

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

FTA charter decision slams rogue Indiana transit agency

LAFAYETTE, Ind. — A ruling by a regional administrator for the Federal Transit Administration says the Lafayette public transit agency has been blatantly and consistently violating federal charter service rules and it was aided and abetted in many of the violations by two private bus operators.

The FTA ordered the transit agency to cease and desist from providing illegal charters and, because there was a “pattern of violations,” it said it planned to

withhold federal funds equal to the amount of the illegal bus services.

The full extent of the illegal charters is not yet clear but the general manager of Greater Lafayette Public Transportation Corp. admitted in a newspaper interview last June his agency earned \$87,000 from “subcontracted” charters.

The ruling is one of the boldest yet by a regional FTA administrator and legal counsel because

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First test of new charter rules is studied by Florida operator

PENSACOLA, Fla. — Already fighting a two-front battle over charter rules violations by the local public transit agency and a non-profit group, a small Florida bus operator is gearing up for a third.

Thomas McKean, president of Beach Boy Trolley, said if he's not satisfied with the results of the pending actions, he will file a new complaint with federal regulators under new charter rules the Federal Transit Agency plans to put in effect April 30.

“It's time to take off the gloves and go bare knuckled,” he said of his dispute with Escambia County Area Transit (ECAT).

He said he plans to have the new complaint ready to go the same day the new charter service rules take effect, which would probably make him the first operator in the nation to test the reworked regulations that were completed last month by the FTA after nearly two years of work.

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Rochester transit, schools win court decision in fight

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — A contentious, high-stakes feud between a public transit authority and a private school bus company over which one should be allowed to provide school transportation for more than 9,000 Rochester high school students has tilted back to the transit agency.

U.S. District Court Judge David G. Larimer has ruled that the Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority could

legally operate the school routes as part of its regular public transportation service.

The decision effectively ended a cease and desist order against the transit agency the Federal Transit Administration issued in October after determining that RGRTA's school transportation program violated charter service rules that prohibit public carriers from competing with private bus companies.

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Fuel tax tiff

Operator gets help from IRS ‘advocate’

Get this: You may have a friend at the Internal Revenue Service you never knew you had.

It's the Taxpayer Advocate Service, an independent office within the IRS that's responsible for helping taxpayers who are unable to resolve tax issues short of hiring a tax lawyer.

And it has worked for one motorcoach operator, not once, but twice.

Now that might not sound very likely, but Jolynn Anderson, who co-owns Huntsville, Ala.-based Spirit Coach with her brother, insists it's true. She says a tax advocate can be of real service.

Getting her problem resolved, wasn't easy, even with the assistance of an advocate. It still required a great deal of persistence and patience.

Anderson, who lives in Texas, spent months dueling with the IRS over her 2006 tax refund. IRS tax collectors questioned her claim for the 17-cents-a-gallon rebate on the diesel fuel tax her company paid to run its 11 coaches during the year.

“I sent in the quarterly fuel tax forms, but that did not satisfy them,” she said.

Instead, the IRS demanded copies of all of the company's fuel receipts. It took her office staff sev-

eral days to round them up — they weighed more than five pounds — and get them in the mail.

A few weeks later, however, she was informed her time for working out the problem had expired and she now would have to hire a tax lawyer to appeal her case in federal Tax Court.

“All of this came about because it took the Memphis office over three weeks to get my packet of receipts from the mailroom to the examiner,” she said. “It weighed over five pounds so it wasn't a package that could easily be lost.”

Anderson said she was so frus-

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Sales of new coaches slip in 2007

What a difference a year makes.

Twelve months ago in this spot it was reported that sales of new motorcoaches had climbed during the fourth quarter of 2006, boosting deliveries for all of 2006 to their highest level in four years.

The picture for the fourth quarter and all of 2007 is not so upbeat.

Figures from *National Bus Trader* magazine show that total sales in the final quarter of last year were 591 new coaches, down

from 760 in the final quarter of 2006, and the second consecutive quarter to show a sales decline from the previous year.

Prior to the second-half 2007 slowdown, there had been 11 quarters in a row of sales increases.

Overall, '07 sales of new coaches totaled 2,173, down from 2,381 in 2006. However, 2007 sales remained above either 2005 (2,058 units), or 2004 (1,668 coaches).

The industry's 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 units. The fourth is traditionally the best quarter of the year for new-coach sales.

National Bus Trader Editor Larry Plachno said there are a number of specific reasons for the '07 sales downturn.

No. 1, Plachno thinks the industry plateaued from the upward

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New engines are rolling up miles

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — Motor Coach Industries says it is getting positive feedback from the 116 customers who have purchased 430 new coaches during the past eight months that are equipped with reduced-emissions 2007 and 2008 diesel engines.

Those customers have logged more than 12 million miles of “roadworthy performance,” according to MCI, the No. 1 supplier

of over-the-road coaches in North America.

“The feedback on the engine technology has generally been positive,” said Paul Fazio, director of powertrain engineering at MCI. “In some cases we've made adjustments to the software program tied to the regeneration process but, like anything new, it's just a matter of learning how something works.”

Fazio also reports that, in some

cases, operators are getting fuel economy improvements from the new coaches.

But the most significant aspect of the new engines, says Fazio, is what operators and the public don't see — fewer exhaust emissions.

“The greatest benefit is the reduction of particulate matter by 90 percent and NOx emissions by 50 percent,” he said. “It's a remark-

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Isherwood buys Cyr unit in Maine

PORTLAND, Maine — A little more than six months ago, Gregg Isherwood of Custom Coach and Limousine approached veteran New England bus operator Joe Cyr to see if Cyr would be interested in buying Irsherwood's Portland-based operation.

Instead, Isherwood wound up buying Cyr Bus Lines' southern division.

"It came full circle," Isherwood said of the purchase. "I approached Cyr to buy me and I bought him."

Isherwood, 46, president and general manager of Custom Coach,

calls the transaction "a great mix." In fact, he feels it would have been an equally great mix had Cyr purchased Custom Coach.

The southern division of Cyr Bus Lines was formerly a separate company called The Maine Line, which had a long and distinguished history in the area.

The Maine Line, which had been in business since the early 1940s, was purchased by Coach USA in 1998 from the Ouellette family. At the time, The Maine Line had a fleet of nearly 50 vehicles, 85 employees and \$8.2 million in

annual revenue.

By early 2003, however, Coach USA began divesting most of its tour and charter operations. It sold The Maine Line and four other New England-based subsidiaries to Peter Pan Bus Lines.

Eventually, Cyr purchased The Maine Line operation from Peter Pan.



Gregg Isherwood



Joann, Richard Flood display their certificates of achievement.

Bus academy graduates first drivers of program; operators are signing up

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Two employees of Coach Tours Ltd. of Brookfield, Conn., have become the first motorcoach driver graduates of the Bus and Motorcoach Academy.

Joann and Richard Flood, who have been driving for Coach Tours for 10 years, have been honored by their employer, as well as by the academy, for their achievement.

"We are extremely proud of these two professionals," said Michael Neustadt, president of Coach Tours.

"Their accomplishment shows me how important it is for them to constantly improve their skills. They are always trying to offer the best customer service possible while watching out for our bottom line," said Neustadt.

The Floods were honored by Neustadt and fellow Coach Tours' employees at a meeting of company drivers.

Separately, Bus and Motorcoach Academy Executive Director Ken Presley awarded the Floods the academy's first two *Certificates of Academic Achievement in Motorcoach Operations*.

The certificates denote completion of the academy motorcoach operator program that includes courses in driver qualifications, vehicle maintenance, safe driving, security, and passenger

issues.

"Studies show that all drivers, regardless of their years of experience, benefit from academic training and retraining," said Presley. "Your completion of these courses places you in the highest ranks of professional acumen with your peers. You are to be commended for your commitment to elevate your professional skills and knowledge."

Popular drivers

Neustadt reports the Floods are favorite drivers for many of Coach Tours' customers, including the professional and college baseball teams served by the company.

To encourage the Floods and other Coach Tours' employees to complete the Bus and Motorcoach Academy driver program, Neustadt has instituted an incentive program.

If a driver signs up, completes and passes one or more of the courses, Coach Tours will reimburse all or part of the registration fee for each course passed. For full-time employees, Coach Tours we will pay 100 percent of the fee. For part-time employees, the company we will pay 50 percent of the fee, as long as the driver worked at least 400 hours during the previous 12 months.

To gain reimbursement, drivers

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Bridgestone Firestone hikes prices

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Bridgestone Firestone North American Tire has announced price increases of up to 8 percent on the company's Firestone and Bridgestone brand tire lines, as well as all associate brand tires.

