to \$1,000. Gov. Ed Rendell signed the bill after a steady stream of complaints regarding flying ice and snow.

by calling (209) 379-1851, or e-mail ruth_middlecamp@nps.gov.

Travel industry seeks 'trusted traveler' plan

WASHINGTON — Some of the U.S. travel industry's leading lights have asked Congress to adopt a special "trusted-traveler program" for frequent international visitors, believing it would help reverse the diminished appeal of the U.S. to travelers from abroad.

Since 9/11, international visits to the U.S. have fallen by 17 percent. The drop has meant the loss of billions of dollars of visitor spending.

The Discover America Partnership, an offshoot of the trade group Travel Industry Association of America, proposed the new program to the U.S. Senate trade and tourism subcommittee as part of a broader package of suggestions for boosting international visits.

Under the trusted-traveler proposal, regular visitors from abroad could submit extensive personal and biometric information to the U.S. government.

If approved for the program, the foreign traveler could count on predictable airport clearance procedures when arriving in the U.S.

Heightened scrutiny of foreign visitors during the past five years has led to unpredictable and inconsistent treatment of foreigners at U.S. airports, and has played a major role in reducing visits to the U.S.

In fact, the process foreign travelers must use to enter the U.S. is the world's ugliest, worse than the Middle East, Asia and Africa, according to a survey by the Discover America Partnership.

By a 2-to-1 margin, 2,011 foreign respondents ranked the U.S. worst among 10 broad travel destinations for the overall difficulty of its entry procedures. Some of the views:

- More than half said U.S. immigration officials are rude.

- Two-thirds said they feared

NTA supports visa waivers

LEXINGTON, Ky. — The National Tour Association and its government relations committee are supporting expansion of the U.S. visa waiver program.

NTA said it believes extending the program to other countries will stimulate inbound tourism to the U.S.

The visa waiver program, which currently covers 27 countries, allows citizens from those

being detained for making a simple error upon entering the U.S.

- Fear of U.S. officials outranked fear of encountering terrorism or crime during their visit.
- 36 percent said U.S. entry policies would keep them from visiting.

It's unknown how many of the respondents' impressions were coming from actual experience or simply from perception.

"Whether it's perception or reality, we have a problem," said Geoff Freeman, executive director of the Discover America Partnership.

Freeman's group sees a "strong correlation" between the drop in incoming foreign travel and more stringent entry policies enacted after 9/11. "Since 9/11, we've seen (foreign) travelers as more of a threat than an opportunity," said Freeman.

Discover America Partnership, whose members include Disney, Marriott, the Travel Industry Association and other industry giants, believes that besides economic considerations, an opportunity to bolster the U.S. image abroad is being missed because of cumbersome visa and entry procedures.

Foreigners who have visited this country are 74 percent more likely to have an "extremely favorable" opinion of it, according to the survey.

The travel partnership is seeking \$300 million from the government to finance its proposals, which include stepped up tourism marketing.

Whether Congress or foreign travelers would embrace such a program is unclear. Nevertheless, U.S. Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., says he plans to develop legislation aimed at reversing the slide in foreign tourism.

"Today, there are friendly nations that deserve to be incorporated into the existing visa waiver program," said NTA Legislative Counsel Jim Santini.

Bus/Motorcoach Academy: Filling a void

By Ken Presley
Vice President of Industry Relations
United Motorcoach Association

The motorcoach industry, as we know it today, largely evolved from a driver base, and the success of these drivers — turned business owners — is and always has been difficult.

In many ways, our industry is the purest form of capitalism, existing in a "survive or die" mode.

The tremendous capital requirements, combined with razor-thin margins, are a perfect formula for numerous business failures and turnover. Desire and hard work are simply not enough.

Balanced with the marketplace's increased need for transportation, and some of the most tenacious individuals in any industry, our industry's operators often exist in a "survival zone," rather than a success zone.

To be sure, there are success stories (many reading this newspaper share that distinction) that serve to inspire and warrant imitation.

However, many astute observers often opine that there is a general lack of broad-based business acumen in our industry.

It is my experience that every motorcoach operator, at some point, whether just beginning, in a crisis, or attempting to increase revenue and profits, will choose to succeed and desires to create its own success story.

Currently, there are few readily accessible resources available for an operator to develop business and operational skills, and all too often operators must simply imitate and/or drop their rates to capture a slice of the ready charter market.

This cycle, while a model of capitalism, fails to recognize one very large component: Society considers mobility critical to access jobs, medical care, education, recreation, and the like.

While our industry is acting out survival of the fittest, government and other passenger transportation sectors are increasingly

solving transportation needs, and the public seems to care little that it may be public transportation instead of private.

Plainly stated, in many ways we are allowing our industry to be increasingly marginalized while the country's passenger transportation needs grow and others capture the opportunities.

The trucking industry has a significantly larger number of operators to fail or succeed. When we fail, the void can be very noticeable, and filling it often falls to other sources

'We will expand the business and operational knowledge of the motorcoach and bus industry.'

not conducive to a healthy motorcoach and bus industry. Goods do not vote, people do!

I believe that now, more than ever, we stand at a threshold of opportunity, but many operators are facing an abyss.

Too few are prepared to offer school bus transportation, commuter transportation, mobility-impaired transportation, the subtle demands of a discerning travel-and-tour market, or even to participate in the United Motorcoach Association 20 Group Program.

We can ill afford as an industry to ignore the call to build an industry prepared to meet the demands of an increasingly mobile society. We must establish a broad base of knowledge, accessible to operators so they may make effective business decisions more conducive to the industry as a whole.

We must encourage diversity in accommodating passenger needs with a variety of equipment and human resources suited to the marketplace rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

New approaches to our industry require a broader knowledge base.

Twenty-five years after deregulation, we

have a wealth of industry experts who lack the appropriate platform to impart their treasure of knowledge.

One-hour clinics spread out here and there are simply inadequate to meet the needs of an industry, not starved for opportunity, but rather the knowledge that inspires the risk necessary to diversify and capture our expanding mobile society.

That is why UMA is creating the Bus & Motorcoach Academy, the industry's only comprehensive, accredited continuing education program. (See Feb. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The academy will seek to broaden the business acumen of operators — especially small operators, and provide readily accessible industry-specific educational resources.

