

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

THE NEWS RESOURCE FOR THE BUS AND MOTORCOACH INDUSTRY

MOTORCOACH EXPO 2004



This Van Hool T2145 won a contest at Motorcoach Expo for the best bus graphics. ABC Companies/Van Hool adopted an outdoor sports theme for its booth and coaches and Turbo Images executed the winning design.



NASCAR racing legend Richard Petty signed autographs at the Setra stand.



Gayle Ellsworth of Trailways talks to Mike and Becky Sellers of Texoma Tours in Sherman, Texas.

Happy Days? MCI boosts output, Setra has record sales

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Motorcoach Industries Inc., North America's largest over-the-road bus manufacturer, is stepping up coach production this month, a move that suggests better days may be ahead for the industry.

"We are seeing significantly more activity than we had planned," said Tom Sorrells, president and chief executive of Schaumburg, Ill.-based MCI. "We're hopeful this is a sign of a sustained rebound in the North American coach industry."

Sorrells said the production line at the company's plant in Winnipeg would begin turning out three coaches daily and start operating five days a week.

The company had been producing two coaches daily on a four-day work schedule.

The step-up in production will allow MCI to recall an as-yet-undetermined number of workers who were laid off during the latter part of last year.

The three coaches a day that will be com-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 ►

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Setra of North America reports that during 2003 it achieved its highest unit sales and revenue for a single year since it began importing motorcoaches into the United States 20 years ago.

Following the launch of the luxury S417 model in Orlando at Motorcoach Expo 2003, Setra proceeded to sell 100 of the coaches during 2003.

That compares with total Setra new-coach sales of 28 units in 2002.

The S417 proved to be so popular that "we sold all of our stock inventory in December," reports Robert Jones, vice president of sales at Setra of North America.

"We believe our 2003 sales are a testament to the quality manufacturing and features of the S417, its advanced technology and our customers' confidence in Setra."

Manufactured in Ulm, Germany, the S417 is designed specifically for the North American market. It is based, however, on

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 ►

Operators threatened by charter rules bill, industry fights back

WASHINGTON — Four key motorcoach industry associations have joined forces in an attempt to block legislation that would allow virtually every public transit agency in the U.S. to provide charter bus service to local schools, government entities of every description and nonprofit organizations of every stripe. And, do it at cut-rate prices.

The U.S. Senate already has passed the draconian legislation, and if the bill sails through the U.S. House of Representatives — in its present form — as easily as it did the Senate, it will have devastating consequences for hundreds of private motorcoach operators across the U.S.

"This legislation has the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 ►

SafeStat System is blasted by auditors

WASHINGTON — The Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Transportation has issued a highly critical report on SafeStat, the federal government's system for ranking the safety of motorcoach operators and truckers.

The Inspector General said the problems with SafeStat are so serious and extensive that it may not be smart to continue to make it public.

The Federal Motor Carrier

Safety Administration, which manages and operates SafeStat, "will need to demonstrate timely improvement if it is to continue to publicly disclose carrier results across all SafeStat categories," the report said.

The report's findings were anticipated by many in the motorcoach and trucking industries. Operators, safety officials and advocates, insurers and others have pointed to shortcomings in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ►

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Free security workshops offered to bus operators

WASHINGTON — Security training for coach company employees will be offered free at 10 workshops being conducted across the United States starting next month. The training is part of the campaign to combat terrorism.

The training provided at the workshops will complement the self-training security packages that became available last month to all U.S. motorcoach companies. (See full-page announcement on page 5.)

The self-training program and the workshops are being organized by the American Bus Association and the United Motorcoach

Association under grants awarded by the U.S. Transportation Security Administration.

The joint program is called Operation Secure Transport and it is designed to help coach operators improve security throughout their companies. There is no requirement to be a member of ABA or UMA to participate.

More than 3,000 motorcoach operations nationwide were sent letters last month inviting them to participate in the self-training program. Accompanying the letters was a form for signing up.

The next phase of Operation Secure Transport is the 10, two-

day workshops, which are being designed as trainer-the-trainer sessions. Attendees will come away armed with information they can take back to their companies and communicate to employees in virtually all aspects of the business.