The price hikes for bus and truck, passenger and light truck, and agricultural and off-the-road

tires will affect the replacement, original equipment and export channels. The increases are scheduled to begin phasing in March 1.

"The continuing unprecedented upward spiral of energy and raw material costs makes this action necessary," said Asahiko 'Duke' Nishiyama, vice chairman and president of BFNT.

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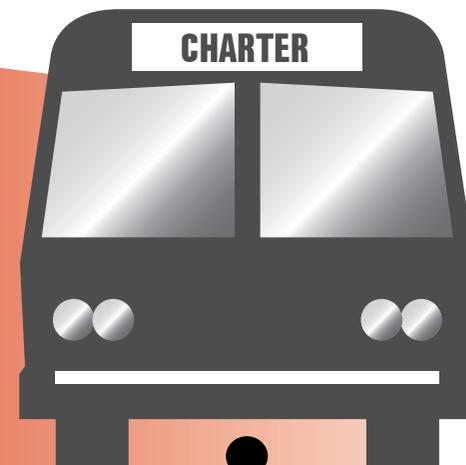
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THE DOCKET

Will economic stimulus help sustain travel market?

WASHINGTON — Congress, President Bush and the Federal Reserve are making dramatic moves aimed at stimulating the U.S. economy.

And the motorcoach industry hopes their actions will bolster consumer confidence so Americans will sustain their zeal for traveling.

Congressional leaders and Bush generally agreed on a package of tax rebates and incentives aimed at encouraging spending by consumers and businesses.

At about the same time, the Federal Reserve slashed the interest rate on money it loans to banks from 4.25 percent to 3.5 percent, a move designed to calm financial markets as well as foster economic activity.

Any fiscal or monetary policy that gives the economy a boost is a good thing for travel and tourism. In general, though, business slowdowns impact the travel industry much differently than they do other sectors of the economy.

“When there’s a slowdown in the economy, travel only slows slightly,” said Douglas Shifflet of D.K. Shifflet & Associates, which tracks travel trends.

“The amount of time people spend on vacations and in hotels is hit harder. They make tradeoffs; they stay closer to home or with friends and relatives.”

Adds Amy Ziff, Travelocity editor-at-large: “They’ll look for other ways to save, like taking a day or two off of their trip.”

But they will still travel.

The Conference Board’s most recent consumer survey found 45.8 percent of Americans intend to take a vacation within six months, down just a tad from 46.4 percent a year ago.

Domestic travel also might even benefit from a weaker economy, a weak dollar and other trends. Visits to national parks were up 1.3 percent, January-September 2007, compared with the previous year, with Yosemite and Yellowstone

adding more than a quarter-million visitors.

One spur to the economy that would have touched the motorcoach industry won’t be happening, however. Congressional Democrats dropped a proposal to boost spending on roads and other infrastructure as part of the stimulus package, although Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada called for a long-term stimulus plan to build more roads, plus utilities, schools and housing.

Washington state revokes CDLs in mail fraud probe

SPOKANE, Wash. — The commercial driver licenses of nearly 100 school bus and truck drivers are being revoked by the Washington state Department of Licensing as part of a mail fraud and conspiracy investigation.

The drivers, mostly from other states, used mail-drop addresses in Spokane, didn’t meet state residency requirements, and were part of a scheme involving paying bribes to a third-party test evaluator, said U.S. Attorney Jim McDevitt.

State Licensing Director Liz Luce credited the FBI with breaking up CDL Consulting, which McDevitt described as a “driver’s license mill.”

Brano Milovanovic and Suad Grebic, both of Spokane, were arrested and five other suspects were being sought on mail fraud and conspiracy charges.

The individuals who got their commercial driver licenses from the Spokane driving school re-

turned to other states where they were re-licensed under reciprocal agreements with Washington.

Luce said she couldn’t begin the license revocation process until the investigation became public. And, while her agency could only cancel the contract with the private contractor involved in the fraud scheme, Luce said she was pleased the FBI and U.S. attorney’s office were pursuing criminal charges.

Luce said that state budget cutbacks in the 1990s caused the department to lose employees, forcing the agency to hire outside contractors as testers for commercial driver license applicants. “I believe that opened the door,” she said.

Applicants can no longer choose their own testers, and state licensing personnel are now doing 60 percent of the test-evaluation work, Luce said.

Interpreters helping CDL applicants with written tests also are more closely screened.

Court rejects challenge to truckers HOS

WASHINGTON — Truckers’ hours-of-service rules, which have been under near-constant legal challenge since they were revised nearly five years ago, will stand as they are for the time being, a federal appeals court has ruled.

Public Citizen had asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to invalidate the Interim Final Rule on hours of service, but the court rejected the request.

The decision means the 11-hour daily driving limit and the 34-hour restart will remain in effect while the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration works on a final version of the rule, a process that will take months.

Had the court ruled the other way, the 11-hour limit would have been changed to 10 hours and the 34-hour restart would have been eliminated.

Public Citizen had argued that the Interim Final Rule violated the court’s prior decisions in the case. While the FMCSA and its supporters defended the IFR on the basis that the retention of the 11- and 34-hour provisions in the IFR were needed to avoid significant disruptions to the industry and to law enforcement and the safety gains achieved under the current HOS rules.

The appeals court decision does allow for a separate court challenge to the Interim Final Rule by Public Citizen. However, such a challenge would take months to pursue and most likely the FMCSA would issue a final HOS rule before the litigation could be completed.

’08 UCRA fees unchanged, collections will start earlier

WASHINGTON — The board of directors of the Unified Carrier Registration Agreement have voted to keep UCRA fees unchanged for 2008.

Leaving the rates the same as those adopted when the program was established last year allows the states to by-pass the time-consuming federal rulemaking by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration that’s necessary before UCRA fees can be changed.

States believe that one reason they did not collect all the fees due them in 2007 under the new program was the limited time for collections.

Unified Carrier Registration

Agreement registrations and collections for 2007 began on Sept. 10 last year.

This year, it’s anticipated UCRA registrations and collections will begin in March or April rather than in the summer.

As was the procedure last year, carriers will receive a notice from their base states when the UCRA registration season begins.

And once again, carriers will be able to register on-line for UCRA with the national system hosted by the Indiana Department of Revenue.

The UCRA is the procedure that replaced the defunct Single State Registration System.

Special ‘day’ at White House

WASHINGTON — Tourists stopping at the White House Visitor Center between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on President’s Day (Monday, Feb. 18) will have an opportunity to be “sworn into office as President for a day” with the help of National Park Service rangers and volunteers.

The White House Visitor Center is near the White House on Pennsylvania Ave., between 14th and 15th Streets, N.W., on the north side of the Commerce Department building.

A full day of free programming

is planned, including providing visitors glimpses of historical events through the participation of actors from the acclaimed American Historical Theater. There also will be games, crafts and other activities.

Highlights include a “chat” with Abraham Lincoln and a table-side conversation with First Lady Dolley Madison. Pictures can be taken with Presidents Lincoln, Kennedy and Ford.

For more information, call (202) 208-1631 or go to www.nps.gov/whho.

New Hampshire, other states want English CDL mandate

CONCORD, N.H. — A New Hampshire lawmaker wants to make it clear that aspiring commercial vehicle drivers must have a firm grasp of the English language before they obtain licenses to drive.

Federal rules require people who receive their commercial driver licenses to be able to read and speak English well enough to read road signs, prepare reports, and communicate with the public and with law enforcement.

Sen. John Barnes Jr. has introduced a bill that would add those

same requirements to state law.

But Barnes and New Hampshire aren’t alone in pursuit of rules intended to make sure commercial drivers can communicate in English. Similar efforts are being sought in statehouses that include Ohio, South Carolina, Virginia and Missouri (see Feb. 1 Bus & Motorcoach News).

Supporters say state restrictions are needed to help assure aspiring bus and truck drivers have a firm grasp of the English language before they obtain their license to drive.

What can employers do?

Soaring medical insurance premiums

The cost of employer-provided health insurance is rising so fast that at the present rate it will roughly double in four years.

Health insurance rates are soaring because the cost of health care is climbing for a variety of reasons:

- Normal inflation
- Individuals belief they have a right to the best health care money can buy.
- Improved, more expensive technology
- Fear of malpractice suits
- Cost shifting from poor to better-off patients
- More state-mandated health benefits
- An aging population

Here are steps employers can take to ease the financial burden:

1. Increase deductibles. With this option the employee becomes the benefits consumer and thus responsible for a larger portion of his or her medical expenses.

This method is considered less "painful" than having employees paying a portion of their medical premiums. The effect is felt only if and when a claim occurs, while the payroll deduction for premiums happens with every paycheck.