Bus & Motorcoach Academy will consolidate and coordinate existing and new talent to provide authoritative business knowledge to not only motorcoach owners and operators but also to drivers, school bus operators and other key industry personnel.

The College of Southern Maryland will host the academy, and Carmen Daecher to be dean.

The programs offered by the academy will carry certifications and accreditations.

We will expand the business and operational knowledge of the motorcoach and bus industry. And, in doing that, we will considerably improve and increase the confidence necessary for operators to take the measured business risks needed to seize and expand opportunities offered by an increasingly mobile society.

Bus & Motorcoach Academy will be a single, reputable and affordable resource available to operators for comprehensive instruction and certification of achievement in such areas as business operations, accounting, marketing, human resources, safe operations and driver training.

I am passionate about our industry... and about Bus & Motorcoach Academy being able to provide the affordable education the industry needs.

Bus broker responds to Bus Co-Op article

By Edward Telmany
President of Sales
US Coachways Inc.

In response to the article "Operators plan to challenge bus brokers with a co-op" (Jan. issue *Bus & Motorcoach News*):

For all operators interested in joining the Bus Co-Op, think twice.

The Bus Co-Op's intention to attract customers isn't any different than Busrates.com, Alltimefavorites.com, Magicyellow.com, Verizon.com and a hundred other Web site directories that provide a listing service for bus operators.

However, there is a remarkable difference in the price and efficiency.

The current Web sites that provide listing services have many years of proven performance for reaching customers. The work and time that goes into the maintenance, programming and design of these sites is significant.

The science of reaching customers through search engines is unparalleled and takes time. Achieving organic rankings with search engines can take as long as three years and cannot compare with virgin sites just starting out.

The Bus Co-Op would be a long way off from competing with the proven track record of sites already in the running.

The Bus Co-Op is asking a high price for its service, as much as \$20,000 for each operator. This figure is astounding when a bus operator can simply join a competitive Web site for as little as \$100 and in some cases free.

The amount does not add up, the science does not add up, and the leads won't either.

Bus brokers are not putting small operators in jeopardy of losing business. To become an affiliate of US Coachways, please call vendor relations at (800) 359-5991 Ext. 217.

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Blunt-speaking bus broker refutes 'misinformation'

Glenn P. Orloff
President & CEO
Metropolitan Shuttle

Much has been written in this publication about bus brokers and the problems encountered by bus operators in working with them.

As a major broker, and one that has been occasionally mentioned in this publication, I would like to take this opportunity to offer our perspective.

I cannot speak on behalf of the broker industry, nor do I wish to. I only wish to counter some of the misinformation that has been published here and elsewhere.

For the record, I want to be very clear that in choosing a vendor for a given job, yes, price is important. However, first and foremost, a vendor providing services for Metropolitan Shuttle must meet the requirements of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (ratings below 75 in all three categories) and/or be listed as an approved carrier on the Web site of Surface Deployment and Distribution Command of the U.S. military.

Furthermore, the vendor in question must have valid insurance coverage as required by law and be able to produce evidence of such.

Metropolitan Shuttle had to forego a great number of potentially profitable charters in 2006 due to the fact that the only available vendor(s) either did not have satisfactory ratings with the FMCSA or could not satisfactorily produce an appropriate insurance form with Metropolitan Shuttle and/or the client listed as an "additional insured."

Meeting standards

Adherence to these standards has also meant that Metropolitan Shuttle usually does **not** choose the lowest bidder for a given charter, but rather the bidder that meets the standards above, has a competitive price, and has demonstrated an ability to perform well and allow for the greatest possibility of the client becoming a repeat client.

Suggesting that our only criterion for choosing a vendor is price implies a certain stupidity that would never allow for the possibility of repeat clients. Those of us who are successful in this industry know that without repeat business, we would never survive.

Clients who work with Metropolitan Shuttle can rest assured that the bus they ride will meet the above standards. We state this in our "terms and conditions." We

are, therefore, bound to deliver on this pledge. This obviously angers some vendors who would like to get our business, yet it provides an invaluable service to the client community.

The upstanding bus operators in the bus charter industry might be surprised at how many operators do not meet the standards of the FMCSA.

Another important point to mention, and this also may irritate some as this publication is targeted specifically to bus operators, is that not all operators are honorable or upstanding. I found it highly ironic that the article of July 15 would quote Kraftours of Tulsa, Okla., a company that dropped a big job from us on a moment's notice when a better booking came in later, after confirming that the job was all set.

They seem to be notorious for such practices in the Oklahoma/Arkansas area, as other companies we spoke with in the area did not seem to be surprised that Kraftours did such a thing.

About Busrates.com

The ultimate irony, however, comes in the form of the self-proclaimed "consumer advocate," Busrates.com.

Busrates.com promotes itself as protecting the interests of both bus charter operators and the general consumer wishing to purchase bus charter services. Busrates.com

'Another important point to mention, and this also may irritate some as this publication is targeted specifically to bus operators, is that not all operators are honorable or upstanding.'

does neither of these.

In its apparent zeal to bring in advertising dollars, Busrates.com apparently applies no eligibility requirements for advertisers on its site whatsoever.

Operators that have been put out of service by the USDOT and operators with SEA rankings well above 75 are listed side by side on this site with upstanding and legitimate carriers.

Clearly, legitimate carriers would not want to be lumped together with those operating illegally and/or beyond the criteria of the USDOT and FMCSA.

Unfortunately, many who ad-

vertise and/or list on Busrates.com are not aware that they are being lumped together with the outcasts of the industry. It seems that Busrates.com will take money from anyone, legitimate or illegitimate. That can't be a good thing for the serious and upstanding operators.

On the consumer side, it's even worse. Imagine a potential purchaser, not knowing much about the bus charter industry, consulting Busrates.com and then choosing a carrier like Bates Tours and Charter of Woodbridge, Va.

Bates Tours is a company with a vehicle safety rating of 98, just about the worst rating a company could possibly have and still operate.

Imagine the potential legal liability for that unfortunate purchaser if something were to happen to the 50 or so passengers on that bus — and all because they trusted Busrates.com, the "consumer advocate," for their bus information.