Five modules will be presented during the workshops:

- Security Considerations for Motorcoach Drivers.
- Security Considerations for Maintenance Personnel.
- Security Considerations for Motorcoach Terminal Employees.
- Security Considerations for Motorcoach Company Managers.
- Incident Control and

Operations Shutdown During Security Threat Events.

Conducting the workshops for the ABA and UMA will be The Daecher Consulting Group of Camp Hill, Pa., and its principal, Carmen Daecher.

There is no charge to attend the workshops, but there is no reimbursement for travel expenses. A working lunch will be provided both days, and on Day Two, if the hotel does not provide breakfast to registered guests, a continental breakfast will be provided.

Those interested in the program can request registration information by sending an e-mail to

security@safetyteam.com. ABA also is developing a Web address to handle electronic registration.

Here are the dates and locations for the workshops:

April 13-14 Boston
April 15-16 Chicago
April 20-21 Charlotte, N.C.
April 22-23 Pittsburgh
April 29-30 Memphis, Tenn.
May 4-5 San Francisco
May 11-12 Phoenix
May 13-14 Denver
May 18-19 Dallas
May 20-21 Tampa, Fla.

Questions can be directed to the Daecher Consulting Group at (717) 975-9190.



Coach USA signs agreement for 61 J4500 MCI coaches

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — Coach USA has signed what is believed to be the largest bus purchase agreement by a motorcoach company in at least two years, ordering 61 J4500-coaches from Motor Coach Industries.

Sixteen of the wheelchair-lift equipped coaches are being delivered immediately to Coach USA's North Central region, which is based in Chicago. Another 14 will be delivered next month.

The Coach USA North Central operators receiving the new J4500s models are

Keshin, Chicago; Wisconsin Coach, Milwaukee; VanGalder, Janesville, Wis.; Coach USA Central Cab, Waynesburg, Pa.; Coach USA Lenzner, Pittsburgh, and Central New York, Syracuse.

The coaches will bring the region's fleet of over-the-road buses to 360. All together, the region operates 1,300 vehicles, including school and transit buses, with operations in Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, central New York and West Virginia.

The remaining 31 J4500s will be delivered to Coach USA's

Northeast region in May. The Northeast region, which includes New Jersey, eastern New York and southern Pennsylvania, took delivery of 17 new D4500 MCI coaches at the end of January.

MCI said the Coach USA order is a further sign the U.S. transportation sector is showing signs of optimism.

"This new investment will make a real difference to the comfort and reliability of our service on the road," said Brian Souter, chief executive of Coach USA. "We believe there is significant potential to grow our charter business, in particular, and these new state-of-the-art vehicles will improve the quality of service we can offer our customers."

The Coach USA J4500 coaches have seating for 56 passengers, and feature Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines and Allison B500 transmissions.

The order marks the first J4500 coaches to be placed into Coach USA's fleet. The J4500 was developed four years ago as a spin off to the E4500 coach. MCI says the J-model is quickly becoming its most popular coach model.

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THE DOCKET

Senate bill would change red-dyed fuel tax system

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate has adopted legislation that eliminates the requirement for motorcoach operators to use red-dyed diesel fuel to take advantage of the lower federal taxes associated with the special fuel.

A lobbyist and an attorney for the America Bus Association say the measure also would alter the way operators handle the payment of taxes on red-dyed diesel, a change that apparently irks some operators.

Currently, red-dyed diesel fuel — it contains a red coloring that makes it easy for law enforcement officials to identify — is exempt from 17 cents of the 24.4-cents-per-gallon federal excise tax because its use is generally limited to non-highway vehicles, such as farm equipment and boats.

Motorcoach operators are

allowed to use it in coaches that seat more than 20 passengers and that are available for charter by the general public, and in buses that are being used to provide public transit services under a contract with a state or local government.

Coaches used exclusively by a group or organization may not use the fuel.

Operators have two ways to handle the tax exemption for the fuel. They may purchase the fuel tax-free and then pay the appropriate taxes each quarter, or they may pay the full excise tax at the time of purchase and then file for a refund from the Internal Revenue Service each quarter. Most operators opt for the refund method.