2. Changing the co-insurance percentage and/or stop-loss level. These methods of lowering premiums result in the same type of cost-shifting as in option No. 1. The consumer is exposed to greater amounts of risk and therefore costs if and when a claim occurs. The employer reduces costs by paying lower premiums. These options should be reviewed independently to measure the impact of each.

If the stop-loss (the amount for which a covered employee or dependent is liable for expenses arising from a single claim) is increased to an extreme, then the catastrophic protection value of the plan is severely reduced, and the very reason for having medical insurance becomes questionable.

As an example, if the stop-loss limit is \$1,000, then the co-payment percentage (the portion the insured pays on each claim) or 20 percent is applied to the first \$5,000 or eligible expenses.

Beyond that point, the plan pays eligible expenses at 100 percent.

Similarly, if you consider changing the co-insurance percentage from 80/20 to 70/30, an extreme increase can likewise severely lessen the catastrophic protection value of the plan, and the rate lowering impact also diminishes.

In addition, 'split level' co-insurance plans are available. For example, such a plan might offer a co-insurance percentage of 70/30 for the first \$2,500 in expenses, and then 80/20 for the next \$2,500 and 100 percent thereafter. The resulting out-of-pocket maximum cost would be \$1,250 per person per year.

3. Eliminating benefits. If you consider the fact that medical insurance is designed to cover the major expenses, with the small expenses best covered by the individual, then the elimination of some benefits offers a sensible alternative.

Some examples are to elimi-

nate accident benefits payable at 100 percent, reduce benefits to the government-mandated minimums, and reduce the outpatient co-insurance percentages.

The results of these types of changes may have only a nominal impact on premiums but they may have a greater impact on the attitudes of both you and your employees.

4. Changing insurance companies. When this option is considered as a means of reducing medical insurance premiums, a number of questions should be considered.

- Will the new insurance company accept all of the people currently insured?
- Will the new insurance company's pre-existing limitations have a negative impact on those members currently insured?
- How different is the plan from your current plan, and how will your members react to a change?
- What is the new insurance company's claim payment history and timing?

The most dramatic results in curbing health insurance costs have been achieved by employers that have incorporated incentives into their benefit plans to encourage employees to become smarter, more cost-conscious healthcare consumers.

Make sure your employees know that health insurance benefits are not "free."

Encourage them to stay healthy and use healthcare services when necessary.

The article provided by Mass Marketing Insurance Consultants.

Operators warned about scams, flim-flam artists

Motorcoach companies across the U.S. are being warned by other operators, as well as the federal government, about possible scams and shady business dealings prevalent in the industry.

Red flags should go up if an operator:

- Receives a letter claiming to be sent from the USDOT asking you to fax a financial release form to the department.
- Receives a call or other communication from a tour company/ bus broker operating under the name Marquico & Associates, Washington Charters and Tours, Pacific Northwest Charters and Tours, San Francisco Charters and Tours, Minnesota Bus Charters, or variations of these names.
- Is contacted by a youth drum and bugle corps for a charter.

Roland Atwood of Red River Trails in Moorhead, Minn., reports receiving two of the supposed USDOT letters. After checking the Department of Transportation Website, however, Atwood discovered the letters are both fraudulent and not new.

The USDOT says "there has been another round of fraudulent letters issued to U.S. Department of Transportation contractors and potential contractors purporting to be issued by DOT.

"These fraudulent letters request that current or potential contractors register by submitting their company's financial information on a release form entitled, 'Authorization to release financial information.' Please be aware that DOT does not require any financial information to be submitted in

order to be eligible for procurement."

The first of these letters surfaced more than two years ago and they purport to be from and signed by a USDOT "senior procurement officer."

"Please DO NOT complete the release form which is attached to the letter and DO NOT release any information to the facsimile number cited in the letter," warns the USDOT.

The point of contact for the fraudulent letters is the U.S. Department of Transportation Office of the Inspector General Hotline, (800) 424-9071.

A number of operators attending UMA Motorcoach Expo 2008 reported bad experiences with an outfit called Marquico & Associates of San Francisco that reportedly operates under a number of different names and uses attractively designed Websites to give it credibility. It also uses a variety of telephone numbers, both 800 and conventional, that appear to ring to the same office.

Among the company's shoddy practices is to guarantee coaches with a credit card that ultimately is declined.

"Google" the company name before doing business with it and read the comments.

Other operators at Expo reported being stiffed by youth drum and bugle corps. One operator reported losing upwards of \$20,000.

The prevailing sentiment boiled down to this: If a drum and bugle corps wants to charter a coach, demand cash up front.

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Advisory Board

ALWAYS TRAVEL WITH THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT



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Former Lion Trailways president sentenced; avoids jail

CAMDEN, N.J. — Dominick Paglione, former president and CEO of Lion Trailways of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, has escaped a jail sentence for falsifying payroll tax records for five years.

Paglione was able to avoid

incarceration because he's on a kidney transplant list, said a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Paglione pleaded guilty in October to underreporting employee wages subject to federal employment tax for Lions Corp., which at

the time was the parent company of Lion Trailways.

He owes the government about \$1.7 million in back taxes, penalties and interest, said Greg Reinert, a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office in New Jersey.

For his sentencing, Paglione appeared in federal court in Camden before U.S. District Judge Joseph E. Irenas, who ordered he receive eight months of community confinement, which is similar to a halfway house, and 12 months

home confinement.

Paglione gave \$150,000 to the government as part repayment, an IRS spokesman said.

Prosecutors say Paglione's health was a factor in the sentencing, particularly because he is ill, needs a new kidney and is on an organ donor list. He could have been sentenced to as many as three years in prison.

Late last year, Paglione pleaded guilty to one count charging him with filing a false employer's tax return for 2003. (See Nov. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

He underreported the total employee wages subject to federal employment tax, resulting in more than \$400,000 in underpayment of taxes. Authorities said he falsified more than a dozen quarterly tax returns for the company over a five-year period.

Ownership of Lion Trailways reportedly has changed and the company, which for a time lost its Trailways affiliation, has been readmitted as a Trailways member.

The company has facilities in Rio Grande, N.J., and Levittown, Pa.

Concord Trailways drops affiliation

CONCORD, N.H. — Concord Coach Lines, known for the past 27 years as Concord Trailways, has dropped its affiliation with the Trailways Transportation System.

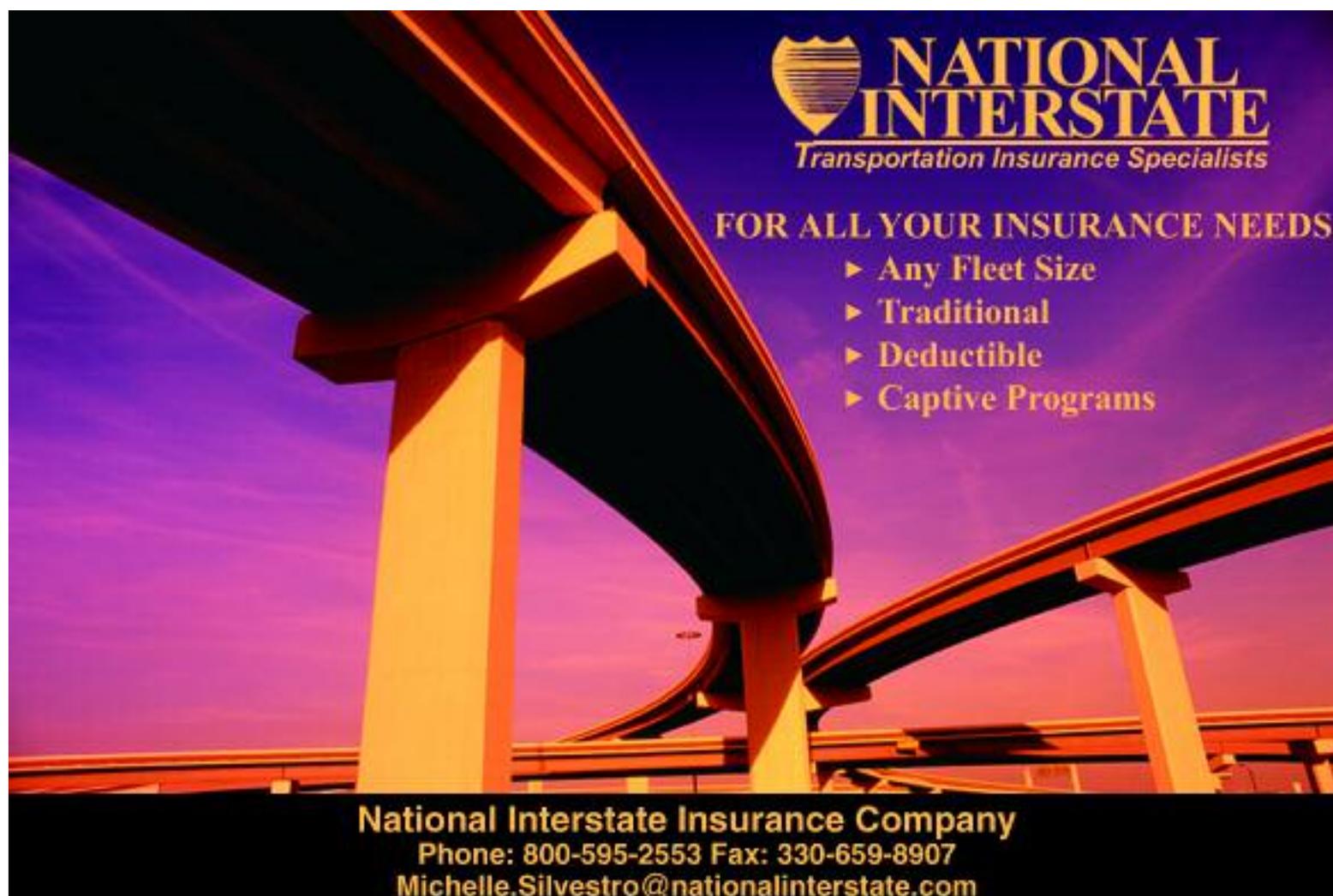
Concord Coach, which began operating 40 years ago, joined Trailways in 1980 in an effort to improve connections for passengers traveling with other carriers beyond Boston.