Plenty of bad apples

Shady operators abound all over the Busrates.com site, from Bates Tours, to Duncan Bus in the Washington D.C., area which has been put out of service by the USDOT.

It is a true disservice to the bus charter industry that Busrates.com would pose as a protector of the consumer while at the same time directing those very consumers

toward the outcasts of the industry in exchange for the outcasts' blood money.

Further hypocrisy by Busrates.com includes taking payments from Google to list brokers of bus charter services, which Busrates.com claims to be the bane of the bus charter industry's existence. If Busrates.com really and truly believed that bus charter brokers are parasites and harmful for the industry, why would they then list them on their site?

Either their claim is simply disingenuous and motivated by greed and self-interest, or those advertising dollars are just too hard for Busrates.com to resist.

Unfortunately, too much discussion here has centered on a premise of us versus them when discussing operators and brokers. However, the truth is that there are legitimate and illegitimate companies among both operators and brokers.

Value in cooperation

The legitimate and upstanding operators have nothing to fear and more to gain by cooperating with a legitimate and upstanding broker providing national coverage. Our typical client profile is an enterprise that charters buses in various markets all over the country. This type of client simply will not maintain a rolodex of vendors and deal with all the headaches of background checks and verifications if there is a single national service like ours that will handle that for them.

On the other hand, most bus companies provide service only regionally, so it would only make sense that the two types of services would collaborate and share the mutual benefit.

We enjoy such mutually beneficial relationships with dozens and dozens, if not hundreds, of operators all over the country. It is unfortunate that there are, indeed, a number of unsavory brokers willing to cut corners and deceive for financial gain, just as there are those types of operators, not to mention the self-proclaimed white knights like Busrates.com.

The key is for the upstanding players in the industry to recognize each other and continue to develop the mutually beneficial relationships that will only serve to benefit our industry as a whole.

Contact Orloff at (866) 556-3545, or by e-mail at glenn@metropolitanshuttle.com. His company Web site is www.metropolitanshuttle.com.

BusRates.com offers different view

Mark Greer
Founder
BusRates.com

Like the Yellow Pages, BusRates.com does not research or recommend the companies in its directory of bus and motorcoach operators. Rather, we guide customers on how to research them on their own.

Imagine the liability of promising to have thoroughly researched companies.

We are a small operation that could never afford a \$6 million lawsuit, or the insurance needed to protect against this.

The broker's business model is set up so that there will always be an incentive to choose low price over higher quality.

Customers must take a leap of faith when putting trust into a biased party to choose their company for them.

Knowing how brokers work, I would never book a bus through a national broker and I don't think most customers would either if they understood what they were getting.

Too frequently, brokers are only taking advantage of those customers that don't shop around. Quite honestly, how do they sleep at night?

The reality of it is that if the brokers weren't showing up first on search engines, and bus-owning companies were, customers would be booking directly with bus owners, and both the bus owner and the customer would be better off for it.

The days of broker Internet domination is coming to an end. More bus owner groups are uniting to compete against them.

I do feel there is a place for brokers in the industry, however. For example, brokers are a good

option for groups having trouble finding availability that don't have the time to call around and do the legwork.

I also feel that local brokers that intimately know their market and adhere to the 10 percent gross/net rate commission system can offer a terrific value.

If Metropolitan Shuttle is interested in collaboration, I would suggest it consider transforming into a directory. The Internet needs directories. Not everyone can have their Web site show up on the first page.

Until then, I will continue to do everything in my power to reach more customers and create more awareness.

According to Alexa.com, BusRates.com ranks in the top 100,000 of all English language Web sites in traffic, making it the highest bus charter-related site in North America.

OMCA seeks tax relief to spur 'green' coach purchases

TORONTO — The Ontario Motor Coach Association has asked the provincial government here to give the over-the-road bus industry tax breaks to help accelerate its transition to new, reduced-emissions buses.

The association filed two pro-

posals with the Ontario Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs as part of the committee's pre-budget considerations.

"Besides being the safest and most energy-efficient transport mode, the inter-city motorcoach is also the most environmentally

friendly," says OMCA President Brian Crow.

"To stimulate sales of 'cleaner' motorcoaches and to kick start the motorcoach industry's transition to the new greener Ontario vision, we are asking government to implement a diesel fuel tax-rebate pro-

gram for motorcoach operators and to eliminate the (provincial sales taxes) on motorcoaches equipped with the new, virtually-emission-free engines."

In its proposals, OMCA noted that new ultra-low-sulfur fuel costs 3 to 5 cents more per gallon, and the '07 reduced-emissions engines add between \$8,000 and \$12,000 to the cost of a new coach.

"As a result, there is a natural reluctance on the part of coach operators to purchase new motor-

coaches and instead to stay with proven technology that is less expensive," the association noted. "This may mean a delay in the environmental benefits associated with new engine technology," the OMCA added.

"We have faith that after reading our submission, the standing committee will take up our recommendations to offset some of the costs associated with these environmentally friendly features," said Crow.

Team Coach Imaging helps operator adopt new design

CONCORD, Ont. — Choosing a new design and colors for an entire motorcoach fleet can be stressful and demanding.

But Chris Brown, general manager of Can-ar Coach Service in Concord, near Toronto, says that Team Coach Imaging made it a relatively painless project for Can-ar.

Brown said the Team Coach Imaging "worked with us in every aspect of the project," offering help and advice. The workmanship, he said, was second to none.

"We have received numerous compliments not only from our customers but from other coach companies in the Toronto area," said Brown.

Team Coach Imaging, a division of Lettrapub Inc., a Ste-Marie,

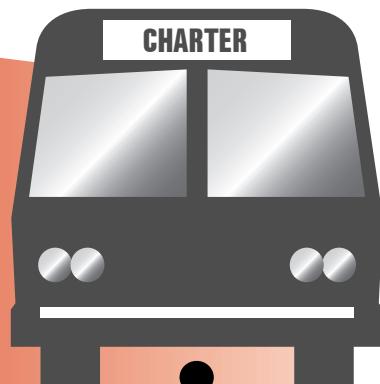
Quebec-based signage and digital printing company, specializes in fleet graphics and meeting the evolving needs of the motorcoach industry, said Ronald Leblanc, director of development.

"Our objective is to offer our clientele products of superior quality which will emphasize their company and guarantee an impressive look on their vehicles," said Leblanc.

"We like to create a close and loyal relationship with our clients. That, combined with our reliability and professional installation network, helps us meet our expectancies and high standards, resulting in our success," said Leblanc.

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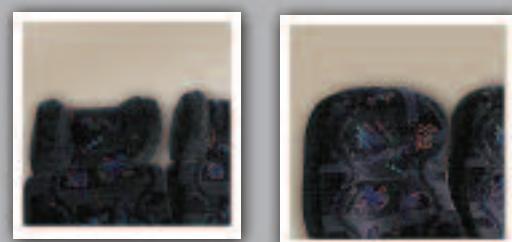
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DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses honors top employees

SECAUCUS, N.J. — DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses North America has honored its top sales and support employees for 2006.

Don Jensen was named motorcoach sales manager for the second consecutive year. In 2005, Jensen celebrated 25 years with DCCBNA and continues to oversee the sales efforts of Setra motorcoaches for the Northwest.

The leading pre-owned motorcoach sales manager was Rob Lambert, who is based in the DCCBNA service, parts, and sales center in Winter Garden, Fla. Lambert has been instrumental in increasing pre-owned sales in the Southeast.

The honors came at the company's annual sales, service and parts meeting in Secaucus, N.J., which is near the company's new technical service and training center.

Bill Welch was named product support person of the year. Welch is warranty manager for the Setra

CAN program and joined DCCBNA in 2002. He is based in Greensboro, N.C.

Other awards went to:

- Roger Hawkins, Sprinter

shuttle bus sales manager of the year

- Sheri Calame, transit sales person of the year

- Peter Piotrowski, transit product support person of the year

"Our entire sales, service and parts organization played a tremendous role towards our overall corporate success in 2006," said Patrick Scully, chief commercial

officer for DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses North America. "We salute all of our team but especially these individuals who stood out among their peers."

People

The late **Peter L. Picknelly Sr.**, long-time chairman of **Peter Pan Bus Lines** of Springfield, Mass., was named as the first recipient of the **American Bus Association** Lifetime Achievement Award. Mr. Picknelly's son, Peter, accepted the award at the Kaleidoscope Awards ceremony held in conjunction with the 2007 ABA Marketplace in Grapevine, Texas, late last month. ABA created the award to honor key individuals — leaders, motivators and pioneers — in the industry. Mr. Picknelly Sr. died three years ago.

SEFAC Inc., the Baltimore-based specialist heavy-duty mobile lift manufacturer, announced the appointment of **Gary Mason** as vice president-sales. Mason has seven years experience in the mobile lift industry, including five years operating his own mobile lift company. He will be based at SEFAC's parts and distribution center in Rialto, Calif. He can be contacted at (909) 697-9009.

Paradigm Technology Consulting announced that **Bob Hopwood** has joined the company as program manager-transportation. Hopwood comes to PTC with more than 25 years of executive industry experience in motorcoach, charter and tour-based organizations.

Hopwood previously was general manager, sales and marketing for **Premier Coach of Vermont** in Colchester.

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Bus sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

fourth quarter was Motor Coach Industries' J4500, followed in second place by the MCI D4500. Moving up to No. 3 was the Prevost H3-45, which had been the fifth best seller in the third quarter.

No. 4 on *National Bus Trader's* "Hit Parade" of seated-coach models was the Van Hool C2045, followed by the revamped MCI D4505, the Setra S 417 and the Prevost X3-45.

The three top selling models, the MCI J4500, D4500 and Prevost H3-45, represented 55.7 percent of the total market. During the three previous quarters, the three top sellers represented 62, 60 and 59 percent of the market, indicating new-coach buyers are continuing to diversify their purchases.

Plachno observes that "bread and butter" new-coach models continue to outsell fancier, high-tech units.

The market share captured by European-built coaches slipped to 16.6 percent in the fourth quarter, compared to 23.7 percent a year earlier.

Only 3.6 percent of the coaches sold in the fourth quarter were 40- or 41-foot models. All others — 96.4 percent — were 45-footers.

Canadian operators purchased 5.8 percent of the new coaches in the fourth quarter of last year, the lowest quarterly sales percentage of the year. In the previous three quarters, Canadian operators purchased 6.7 percent, 15.5 percent and 10 percent. For the year, new coach sales in Canada were up slightly from 2005.

Conversion slowdown

A total of 87 conversion shells were sold in the fourth quarter, or 11.4 percent of the market, which was consistent with the other quarters throughout the year. The conversion market has been flat since it peaked in 2000, with 15.8 percent of the market.

The primary reason for the slowdown in the conversion sector is that the market has matured. There have been few flashy new gizmos or features to excite high-end conversion buyers in recent years. Consequently, converters have been attempting to broaden the

Turbo completes major 'wrap' project

WASHINGTON — When the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority wanted to promote its new fleet of compressed natural gas buses, it asked its advertising agency to come up with a special wrap for the 25 buses.

Laughlin, Marinaccio & Owens Advertising, WMATA's agency, turned to Turbo Images of St. Georges, Quebec, to help execute the wraps.

Turbo Images, which specializes in creative fleet graphics identification, worked with Laughlin, Marinaccio & Owens Advertising to develop a wrap emphasizing the

environmentally friendly nature of the CNG buses.

What resulted was a topiary garden design of natural flora and fauna.

Paula Hoffman, print production coordinator at Laughlin, Marinaccio, said Turbo Images "did a great job completing this large project. The installers... were always willing to take time out of their schedule to answer our questions. The friendly staff was always available and willing to help, which made this otherwise difficult project go very smoothly."

Pier Veilleux, president of Turbo Images, said the big project

required close cooperation, and his company was able "to provide the reliable and attentive service and support they expected from us."

In 2005, Turbo Images produced and installed graphics on more than 14,000 vehicles for clients across North America. Its bus industry clients have included Greyhound, AC Transit, Golden Gate Bridge Highway & Transportation District, Pacific Western Transportation, New Jersey Transit, Arrow Stage Lines, Latin Express Services, and Laidlaw.

For more information, go to www.turbo-images.com.

market by going after corporations and other upscale groups. Traditional seated-coach operators, looking to capture a piece of the high-end market, also are being targeted.