"We've enjoyed our relationship with Trailways and the increased interline connectivity that relationship has established for our customers over the years," said Harry Blunt, Jr., owner and president of the company. The interlining system used by Concord Coach Lines remains unchanged.

Blunt said the benefits of maintaining membership in Trailways have diminished in recent years, noting that Peter Pan Bus Lines had dropped its affiliation with Trailways last year.

Concord Coach Lines operates transportation centers in Concord and Manchester, N.H. In 1992, the company expanded to Maine, offering express coach service from Bangor and Portland, Maine, to Boston.

The company and its subsidiaries, Dartmouth Transportation Co. and Boston Express Bus, carry more than 1 million passengers annually in northern New England.



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'07 earnings will set record at National Interstate

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Corporation expects to report flat profits for the fourth quarter of 2007, but record-setting earnings for the full year.

Richfield-based National Interstate anticipates fourth-quarter 2007 net income in the range of 54 to 60 cents per diluted share, compared to actual earnings of 59 cents per diluted share for the fourth quarter of 2006.

For all of 2007, National Interstate is forecasting earnings of \$2.22 to \$2.28 per diluted share, compared to full-year 2006 earnings of \$1.85 per diluted share, or a gain of more than 20 percent.

The parent company of National Interstate Insurance announced the preliminary results late last month.

Greyhound cuts fares drastically on popular runs

DALLAS — Greyhound Lines has announced a new series of fare discounts that will save riders as much as 45 percent on a number of popular routes nationwide.

The discounts apply to regular, walk-up tickets purchased at Greyhound terminals and vary depending on the day of the week.

One-way fares from San Jose to Santa Cruz, Calif., for example, are now \$5 Monday through Thursday, and \$6 Friday through Sunday. The previous one-way fare was \$7.25.

A one-way ticket from San Jose to Santa Barbara, previously \$39, is now \$33 Monday through Thursday and \$36 Friday through Sunday.

In most cases, round-trip fares are double the one-way fares.

Dustin Clark, a spokesman for Greyhound, said the fare reductions were not entirely in response to new competitor megabus.com, which offers discount fares on some seats on all of its routes.

"Greyhound has a long history of providing affordable travel," said Greyhound President and CEO Dave Leach. "In a time of increasingly expensive travel costs, we are continuing our tradition of low-cost, convenient transportation."

During the past year or so, Greyhound has instituted new fare programs and adjusted fares to not only compete with megabus.com and other curbside operators but also to attract new customers.

One program, called Hot Seat Specials, is available on its Website and offers cheap fares between many of the same pairs of cities served by megabus.com.

The flat '07 fourth quarter will come despite a more than 15 percent increase in gross premiums written during the quarter. For the full year, gross premiums totaled \$346 million, a 13.3 percent increase over premiums of \$305.5 million for the 2006 full year.

National Interstate reiterated

that it has minimum exposure to the turmoil roiling financial and investment markets. For example, National Interstate says its investment portfolio is conservative, diversified and high quality.

Specifically, the company does not have any direct exposure in its mortgage backed/collateralized

mortgage obligations related to the so-called subprime lending sector.

Additionally, 94 percent of its municipal bond portfolio is rated A- or better, and all of its investments are current with dividend and interest payments.

And while the market turmoil has resulted in value declines in its

portfolio, particularly in the credit- and real estate-related holdings, the company doesn't believe it will experience "any material true economic losses from these investments."

The company will release final '07 fourth quarter and year-end results before the market opens Feb. 19.

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New coach sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

sales trend that began in late 2004 “and the numbers are close to where they should be.”

Plachno, who has been tracking new-coach sales figures for the industry for more than 20 years, also attributes the lower '07 numbers to three other principal factors:

- Operator concern over the efficacy of 2007-model year reduced-emissions engines.
- Reduced public sector coach deliveries.

• Conclusion of the six- to eight-year replacement cycle for coaches acquired during the high growth years of 1996-2000.

“To provide a reasonable comparison, I took annual sales figures from 1989 through 2006 but eliminate the four years from 1997 to 2000 as being an unusual situation,” said Plachno. “The average annual sales for the remaining 14 years was 1,972 coaches. With 2,173 coaches in 2007, we are obviously ahead of the average and probably just where we should be once you take everything into con-

sideration.”

Going forward, Plachno predicts that absent any unusual events, like the economy falling out of bed or fuel pumps running dry, “good” sales years for the industry should average between 2,000 and 2,500 coaches.

Plachno's fourth-quarter '07 report uncovered some interesting sales blips.

The top selling coaches were the MCI J4500, the Van Hool C2045, and the Prevost H3-45 and Setra S417, which tied for third.

The remaining top sellers were

the MCI D4000, MCI D4505, Prevost X3-45 and MCI D4500.

Imported coaches — Van Hool and Setra — captured 25.4 percent of the market in the fourth quarter, up from 22.5 percent in the third quarter, and way up from 16.6 percent in the fourth quarter of '06.

Canadian bus operators purchased 255 coaches in '07, or 11.7 percent of the total. In '06, Canadian sales accounted for 9.3 percent of the total.

Conversion shells took 14.2 percent of the market for 2007, up from 11.8 percent a year earlier.

Roughly 73 percent of the new coaches sold in the fourth quarter were equipped with Allison transmission, with 27 percent sold with ZF AS-Tronic transmissions. However, the AS-Tronic outstripped the Allison on the most 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 C2045. Nearly 60 percent of those models were devliered with ZFs.

For more information, contact Plachno at plachno@busmag.com.

New engines

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

able technological achievement with a positive environmental impact.”

The first production-model MCI coaches equipped with 2007 EPA-mandated reduced-emissions engines began rolling off the company assembly line early last May.

And, in a move aimed at reducing whatever customer resistance there might be to the power plants, MCI expanded its powertrain choices. It reintroduced Cummins as an engine option, meaning oper-

ators could chose from Detroit Diesel, Caterpillar or Cummins.

Interestingly, MCI reports that sales among the three engine brands are split evenly. “All are doing very well,” said Fazio.

“Customers can choose what works best for their operations,” added Larry Killingsworth, MCI vice president of sales and marketing. “Tour, charter, schedule-service and short-distance shuttle operators like that they have options.”

Some operators using the clean-diesel coaches have leveraged their purchases into promo-

tional and publicity opportunities. Ryan's Express, which operates in the desert Southwest, is one of them.

“Our corporate tour groups especially like the fact that we can offer them a greener way to travel,” said Tom Sterett, general manager of the Phoenix location.

Ryan's Express took delivery of seven MCI J4500 coaches in September.

“We're very pleased with the engine's performance,” added Sterett. “We've been promoting the environmental benefits of the

engines and ultra low sulfur diesel to our customers, and they are responding.”

When Chicago Classic Coach took delivery of two MCI J4500s in October, a local suburban newspaper did a feature article about the coaches, including running a photo of a white-handkerchief demonstration to illustrate the decrease in particulate matter. “The article resulted in several calls from new prospects,” said Richard Hausman, owner and founder of Chicago Classic.

“We've put the news on our

Website, and we use the article, along with a press release on the delivery, when we get questions from customers asking us what we're doing to be green.”