About two-thirds of the new coaches sold in the fourth quarter were equipped with Allison B500s, with 34 percent sold with ZF AS-Tronic transmissions. However, the AS-Tronic outstripped the Allison T2145.

on many of the popular private-sector coach models sold during the fourth quarter, including the MCI J4500, the Prevost H3-45 and Prevost H3-41, and the Van Hool T2145.

In his fourth-quarter report, Plachno noted he may have to expand his report this year with two new coaches entering the market. The Temsa, which is being im-

ported from Turkey, and the BCI Falcon, which is coming from China, may qualify for the *National Bus Trader* report. Both were introduced to the industry at Motorcoach Expo 2007 in New Orleans last month.

Plachno said he needs to confirm both are "integral" coaches. That is, they use a monocoque or unibody design.

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Spokane coach operator, Werner Rosenquist, dies

SPOKANE, Wash. — Werner Rosenquist, who operated a bus and motorcoach company in eastern Washington for more than 40 years, died last month. He was 88.

Mr. Rosenquist joined the industry in 1941, a year after graduating from Whitworth College in Spokane and two years after marrying his wife, Gladys.

Gladys' father operated Auto Interurban, an early Spokane bus company. Mr. Rosenquist went to work for his father-in-law and spent 15 years there before starting his own bus company in the mid-1950s.

He acquired several routes and companies, eventually combining them into what became known as Empire Lines, which he operated until the late 1990s. He also created a travel agency.

Mr. Rosenquist was active in both civic and industry organizations, including being an early member of the United Bus Owners of America (now United Motorcoach Association).

Mr. Rosenquist sustained a

lifetime commitment to his alma mater. He was a board member of Whitworth College from 1950 until his death, and was president of its foundation from 1972 to 1989. Last March, he was honored for his service to Whitworth and the foundation.

Additionally, he served on the board of an association of three cemeteries, and was a founding board member of a funeral home and served as a trustee until his death.

His interests included photography and technology. His family said he seldom met a new technology he didn't like.

He is survived by his widow; three sons, Terry, Mark and Tracy; a daughter, Ann Compogno; a brother, Howard, and a sister Helen Giboney.

Memorial gifts can be sent to Christ Kitchen, 2709 W. Boone Ave., Spokane, WA 99201; Union Gospel Mission, 1224 E. Trent Ave., Spokane, WA 99202, or the Easter Seal Society, 606 W. Sharp Ave., Spokane, WA 99201.

Transit agencies seek charter firms

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

Johnson City, Tenn. Deadline: Feb. 9, 2007. Write to: Donna Bridwell, Transit Planner, Johnson City Transit System, 137 W. Market St., Johnson City, TN 37604. Phone: (423) 929-7119.

Berkeley, Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee, Orangeburg and Sumter

counties, S.C. Deadline: Feb. 19, 2007. Write to: Ann D. August, Executive Director, Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority, P.O. Box 2462, Sumter, SC 29151. Phone: (803) 775-9347. The transit agency will conduct a hearing at 6 p.m. Feb. 8, regarding its charter service notice, at the Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments, 36 W. Liberty St., Sumter.

Pontotoc County, Okla. Deadline: Feb. 22, 2007. Write to: Danna Laxton, Director, Pontotoc County Public Transit Authority/Call A Ride Public Transit System, 15425 CR 3540, Ada, OK 74820. Phone:

(580) 332-2400.

Southeastern Virginia (i.e. 50-mile radius of Newport News, Hampton, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, Chesapeake and Suffolk). Deadline: Feb. 23, 2007. Write to: Sheran Taylor-Jones, Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads, 3400 Victoria Blvd., Hampton, VA 23661. Phone: (757) 222-6036,

Racine County, Wis. Deadline: 4:55 p.m. Feb. 28, 2007. Write: Michael J. Glasheen, Transit Planner, City of Racine, 730 Washington Ave., Rm. 304, Racine, WI 53403. Phone: (414) 636-9463.

Rules violations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

In its complaint, the United Food & Commercial Workers Union Local One said the service provided by RGRTA Transit System displaced nearly 70 school bus routes and violated FTA school bus regulations.

FTA Regional Administrator Letitia Thompson, who also decided the Westchester case, agreed with the union, ruling that the service provided by RGRTA transit "contravenes the

purpose and intent" of FTA rules and, "in some of its characteristics, specifically violates the (FTA) school bus regulations."

The school bus case was not Rochester-Genesee Regional Transit's first experience with violating FTA rules.

Early in this decade, John H. Kemp of Kemp's Bus Service in Avon, N.Y., went on a one-man mission to stop the rogue agency from violating federal charter services rules, which it was doing extensively and with impunity.

It took Kemp two years but his

persistence paid off. The FTA finally ruled in 2002 that the transit agency had violated the rules by running a variety of prohibited services, ranging from grocery shopping trips for the elderly, to shuttling students on college campuses, to transporting police officers for out-of-town trips.

Kemp estimated the transit agency was doing upwards of \$1 million in illegal charter work annually. That was small potatoes, however, compared to the annual value of the illegal school bus service: \$5.9 million.

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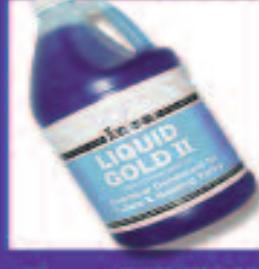
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New effort to boost popularity of U.S. river cruises

Here's a travel tidbit you may have missed:

Small ship voyages now account for 80 percent of Grand Circle Travel's business, surpassing the motorcoach as the most popular way to tour Europe — and some other continents, according to the largest marketer of international vacations for Americans over age 50.

Grand Circle Travel lists seven river cruises among its "top 10" vacations last year, with "The Great Rivers of Europe," a 16-day trip along the Rhine, Main and Danube, topping the popularity poll.

Boston-based Grand Circle built its first river ship nine years ago and today has 50 ships plying European and other waterways. Six more 50-passenger ships are due this year.

Now, another American company would like to duplicate Grand Circle Travel's riverboat popularity in this country.

Beginning last year, Newport Beach, Calif.-based Ambassadors International Inc., initiated a series of moves that has created a new company with six U.S.-flagged cruise ships that will ply coastal and inland waterways in this country, including the Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Cumberland and

Arkansas rivers in the Midwest; the Columbia, Snake and Willamette rivers in the Northwest, and the Inside Passage in Alaska.

The new company is called Majestic America Line and it was

formed by combining American West Steamboat Company and Delta Queen Steamboat Company.

Ambassadors purchased Delta Queen Steamboat Co. in April but it wasn't until late last year that it

was decided to combine the companies and began operating them under the Majestic America Line brand.

In March, Majestic America is debuting the world's largest and

"most elegant" river cruise ship, the American Queen. With accommodations for 436 passengers, the American Queen will be the flagship vessel of Majestic America Line and sail between New Orleans and Memphis, St. Louis and Minneapolis, and on the Ohio River to Cincinnati and Pittsburgh.

For those interested in the old Mississippi riverboats, the Delta Queen and the Mississippi Queen, they too will be sailing this spring.

According to one travel writer, senior vacationers like the multi-day European cruises because they don't have to unpack and repack for the length of the voyage; harbors are close to the heart of many cities — sometimes they are the heart of a city, and since the ships sail at night they drop off passengers at a different harbor each morning.

If health is a concern, as it tends to be for seniors, there is an advantage to a river cruise because passengers are never far from shore.

Based in Seattle, Majestic America Line operates as a division of Ambassadors Cruise Group, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Ambassadors International.

For information, go to www.majesticamericaline.com, or call (800) 434-1232.

The homeless: Nascent line-run market?

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. — During the past dozen years, Greyhound Lines has given free rides to upwards of 12,000 runaway youths through its partnership with the National Runaway Switchboard.

Now, a handful of cities across the U.S. are developing programs designed to send willing homeless individuals back to their hometowns with a one-way bus ticket.

One of the newest cities to

adopt such a program is Palm Springs, where the police department has created Operation Reunite.

So far, six people have received bus tickets, with one person sent to Seattle, 1,250 miles away.

Like most anything government does, the program has its critics. Some homeless advocates, both locally and nationally, are concerned the police department is wasting its money. Others say

the homeless problem won't be solved by purchasing bus tickets.

San Francisco has bought thousands of bus tickets in the last couple of years for its program, and Orlando, Fla., is starting a bus ticket program.

One homeless outreach group in Palm Springs said it used to provide one-way bus tickets for the homeless but saw a number of those it helped find their way back to the sunny California city.

Greyhound extends contract with union

DALLAS — Greyhound Lines and the union representing its drivers and many of its mechanics failed to agree on a new contract when the old one expired at the end of last month, but the two sides decided to keep talking and extend the contract.

The new expiration date for the work agreement between Greyhound and the Amalgamated Trans-

it Union National Local 1700 is Feb. 14.

"We remain committed to reaching a fair agreement with our drivers and mechanics," said Steve Gorman, president and CEO of Greyhound. "We will continue negotiations to address all of the issues that are important to our employees. In the meantime, our business will operate as normal

without interruption."

The ATU represents roughly 3,300 Greyhound employees, including 3,000 drivers and about half of the company mechanics.

Since the last contract was negotiated three years ago, the number of drivers and mechanics represented by the ATU has dropped by 800. That contract was ratified in March 2004.

Speed limiters

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

quickly followed suit with a similar request.

Truckers opposed to speed limiters say research shows that a uniform truck speed would not make roads safer.

And the largest group of independent truck owner-operators claims the fact that both FMCSA and NHTSA (commonly pronounced nit-sa) are considering the rule shows the federal agencies "are all too willing to appease big business."

"Since very few highway accidents involving trucks take place at speeds greater than 68 mph, you don't have to be a highway safety expert to conclude a singular focus on truck speed could hardly produce a safety breakthrough," said Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association Executive Vice President Todd Spencer. "But, that's not how it works in Washington, D.C., where perception is spun to be reality."

The issue is a hot potato in Canada, as well. The Ontario Trucking Association has been in both Queen's Park and Ottawa, trying to get a rule requiring speeds on all trucks be limited to 100 kilometers per hour in Canada.

What about buses?

Deep in their announcement, the FMCSA and NHTSA pointedly noted that the petitions asking for the speed limiters wanted them installed on trucks with a GVWR of more than 26,000 pounds. And that the federal safety regulation cited in the petitions applied to commercial vehicles designed and/or used for the transportation of property.

"This definition does not include motorcoaches," said the FMCSA-NHTSA notice. "And neither of the petitions addresses the potential applicability of the proposed requirements for speed limiters on motorcoaches."

"However, motorcoaches are considered (commercial motor vehicles) under the definitions in 49 Code of Federal Regulations Part 390.5, and the majority of motorcoaches exceed the 26,000-pound GVWR threshold proposed in the petitions."

Then, the federal agencies asked the pregnant question: "Should the proposed amendments to require speed limiters on trucks with a GVWR of greater than 26,000 pounds be extended to apply also to motorcoaches? Do any existing motorcoaches utilize speed limiting devices/technology in current operations?"

Those questions clearly propel the motorcoach industry into the fray.

And the debate over the issue is bound to be lively if for no other reason than the federal government does not currently control speed limits in the U.S. That is done by the states.

Trucks and speeding

In the FMCSA/NHTSA notice, the agencies dredged up old data regarding the impact of speeding on crashes involving large trucks.

They referenced a 1991 NHTSA report to Congress titled "Commercial Motor Vehicle Speed Control Safety."

The report found that non-detectable radar studies showed that compliance with speed limits by over-the-road trucks was poor, "but better than that of passenger vehicles."

It went on to say that most trucks that were speeding traveled at just over the posted speed limit.

"Crash statistics indicated that speeding was generally less involved in combination-unit truck crashes than it was in passenger vehicle crashes," the '91 report said.

The independent truckers contend the speed limiter proposal "is nothing more than a public relations smokescreen" by the ATA

and the handful of large trucking companies, and not a safety initiative.

Big vs. small

Currently, trucking companies can set speed limiters on their trucks at any speed their company executives choose, said Spencer of the OOIDA.

"In fact," he continued, "many large companies already speed limit their trucks but they don't crow about their safety records because they're nothing to brag about."

"They want a government mandate to do it, however, because they know their drivers, whom they pay only for miles driven, would move to another company with a less restrictive speed policy. And they want to deny shippers the option of choosing trucking companies that place a higher priority on on-time service."