Motorcoaches can be part of the solution in helping cities meet clean air standards, said Patricia Ziska, MCI vice president and chief customer officer.

“Whether it's large operators like Coach USA ordering 30, or smaller operators such as EZ Bus taking two or three units, each is showing environmental leadership,” she said.

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Tire monitoring: A coach option that pays for itself

By Dave Millhouser
ABC Companies

Cruising down a Texas two lane, Huck felt a thump and checked his mirror. Sure enough, a drive tire was flat, beginning to disintegrate and burn.

In a miracle of biblical proportions, he spotted a firehouse a hundred yards up the road, and whipped the old Scenicruiser into the driveway.

After evacuating 45 high school kids who were riding the bus, Huck ran into the firehouse, yelling "take her away boys... she's all yours!"

That was pretty much it for miracles that day.

There were no injuries and the luggage was saved, but the firefighters never really had a chance. The bus returned home perched on a flatbed trailer, a 20-foot mass of melted aluminum and steel and charred engine block.

In ye olden days, tire fires were tough. The fire cleverly hid inside the carcass and waited for you to empty the fire extinguisher, then reached out to consume the coach's aluminum and rubber, undercoated with grease.

Tubeless radials have reduced the frequency and severity of tire fires, but a normally inflated tire can reach an operating temperature of 190 degrees on the "belt edge."

In a macho effort to do its part in bearing weight, an under-inflated tire gets much hotter. The flexing sidewall builds heat until the internal pressure approximates normal. The pressure may be normal but the excess temperature is feverishly at work deteriorating the tire.

The time-tested method of "thumping" tires gives a rough idea of pressure, but doesn't hint at temperature. In other words, it may signal trouble... on a bus that hasn't left the parking lot.

Ever wonder why it always seems to be the inside dual that fails?

It may be the Bus Fairy's way of tweaking you. But more likely it's because it's harder to check than an outer, works a bit harder on crowned roads, and feels neglected. It gets even.

When a tire runs low, or hot, a number of things happen. Fuel economy declines, tire wear increases, reliability suffers, and a big piece of spinning rubber is

closer to ignition temperature than you want.

Other than fuel, tires often constitute an operator's biggest operating expense, so anything you do to improve their life pays for itself.

In the past few years, several systems for monitoring tires have become available, making it possible to check their pressure and temperature from the driver's seat. A few monitor pressure only but temperature is just as critical. Unless a driver catches it at the very beginning, low pressure will inch towards normal without raising a flag (see "tire thumping" above).

Most of the systems operate on a similar concept. Each wheel has a sensor installed on its "drop center well" (inside the tire, for us dummies). This puppy samples temperature and pressure, and radios its findings, on a regular basis, so that they can be interpreted by a reader on the dash. If there are significant changes, it sets off an alarm. Most units also allow the driver to manually retrieve the values.

All of the systems seem to work on the same principles, but configure them in different ways. You'll want to do some checking to see

which best fits your operation.

There are several methods of mounting the sensor on the wheel, varying from metal bands to adhesives. The sensors are radio transmitters, so they have batteries (with finite lives).

The systems and sensors need to be calibrated to provide accurate data. Each brand does this in a different way, some are more intuitive than others. The display in the driver's area varies from brand to brand, as well as the amount of information available to him or her.

Each is going to require some maintenance — at the very least replacing batteries, tracking sensors and training both drivers and staff. Once your folks are trained, and you own the equipment, it appears more a matter of paying attention than replacing expensive parts.

Mounting, checking and calibrating sensors seem to be the major tasks, along with keeping track of them whenever tires are changed.

All the major coach manufacturers are offering tire monitoring systems, and it comes standard on some models. When offered as an

option, it generally sells for between \$1,400 and \$2,000 per coach.

Most systems are easy to retrofit, so it's not a stretch to do your whole fleet. As bus options go, this is pretty reasonable. Some options may pay for themselves, this one certainly does — in terms of tire maintenance, fuel economy and safety.

This is an emerging technology, so it pays to ask around about the reliability and utility of the current offerings. Make sure you're dealing with someone who offers technical support and is going to be around for the long run.

If the Bus Fairy chooses to reach out and smite you with a blowout at the wrong time, that one event could cost you more than a whole system, or fleet of systems.

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



Dave Millhouser

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Academy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

simply turn in a copy of their certificate of completion from the academy.

In addition, employees who pass all five courses within the time allotted by the school are given a 25-cents-per-hour pay raise.

"We believe these courses will increase your knowledge of your chosen profession and help you advance in your career," Neustadt told his employees.

Coach Tours is a full-service charter company and tour operator serving Connecticut and metropolitan New York.

Owner/manager education

In addition to offering an academic program for drivers, Bus and Motorcoach Academy also provides comprehensive career education for coach company owners and senior managers.

"There is no other program like this," says Carmen Daecher, dean of the academy. "The curriculum is designed to take the busy lives of motorcoach operators into account."

Based on a modular learning concept, the program for owners and managers includes such topics as marketing, financial manage-

ment, human resources and safety that are focused directly on the motorcoach industry.

All classes, for both the driver and owner-manager curriculums, are delivered through the Internet in six-week modules. The information is succinct, and specifically for people who have plenty of other things to do at the same time.

The course work, which includes quizzes and a final exam, is spread over six weeks because operators are busy. However, Daecher says "the course could be completed in a week if that's all you did."

Operators sign up

Since the academy began its classes last year, 75 operators have taken advantage of the educational opportunities either for themselves or for their drivers.

The course developers have had an opportunity to solve any communication and content problems that have come up. Daecher says the developers welcome feedback and are always receptive to suggestions for expansion of the program and new topics to cover.

Ideas that have been suggested include fuel economy and driver health and wellness.

Daecher notes there are incentives looming for operators to enroll themselves or their drivers in

Academy to get proceeds from book

FARIBAULT, Minn. — ABC Companies has announced that proceeds from the sale of a new book that tells the business history of the Cornell family, founders of ABC, will be donated to Bus and Motorcoach Academy.

The book, entitled *From Small Business to Industry Leader: the Cornell Family Business Story*, was unveiled last month at UMA Motorcoach Expo in San Francis-

co. ABC Founder and Chairman Clancy Cornell autographed copies at Expo.

Since then, ABC customers and others have inquired about purchasing copies.

ABC Vice President of Marketing Brenda Borwege said the company has decided to sell copies for \$25 each, with proceeds over and above the cost of printing and shipping to be donated to Bus and

Motorcoach Academy.

The academy business education program is named the Clarence Cornell School of Business in recognition of an endowment given late last year by ABC Companies.

The 80-page book is a collection of personal observations about the Cornells and ABC. It is dedicated to Ronald Cornell, the late chairman, president and CEO of ABC.

ABC offers technical training for 2008

WINTER GARDEN, Fla. — ABC Companies has announced its 2008 training program for maintenance technicians.

This year's program will include three sessions for technicians needing or wanting training on Van Hool coaches, and two sessions on ABC-branded coaches built on Freightliner chassis.

All of the training is provided free of charge but attendees are

responsible for travel, lodging and evening meals.

The Van Hool sessions for seasoned technicians will be Feb. 25-29, May 5-9 and Oct. 20-24. These training sessions will cover such topics as pneumatics and electrical systems, suspension and steering, disk brakes, HVAC systems, audio and video systems, engine pre-heaters and multiplexing.

The sessions for the ABC

the academy. For example:

- There is a proposed FMCSA rulemaking that would require classroom instruction before obtaining a CDL.

- There is a possibility that in the future successful completion of industry-specific coursework could

help lower insurance rates.

The fees for academy courses are \$139 per module, or course, for UMA members, and \$199 for non-members. Enrollment for a five-course set is \$599.

The 2008 academic year begins February 25.

M1235 and 3035RE models will be May 13-16 and Oct. 7-10, and will cover systems, components, troubleshooting and repairs.

All sessions will be at ABC's distribution and training center in Winter Garden.

For more information, go to www.abc-companies.com, click on Customer Care and then click on Training Program, or call (800) 222-2871 or (407) 656-7977.

The Bus and Motorcoach Academy was created by the United Motorcoach Association and is administered through the College of Southern Maryland.

For more information, go to www.busandmotorcoachacademy.com, or call (800)424-8262.

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Diligence, tenacity key to grant writing success

SAN FRANCISCO — Motorcoach industry consultant, association executive and grant writer Mary Presley enticed participants into her “Grant Writing” educational session at UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month by claiming “we’re giving away money.”

She was quick to explain, however, that the road to successfully banking a grant check from the government is long and tiring.

Fundamentally, the grant process has three steps:

1. Finding an appropriate grant.

Presley recommends beginning this process by searching www.grant.gov for grants that may be available to private bus companies.