The OOIDA contends the idea of speed limiters is "even more misguided and outrageous when you really examine the safety data."

"There is nothing desirable about turning trucks into rolling roadblocks and obstacles for other drivers," said Spencer.

"Slower isn't safer. Every year, NHTSA accident data shows that cars are far more likely to run into the backs of trucks than the other

way around. Real highway safety experts have always known that highways are safest when all vehicles travel at the same speed."

Motive questioned

Spencer thinks the big trucking companies "want government approval to run longer and heavier trucks all over the country. The speed limiter proposal is like putting lipstick on that idea."

The FMCSA/NHTSA will accept comments on the speed limiter idea through March 27. After making a technical review and considering the comments it receives, a decision is to be made whether to grant or deny either or both of the petitions.

Comments can be signed or submitted anonymously. Anyone can submit comments. All submissions must include the agency name and docket number, NHTSA-2007-26851.

To submit comments, go to www.dms.dot.gov/submit/dspSubmission.cfm, include the docket number in the "Docket ID" field and follow the instructions; or fax comments to (202) 493-2251, or mail them to: Docket Management Facility, U.S. Department of Transportation, 400 Seventh St. SW, Nassif Building Room PL-401, Washington, DC 20590-0001.

Compliance review

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

while a compliance review could theoretically come at any moment, there are companies that have been in business for 20 years that have never had one.

And, while the reviews are funded by the FMCSA and its Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program, commonly known as MCSAP (pronounced mick-sap), there are no set rules for who will conduct the inspections.

In some states — like South Carolina, for example, where the State Transport Police run what Presley considers to be a model compliance review program — the inspectors are state employees who are Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance trained to inspect buses and trucks and the program is federally funded.

In other areas of the country, the inspector could come from a regional office of the FMCSA.

If you're new

For new companies, there is a New Entrant Safety Audit, and it is most often conducted on a contract basis for the FMCSA by Consolidated Safety Services of Fairfax, Va.

Consolidated Safety Services is best known in the bus and motorcoach industry as the company that conducts the Department of Defense Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command inspections that review private carriers for the military.

According to Robert Watkins, vice president for transportation safety and security at Consolidated Safety Services, the primary goal of the new-entrant program is to reach every new interstate commercial vehicle operation and assure they possess the basic systems and information needed to operate safely.

Scoop to nuts

Unlike a destination or roadside inspection, a compliance review is a scheduled event that usually takes place at the operator's place of business.

In essence, it is a comprehensive review of all the company's buses, personnel, and business practices. Usually an inspector gives an operator 48 hours notice before appearing on the premises. However, if a company's vehicle has been involved in a major accident, the inspectors often appear on the company's doorstep that very day.

According to Jim Matras of ITS Compliance Inc. in Sun Prairie, Wis., having the required docu-

ments ready and up to date is essential for a satisfactory compliance rating.

Matras performs mock audits for companies hoping to do well on their next compliance inspection.

Among areas that commonly get operators in trouble are: insurance (49 CFR Part 387), driver qualifications (49 CFR Part 382, 383, 391 & 392), accident registry (49 CFR Part 390), maintenance records (49 CFR Part 393 & 396), health records (49 CFR Part 390), and log books (49 CFR Part 395).

The FMCSA wants to see correct documentation concerning each of these areas and that involves paperwork.

Matras also gives seminars on "Being Prepared for a New DOT Audit," and he says one of the difficulties he has is adequately covering the complexity of the compliance review during one teaching session.

The best approach

Presley says that Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations for buses and motorcoaches are the best tools available for organizing a safe motorcoach operation. He encourages adopting a systemic approach to using the regulations. A business organized in this fashion should not have major difficulties with a compliance review, says Presley.

To emphasize his point, Presley points out that the Department of Defense inspection program has not had an operator involved in a fatality in the 17 years of its existence. The Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command reviews all of its carriers in a manner similar to the compliance review every two years.

Presley notes that when a bus company applies for operating authority from the USDOT/FMCSA, it agrees to the conditions set out by the federal safety regulations.

The purpose of the compliance review is not to play a game of "gotcha" with an operator, but to assure that a company's daily operation is safe. Since you will never be penalized for anything that you did not agree to in the beginning, a company based on the regulations should not have problems with the federal inspectors.

When the phone call comes to schedule a compliance review, an operator who applies the systemic approach ought to be able to relax rather than run around in a flurry trying to create the appropriate record keeping at the last minute, says Presley.

Survival tips

He recommends that when an inspector shows up, companies should make the inspector feel comfortable, providing him or her with a place to work uninterrupted, for example, and offering coffee or a soft drink. In addition, Presley recommends that if an inspector asks for a copy of anything, you make a copy for the inspector and retain one for yourself. It could be useful later to know what interested an inspector.

Presley shared these and other tips during UMA's Motorcoach Expo 2007 last month in New Orleans.

New York motorcoach operator Godfrey Lebron of Paradise Trailways, chairman of the legislative and regulatory committee of UMA, also has tips for surviving a compliance review.

No. 1, "make it as easy for the inspector as possible."

LeBron recommends keeping two separate files of safety-related information, one for the FMCSA and one for the New York Department of Transportation. In each file he keeps copies of all the information that is relevant to each agency.

LeBron has his own systematic approach to the compliance review process. He divides the pertinent information into three categories. The first he calls the "static category," or the business quotient. In this category he places:

1. The operating authority granted by FMCSA.
2. The MCS-90B form provided to the operator by its insurance company or broker. It verifies the company has the insurance to operate legally.
3. Or, alternatively, the MCS82B, which is the self-insurance counterpart to the MCS-90B.
4. The accident register. The register is always kept up to date, with information on all reportable accidents.

The second category is "human resources" information, which he calls the "software category." In this category he places:

1. A list of drivers.
2. A copy of the recap that is done in January for the previous year regarding drug testing.
3. A copy of the company's policies for safety management.
4. A folder for each driver hired by the company with:
 - a. Copy of the application for employment
 - b. Previous-employment verification
 - c. Copy of CDL and medical exam certification
 - d. Fair Credit Disclosure form
 - e. Copies of any road tests

MCI expands technician training, adds new center

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — Motor Coach Industries is expanding its motorcoach technician training program, including establishing a National Training Center in Louisville, Ky.