2. Applying for the grant.

It’s important to pay attention to rules and deadlines. Then, the applications must be filled out correctly and completely, she asserts.

3. Receiving the funds.

Receipt of a letter saying the money has been approved is only the beginning of the process. It can take a long time before the money actually shows up.

As an example, Presley asked how many operators in the room had successfully applied for a wheelchair-lift grant from the federal government. A smattering of hands went up. When she asked how many had actually received a check, all hands went down save two.

Presley’s session covered three kinds of grant applications:

- Rural transportation funds (5311 grants) are available for providing people who live in rural areas with access to urban areas for work and other purposes.

Using existing private operators to transport people to and

from urban centers where public transit agencies take over is one way to provide this service as efficiently as possible. The funds are available for all aspects of the operation, including administration and communication, and are usually awarded on a 50-50 basis, meaning the operator must obtain the rest of the funding from other sources.

‘This money can go unused year after year, mainly because operators don’t know it is available or how to apply for it.’

But, there’s a catch. The money is distributed through the states. State agencies are often resistant to part with it because if the money is not used within a certain period, it can be de-obligated. The agency can put the money in another pocket, where it can be used for other projects. According to Presley, this money can go unused year after year, mainly because operators don’t know it is available or how to apply for it.

- Transportation Security Administration grants are available to private operators for tracking and communication equipment and services that could help prevent terrorism or other acts of violence against the traveling public. A key to successful application for a TSA grant is proving your coaches travel frequently in the areas most likely to be targeted for an attack.

The application process opens for these grants next month. Because there is a five-day wait just to get registered with www.grants.gov, Presley suggests



Mary Presley

that those interested in TSA grants register within the next few days.

- Americans with Disabilities Act grants are available through the Federal Transit Administration to private operators primarily for lift equipment but also for projects such as sensitivity training for drivers.

Equipment grants are for new equipment only. Used coaches are not eligible because the lift equipment could have been funded through a previous owner, and it cannot be funded twice.

However, the funds are available for past purchases, as well as future purchases, as long as the equipment was new at the time of purchase, and they also are available for retrofits.

According to Presley, receiving these funds can be a long process. ADA grants are difficult, in part, because there is a lot of staff movement within the FTA. She suggests that an operator begin calling the agency the minute the approval letter comes in.

Presley stressed that building relationships is important in the grant process. It can mean the difference between wandering through the bureaucratic morass, or being put in touch with the right person in the right office at the right time.

At the conclusion of the session, Presley said she would e-mail participants a list of relevant Websites and a glossary of useful terms.

Those attending the session will receive a continuing education unit from the Bus and Motorcoach Academy.

Congressional panel proposes mileage tax, privacy issues surface

WASHINGTON — The Congressional commission created to recommend ways to fund road construction during the next two decades wants to replace the federal fuel tax with a mileage-based tax.

But members of a U.S. Senate committee say the proposal raises serious issues of privacy.

Members of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission discussed the concept late last month during a hearing before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Taxes collected on vehicle miles traveled, which is known as VMT, would require satellite-based technology to read how many miles a vehicle travels in a given state.

Jack Schenendorf, vice chairman of the transportation commission, told the Senate committee the government should replace the federal fuel tax with a mileage-based tax by 2025. By then, he said, more people will be moving toward hybrid vehicles and alternative fuels and fuel tax revenues will plummet.

To get to the eventual implementation of a VMT tax, commissioners are recommending an increase in federal fuel taxes of 25 cents to 40 cents per gallon from 2010 through 2015, along with other ways of raising revenue including tolls, congestion pricing and public-private partnerships for new construction.

Schenendorf said he understands that some people might question the issue of privacy during the move to a VMT-tax system. Several senators weighed in on that topic.

“Don’t waste a lot of time on that one because that ain’t gonna happen,” said Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., the committee’s ranking Republican.

Schenendorf replied that the

government would have until 2025 under the recommendation to improve the technology.

Senate Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., suggested that instead of having technology installed in every vehicle to track where it has been, a system could be devised for reporting mileage when owners renew their vehicle registrations.

“There are other ways to figure out how many vehicle miles you’re using other than having some Big Brother system tracking your every move,” Boxer said.

The commission’s main objective is to have the federal government invest \$225 billion per year for 50 years to fund and maintain transportation systems.

Before a VMT system could be put into place, the commission recommended that several methods of increasing revenue be explored.

Those include increased use of tolling; congestion pricing and private financing; and increased state and local revenues.

Commission Chairwoman Mary Peters, the current U.S. transportation secretary, was absent from the Senate hearing. She and two other commissioners disagree with the majority opinion on the commission that a temporary fuel tax increase and an eventual shift to a VMT is the best way to fund transportation.

Peters is a strong proponent of tolling and public-private partnerships. She wrote her own rebuttal to the full commission report to separate herself from the commission’s recommendations.

The commission’s recommendations are far from becoming government policy. Legislation would have to survive the House, Senate and the White House during the next re-authorization of the federal highway bill in 2009.

Midwest tops for deer crashes

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — State Farm Insurance says vehicle drivers in West Virginia stand a better chance of hitting a deer than in any other state.

In fact, the insurance company has quantified the odds of hitting a deer in West Virginia during the next 12 months — 1 in 57.

No. 2 on the list of states with the highest percentage of deer-vehicle collisions is Michigan, followed by Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Arkansas, Montana, South Dakota, North Dakota and Minnesota.

The state where you’re least likely to crash into a deer? Why Hawaii, of course, where the odds are 1 in 16,000.

State Farm said it based its rankings on claims data from the last half of last year and first half of this year, along with motor vehicle registration counts from the Federal Highway Administration.

To help decrease chances of hitting a deer, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation offers these tips:

- Stay alert for deer darting across the road, especially during

the early morning and evening hours when deer are most active.

- Reduce speed in heavily-wooded areas.

- Watch for other deer after one crosses; deer travel in groups and frequently there will be several crossing at once.

- Pay attention to “Deer Crossing” signs and reduce speed accordingly.

- If you see a deer, slow down, tap your brakes to warn other drivers and sound your horn. Deer tend to fixate on headlights, so flashing them may cause the animal to move.

Redesigned CTP program is launched by tour group

LEXINGTON, Ky. — The National Tour Association has revamped its Certified Tour Professional program.

NTA introduced the first certification in the packaged travel industry, the Certified Tour Professional program, more than 20 years ago. During the past year, the association has been working with Temple University to redesign the program.

The enhanced program is based on an accumulation of points for education, experience and service

in the industry, as well as knowledge gained through the three certified courses — strategic management and leadership, marketing and sales, and financial management.

Planners can earn points by attending seminars at NTA events, self-study and e-learning.

For more information about the program, contact NTA Marketing and Communications Administrative Assistant Andrea Richardson. E-mail andrea.richardson@NTAstaff.com, or call (800) 682-8886 or (859)226-4444

Lafayette, Ind.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

it probed both the scope and details of the sham dealings by the transit agency and the private operators, revealing how documents were doctored to hide the shady activities.

In many cases, Greater Lafayette Public Transportation falsified private operators' requests for buses, claiming they needed wheelchair-accessible vehicles when they did not.

The FTA referred the fraud allegations to the U.S. Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General, which investigated and referred them back to the FTA.

In the past, the FTA has not initiated or pressed criminal charges against transit agency employees who engaged in such fraud in first-time cases.

Other violations, too

But the charter violations at Greater Lafayette Public Transportation were not limited to its slimy dealings with private operators. The FTA decision also noted how the transit agency issued deficient charter service notices and failed to follow proper procedures once the notices had been issued, and it provided illegal charter bus service to Purdue University.

The ruling was issued by FTA regional administrator Marisol Simon and her regional counsel, Nancy-Elle Zusman, and stemmed from complaints filed by Imperial Travel Services, a Lafayette-based motorcoach operator.

Imperial has long suspected Greater Lafayette Public Transportation was engaging in illegal charter services but it wasn't until 18 months ago that it had amassed enough information to file a complaint with the FTA regional office

in Chicago.

Subsequent to filing the complaint, Imperial learned from a variety of sources that the transit agency's illegal charter operations were far more extensive than initially believed and it was engaging in sham dealings with private operators Morgan Coaches and Cliff Hall Inc.

The FTA investigation determined Greater Lafayette Public Transportation was using Morgan Coaches and Cliff Hall Inc. as brokers. The arrangement was designed to look like a "subcontracting" deal whereby Greater Lafayette Public Transportation was providing charter service to customers and the transaction was passing through Morgan Coaches and Cliff Hall. Instead, the arrangement was a sham and a clear violation of federal charter rules, according to the FTA.

All sorts of charters

The variety of charters run by Greater Lafayette Public Transportation was astounding. The FTA decision cited evidence of such charters as weddings, special events, university functions, trips for private schools, YMCA outings, student shuttles, and others.

The FTA decision also knocked Greater Lafayette Public Transportation's annual charter service notices up one side and down the other, saying they were suspect from the get-go.

And the FTA said the charter service Greater Lafayette Public Transportation provided to Purdue University violated federal regulations because it did not meet any of the charter rules' exceptions.

For its part, Greater Lafayette Public Transportation claims its services are not charters. In their decision, FTA officials Simon and Zusman shot down every bit of the

reasoning, logic and excuses put forth by the transit agency.

One of Greater Lafayette Public Transportation's defenses was that everything it did was okay because recent FTA Triennial Reviews of the agency did not find any charter violations.

Many public transit agencies have tried that excuse in the past when wrongdoing has been uncovered. Simon and Zusman weren't buying, however. "The (Triennial Review) process is an overview of a (transit agency's) operations; it's not a detailed examination of day-to-day operations," the regional officials wrote.

Nevertheless, Greater Lafayette Public Transportation has filed an appeal of the FTA regional decision and, in the process, set in motion the "burning of more taxpayer money," said James Calloway, president of Imperial Travel Services.

Beach Boy Trolley

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

McKean claims ECAT is violating both the existing and new rules by using its trolleys for charter service, and for allowing a "sham" transportation company to use them for other charters as well.

He maintains he has lost about \$60,000 in charter revenues because of illegal charters done by ECAT and Winterfest, a nonprofit festival event-planning organization that county and transit officials claim also is a transportation business.

Suit upsets applectart

Beach Boy went after ECAT last August by filing an extensive charter rules violation complaint against the transit agency with the FTA. Less than a month later, Winterfest, which was cited in the complaint as leasing trolleys from Escambia County and ECAT and then using them for illegal charters, filed a suit in Florida Circuit Court claiming the FTA complaint was frivolous.

McKean said filing of the suit came while he and ECAT officials were attempting to work out their differences. He said the transit agency had floated a settlement

offer that included paying him the money he lost, but it was pulled back when the suit was filed.

"Now they won't return my phone calls and they won't even talk to me," he said, adding that he has been told that county officials have passed the word that no one in any official capacity is to speak with him about the situation.

Still, McKean has done well in the two cases so far.

The southeast regional administrator for the FTA decided that the complaint has merit and has urged the two sides to attempt to resolve the issues before turning it into a

formal investigation. McKean said he has been told that ECAT has not responded to letters from the FTA and he is now asking regulators to move ahead with an investigation.

Prevailing in court

In the lawsuit, McKean has won five motions, including three his lawyers filed and two that were filed by Winterfest.

Among them was one that initially went against Beach Boy at the outset of the legal action. McKean, believing the suit did not have merit, did not bother to answer the complaint at the outset, which

resulted in a default judgment being issued against him.

Shortly after that ruling was issued, McKean filed a motion to have the judgment set aside and it was granted by Circuit Court Judge Paul A. Rasmussen, which effectively put the case back at the beginning. Since then, the judge has decided four other motions, all in favor of McKean.

"They haven't won a thing yet," he said.

Meanwhile, he is preparing for a trial, but he fully expects Winterfest to settle the case before it advances that far.

Rochester

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

(See Nov. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The FTA order had cleared the way for Laidlaw Education Services to resume operating the service that it had provided in past years, although a temporary injunction issued by the court earlier had blocked the company from actually doing it.

The court ruling stunned the private bus industry and touched off concerns in some quarters the judge may have bowed to enormous local political pressure to side with the school district over federal transit regulators and the private operator.

"It seems fairly clear that there was immense local political pressure to decide the case in this manner," suggested one motorcoach official who followed the case closely.

Larimer's ruling came in a federal lawsuit filed by the RGRTA and the Rochester City School District against the FTA, Laidlaw and the United Food and Commercial Workers District Local One, the labor union that represents

Laidlaw's drivers.

Judge critical of FTA

They suit contended the FTA was arbitrary and capricious in its determination the RGRTA violated the charter rules and that its decision actually was in conflict with the rules.

Larimer agreed with both claims.

"The FTA went for the clear language of the statute by inferring an overreaching intent on the part of Congress to protect the school bus industry, and then relying on the inference to effectively broaden and rewrite the scope of the statute," he wrote in his decision. "That was improper."

While the judge tossed the cease and desist order, he left the temporary injunction in place until March 24 so the RGRTA could make some adjustments to regular routes that serve the high school students and establish express routes that will bypass downtown Rochester and eliminate the need for students to transfer to other buses during their commute.

The fight between RGRTA and Laidlaw began at the beginning of the 2006-07 school year when the school district moved up its high

school starting time by one hour. Laidlaw, which was providing the high school transportation service at the time, was unable to continue the service because it was transporting elementary students at the same time and it did not have enough buses or drivers to meet the earlier start time for the high school runs.

Transit grabs business

The RGRTA, which also operated a number of school bus routes for the school district, offered to take over the high school routes and later signed a contract with the Rochester City School District to do so.

Laidlaw and the labor union responded by filing a complaint with the FTA, claiming the transit agency's high school service violated federal charter service rules. The FTA agreed the routes violated the rules, but allowed the RGRTA to propose a new plan that it believed would meet the requirement of the rules.

The FTA, however, said the new plan, which included the express routes, also would be in violation of the rules and issued the cease in desist order to prevent the

transit agency from operating any of the high school routes.

The RGRTA responded with the lawsuit and won the temporary injunction that allowed it to continue operating the school routes while the case was being litigated.

Reaction to the court decision was pretty much as expected with the private bus industry complaining bitterly about it and the transit agency and school district praising it.

Dichotomy of views

"It's a terrible decision," said Ken Presley, vice president of the United Motorcoach Association. "A lot of this falls on the FTA for allowing this mischief to go on for

Transits seek charter firms

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

Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee, Lower Richland and Sumter counties, S.C. Deadline: Feb. 15,

2008. Write to: Ann D. August, Executive Director, Santee Wateree RTA (Charter Services), P.O. Box 2462, Sumter, SC 29151. Phone: (803) 934-9947.

Lackawanna County, Pa. Deadline: Feb. 28, 2008. Write to: Kurt Kempter, Director of Development, County of Lackawanna Transit System, North South Road, Scranton, PA 18504. Phone: (570) 346-2061.

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Isherwood-Cyr

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Isherwood, in his 20th year with Custom Coach, said his business has been growing steadily since he started it 20 years ago.

"This was the year I was going to put the brakes on," said Isherwood.

"We've been growing, growing, growing; we were at a comfortable point and I hadn't planned on growing again," he said.

"In Maine, it's a hard market to find experienced bus people. There aren't a lot of bus companies in the state. Passengers, however, are not hard to find."

On the prospect of Cyr, a well-known New England operator, buying him out, Isherwood said: "I thought it would have been a great mix. I would get some people in the bus business, and I could operate the Portland South office for him. But after a two-hour discussion with him and his son, Mike, it went the other way around."

Isherwood said he has always

enjoyed a challenge, adding: "This is a challenge, and I jumped on it. It's intriguing to me and I decided to do it."

Isherwood emphasizes that he wasn't thinking about getting out of the business. Likewise, the Cyrs remain firmly established with their company based in Old Town, Maine.

"My approach was that they needed somebody to run South Portland, and I was looking for more experienced people to run my business in the correct way. I never even contemplated the other scenario, but once that possibility came up, I kind of liked it better. It gives me full control and it accomplishes what I wanted to get accomplished."

The sale also helps the Cyrs, Isherwood said, because they didn't like running two facilities — one in South Portland and their main operation 150 miles away in Old Town.

Isherwood has been in the bus industry since he was 27.

"I was a truck driver from a



Gregg Isherwood's Custom Coach operates a diverse fleet that includes an ABC M1235 and Van Hool C2045.

young age," he said. "After a while, my brother, Steve, started working for a minicoach company in Boston. I was thinking as I was driving trucks, nobody was doing mini-coaches up in this area. So I put a plan together and did some research and bought one."

As part of the transaction with

Cyr, Isherwood acquired 20 45-foot motorcoaches and 25 employees, giving him a total work force of about 60. The Cyr fleet adds to the 7 coaches, 3 midsize buses, 10 school buses, plus several vans and limos he operates with Custom Coach.

"We've been doing it for about

a month now and the transition has gone well," Isherwood said.

As a local product who assumed operation of what had been a longtime local fixture, The Maine Line, Isherwood said of his plans: "To refine what we have, get it running in a proper way, and keep it where it's at."