The upgraded program adds more course offerings and training, and the naming of a new training manager, Kevin Jones.

For this year, MCI will offer regional-based training, plus intensive, three-day "technician tune-up" sessions at its new training facility in Louisville. Plus, MCI will offer customize training programs taught at an operator's site or at an MCI location that's convenient to operators.

"Motorcoach have operators' technicians advance their skill base," said Ken Russell, MCI vice president of aftermarket customer support.

Among the areas of focus for the training will be HVAC systems, powertrains, steering, multiplex systems, brakes, componentry, audio-video systems and other systems. All courses will be taught by experienced instructors. Some

given the driver

f. The driver's accident record

LeBron says he prepares three folders for each driver. One goes in the federal inspection file, one goes in the state inspection file, and he maintains a company personnel file.

Finally, LeBron's system includes a "hardware category," or vehicle information. Here he places:

1. A list of all vehicles with their VIN, year, make, model, tire size, seating capacity
2. Company information on total mileage driven, and number of vehicles ("power units" in government language) and drivers

3. A folder for each vehicle: VIN, seating capacity, driver check lists, repairs and maintenance records

4. Driver daily inspection reports for the time period required by the respective agencies.

In addition, LeBron recommends having evidence of a system for checking, reporting and subsequently repairing vehicles. For instance, it does not do much good if a driver reports a cracked windshield and it does not get repaired until the vehicle has been driven another 50,000 miles.

Matras concurs with the suggestion that an operator have proof

courses will be available in Spanish.

Jones, the new training manager, joins MCI from Caterpillar's engine research and development division. He has an MBA and holds certifications in both advanced hydraulics systems and advanced diesel engine systems.

MCI has announced the following dates and courses for 2007:

- East Coast. HVAC, Proheat, 2007 engine introduction, March 13-15
- Canada. Vehicle dynamics/multiplex, June 5-7
- South. Multiplex troubleshooting/HVAC, June 12-14
- Central. Powertrain diagnostics, Sept. 11-13
- West Coast. Wheelchair lift systems/multiplex, Nov. 13-15
- Technical Tune-Up Training. MCI National Training Center, Louisville, April 11-17; Sept. 25-28

For a detailed schedule, e-mail requests to Kevin.Jones@mci-coach.com, or contact your MCI fleet support manager.

there are systems in place for dealing with problems.

One suggestion he makes is that drivers do a detailed inspection in the evening when the bus has stopped and note any repairs that need to be done.

In the morning the driver should do a re-inspection to make sure the necessary repairs were made before the bus goes back on the road.

Don't overlook ...

Also, Matras recommends providing inspectors with information on counseling or remedial actions that have been taken to correct any safety-related problems and prevent their reoccurrence.

Last, but not least, make sure log books are up to date and available when the inspector steps in the door.

For more information about FMCSA on-site inspections:

The FMCSA provides a Microsoft PowerPoint training module, "What is a Compliance Review?" that can be downloaded from www.fmcsa.dot.gov/documents/training/comp_rev_mx_eng.ppt.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations can be found at www.fmcsa.dot.gov/rules-regulations/administration/fmcsr/fmcsr-guide.htm.

SCENES FROM MOTORCOACH EXPO 2007

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Setra sales vice president, Tom Chezen, above left, discusses the Setra S 417 with Bruce Neuhart of Arrow Stage Lines in Omaha, Neb., center, as Dennis Coverston of DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses, lower right, looks on. Below, Mike Chapler of Unit Chemical, left, hands a product sample to Manuel Sarmiento of OK Tours in San Antonio, Texas.



Above top, Tom Giddens of Pacific Coachways in Garden Grove, Calif., gets to the bottom of things with Pepe Gea of Amaya Astron Seating, right, as George Farrell of Amaya looks on. Above, Li-Ju Lo, left, and Li-Hung Lo, right, of C.Z. Seating stop at a computer screen presentation on the Expo show floor.



Charles Paden of PennTex Industries, above left, discusses alternators with competitor and old friend David Moore of C.E. Niehoff & Co., above right. Below, a lighter moment is shared at the Radio Engineering Industries Elite System display by a group that includes Metro Magazine's Frank DiGiacomo, center in suit, and REI's Guy Jukes, far right in suit.



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18 SCENES FROM MOTORCOACH EXPO 2007



Networking between Solution Sessions at Expo were, above, Frank Bolog of A&M Transit Lines in Alliance, Ohio, left; Charles Atchison, center, and Marion Pruitt, right, of Atchison Transportation Services in Spartanburg, S.C. Below, Lejuan Washington of Little Rock Tours, right, shakes hands with fellow Little Rock, Ark., operator Jim Lienhart of Arrow Coach Lines, while Phillip Jacuzzi of Arrow, center, looks on.



The educational and general sessions at Expo attracted large crowds of attentive attendees, above. At right, Charles Hill of Heartland Trailways in St. Joseph, Mo., on right, engages Norm Arendorf of Village Charters in Wichita, Kan., left, in a discussion, while John Nichols of Heartland, in check shirt, looks on. All photos by Dave Braun Photography, Las Vegas



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SCENES FROM MOTORCOACH EXPO 2007

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Outgoing American Bus Association Chairman Ron Eyre, on right in top photo, and his wife, Joanne, make small talk during the Welcome Reception at Motorcoach Expo. Above, Rose-Marie Rodriguez of the South Jersey Transportation Authority in Atlantic City, left, and Tami Dion of HMS Host Restaurants in Bethesda, Md., brighten the reception.

Larry Wilson of L.W. Transportation in Fredericksburg, Va., above left, and David Messick of Blue Bird Coachworks, above right, enjoy a laugh during the Welcome Reception at Motorcoach Expo. Below, Martin Van Tol of A.C.C. International, center, greets fellow Canadians, Neil Badder, left, and Kathy Badder, right, of Badder Bus Service in Thamesville, Ont.

UMA President & CEO Victor Parra, above left, surprises Sharon Broo, center, and Bob Broo, right, of Travel Guard in Alpharetta, Ga. Below, Mike Waters of Coach America in San Francisco, right, listens intently to Joe Ward of Prevost Car.

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