Fuel tax

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

trated she dashed off a letter to the head of the IRS. Her complaint was turned over to the advocate service office in Houston and an advocate contacted her ready to help.

"The advocate was extremely

helpful, kept me up to date with what was happening, and finally called me to say all had been cleared," she said. "I received the refund, plus 8 percent interest."

Still, things were not quite over for her.

The day before she received the good news that her 2006 refund

was in the mail, the IRS notified her that it was now auditing her 2005 tax return, again because of the diesel tax credit.

That put the advocate back to work and, although Anderson again was required to mail copies of all of her fuel receipts, the problem was resolved a bit quicker this time and

the IRS dropped the review.

"If it had not been for the advocate, I probably would have hired a lawyer to get me through the process.

In addition to the hassle over the tax issue, Anderson said she wasted a great deal of time early on searching for the right people at the

IRS who could help her. Twice the IRS agents gave her the wrong telephone numbers when referring her to others at the agency and a third time they told her they had no idea how she could reach her advocate because the woman was new and they were unable to find her telephone number.

She was frustrated further because several of the agents she spoke with were not familiar with the diesel fuel tax credit and how it applied to her case.

"It was not that the people were not courteous, they were just uneducated in what they were supposed to be examining," she added.

Anderson said the experience was "eye opening," and she warns other operators that the IRS appears to be taking a closer look at the diesel fuel tax credits.

"Be sure you have not only the quarterly reports, but availability of copies of all fuel receipts and be sure that the reports match the receipts," she suggested.

"Pay close attention to the timelines given to you by the IRS because they are very upfront that these do not change."

And, equally important, she stressed, be sure to use the services of the advocate's office.

To find out more about the advocate service and to locate the office serving your state, go to www.irs.gov/advocate and click on "Who May Use the Taxpayer Advocate Service," or "Contact the Taxpayer Advocate Service."

Information also is available by calling (877) 777-4778.

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Museum annual spring event will be June 7th in Hershey

HERSHEY, Pa. — The Museum of Bus Transportation has set the first Saturday in June as the date for its annual Spring Fling, a vintage bus show and collectibles flea market.

Once a year, the Museum of Bus Transportation opens its Memorial Annex to the public, moving its stored vehicles out onto the adjoining grounds and arranging them for viewing and photographing. The museum-owned vehicles are kept in the annex when not on display inside the museum.

The building is then converted from a large storage facility to a bus memorabilia and collectibles flea market, believed to be the largest of its kind in North America.

Offered will be bus toys, mod-

els, badges, photographs, books, fare boxes, uniforms, magazines, depot signs, destination roll signs and other objects. Vendors are being solicited.

Hot food and cold drinks will be served during the event in exchange for donations to the museum.

The Museum of Bus Transportation and its gift shop will be open normal hours that day — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. June 7.

The museum is one mile west of Hersheypark, Chocolate World and Hersheypark Drive on State Route 39. Route 39 is also exit 77 of Interstate 81.

For more information, call (717) 566-7100, ext. 119; e-mail thebusmuseum@yahoo.com or go to www.busmuseum.org.

Calendar

February 2008

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.

MCI enhances customer program

SAN FRANCISCO — At this year's UMA Motorcoach Expo, Motor Coach Industries announced significant updates to the major customer service initiative it launched a year ago at Expo 2007.

At Expo '07 in New Orleans, MCI rolled out Pro Support, a company-wide consolidation and expansion of its customer support services.

During the past year, MCI Pro Support has been both introduced to customers and enhanced with additional upgrades.

Improvements were made, for example, to its Customer Care System iWarranty, online claim and tracking data center, and policies. The changes gave owners of MCI coaches access to downloadable copies of field change programs; a no-waiting return policy on warranty parts; direct MCI shipping access through UPS and Purlator; a shorter, two-day parts adjustments and credit payment period, and Saturday and morning delivery options on warranty parts.

For this year, the iWarranty site is getting a one-page claim form,

and an option that allows the user to determine the labor costs allowed on a warranty repair. The one-page application automatically calculates the claim, speeding up the time it takes to complete the entry.

Additionally, MCI coach owners will be able to reprint returned goods authorizations directly from the iWarranty site, and view warranty parts availability. The upgrades are to be implemented by summer.

"Our goal is to provide quality in all aftermarket services, and to continue refining our warranty, manuals and CCS technology, using the latest tools available for customers ease and convenience," said Michael Anstead, MCI director of warranty. "We're very pleased with our progress and plan to add more features to the systems throughout 2008."

In the field, MCI PRO Support is realigning its network of fleet support managers, teaming them with MCI new coach sales representatives and additional product support staff.

"Our customers will benefit

from this reorganization and additional in-field support staff," said Wade Norton, vice president of fleet support.

Tech training expands

MCI has increased to four the number of technical training sessions it has scheduled for this year.

The sessions will be Feb. 19-22, May 6-9, Sept. 23-26, and Oct. 21-24. All will be conducted at MCI's National Training Center in Louisville, Ky.

"These popular technician tune-up training sessions... teach technicians how to identify potential problems as well as troubleshoot and make appropriate repairs to HVAC systems, power trains, steering, multiplex systems, brakes, audio-video systems and other componentry," said Norton.

In addition, MCI will offer customized regional training programs taught closer to key operator sites, or at MCI regional locations.

For more information, go to www.mcicoach.com, or e-mail mci.training@mcicoach.com, or call (847) 285-2257.



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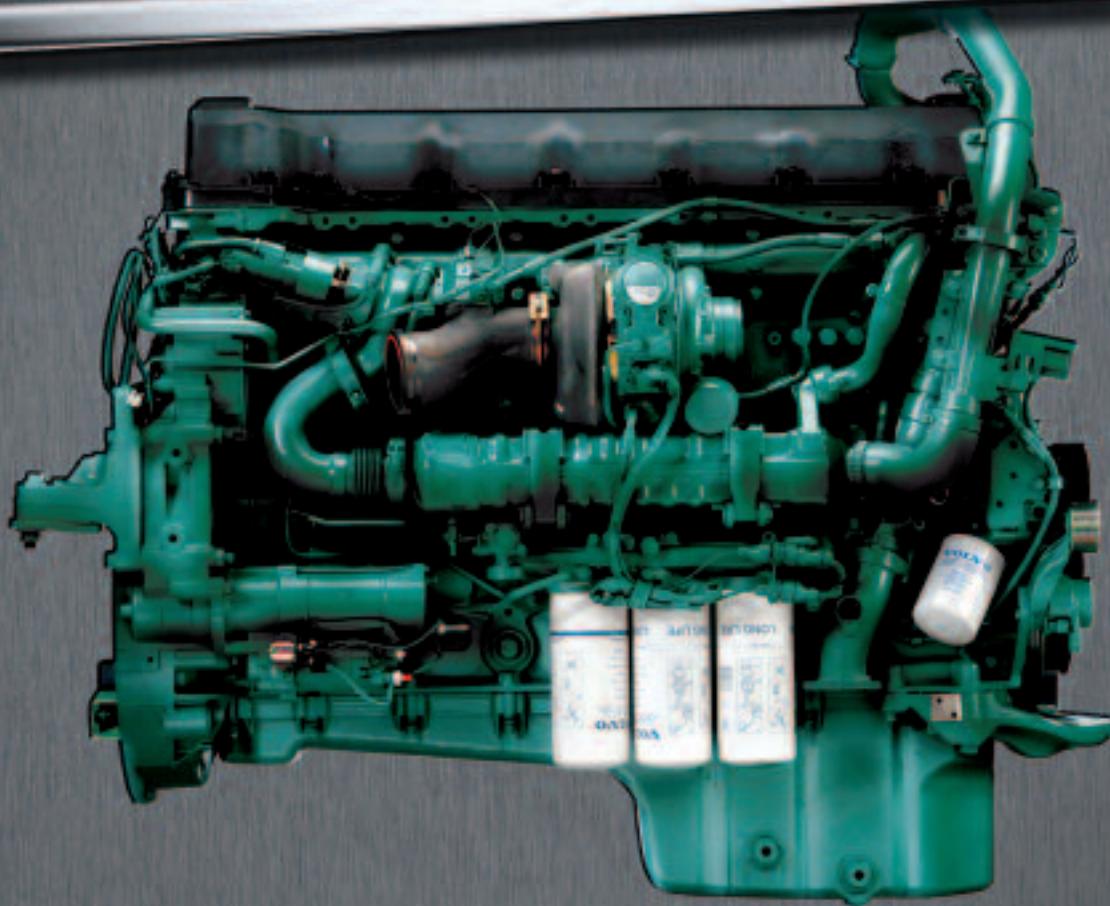
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