Under the new legislation, which passed the Senate last

month and is awaiting action in the House, operators would pay only the required 7.4 cents a gallon tax when they purchase the fuel for qualified coaches or buses. This would eliminate the need for making quarterly payments or requesting quarterly refunds.

"This is a great thing for most carriers," said Rick Schweitzer, general counsel for the American Bus Association, which has been following the legislation. "It is a huge cash-flow issue for them because the Internal Revenue Service has not been very good at getting the money back to the carriers in a timely fashion."

Additionally, he noted that paying the full taxes and then getting refunds amounts to giving the federal government an interest-free loan.

While the vast majority of operators handle the taxes using the refund method, Schweitzer says some prefer paying no taxes at the time of purchase and then making quarterly payments. "Some of them are complaining about it. So, the question is whether it is a benefit for enough of the carriers to offset the detriment to the minority of them," he said.

Clyde Hart, executive vice president of government affairs for the ABA, says the operators he has heard from approve of the proposed change in dealing with the taxes. "They are telling us that it's a good thing and it is something they could support," he said.

Schweitzer said he has been unable to determine why the provision dealing with motorcoaches

and buses was included in the legislation, although he believes it might have something to do with concerns about the misuse of red-dyed fuel.

"My guess is that some people, not motorcoach operators, but others, are buying the fuel and then using it for other (illegal) purposes," he said.

The IRS has expressed such concerns in the past and has made surprise inspections on farms and has had state law enforcement authorities make traffic stops of over-the-road trucks in an effort to catch possible violators.

In Northern California last year, the IRS found nearly two dozen violators in a week's worth of farm inspections, and police found as many as eight trucks in violation during one day of traffic stops.

Missouri considers plan to establish road tolls

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Commercial motor carriers throughout America's heartland are up in arms over proposals in Missouri to establish tolls on Interstates 70 and 44, plus a stretch of U.S. 71 in the southeast part of the state.

The tolls will be a blow to large numbers of motorcoach companies that use I-70, one of the half-dozen major East-West Interstates across the U.S. connecting St. Louis and Kansas City. And to operators that transport thousands of visitors annually along I-44 to the popular entertainment venues in Branson, Mo., and the Missouri Ozarks.

Trucking interests in Missouri, and in the neighboring states of Illinois and Arkansas, have criticized a pair of toll bills working their way through the Missouri General Assembly. They would open the way for tolls on the three major highways, plus two planned bridges.

Truckers in Missouri are actively organizing opposition to the bills.

Passage of the legislation would not automatically guarantee the establishment of toll booths on Missouri highways. Voters also must approve the idea.



Twice in the past voters have rejected blanket toll authority. This time, advocates are pursuing tolls on just five specific projects.

The Missouri Department of

Transportation, which supports the toll plan, says the money the tolls would raise is badly needed for several important highways in the state, plus paying for new bridges.

Bill to fix Atlanta HOV lane issue clears hurdle

ATLANTA — Round One kudos to the Georgia Motorcoach Operators Association.

The Georgia Senate has unanimously passed legislation that will get rid of a state law that bans buses from HOV lanes around Atlanta.

Sen. Jeff Mullis, chairman of the Senate Economic Development and Tourism Committee, shepherded the bill through the Senate at the urging

of the Georgia Motorcoach Operators Association and its allies. Mullis' bill proposes changing a state traffic law to permit buses and motorcoaches to use HOV and left lanes on multi-lane highways.

Currently, Georgia law bans any vehicle with six or more wheels from HOV lanes. The law was designed to keep over-the-road trucks out of HOV and left lanes.

Now, Rep. Don Wix has begun pushing the bill in the Georgia House.

Joy Spears Walstrum of Banyan Tree Consulting Group, which represents Sky Valley Resort and the Tourism Development Alliance of Georgia, reports the measure is being supported by the chairmen of both the Transportation and Economic Development & Tourism committees in the

House, as well as the Georgia Department of Transportation.

During the past year, coaches have been occasionally ticketed for using Atlanta's HOV lanes although the G-DOT has posted information on its Web site indicating the law was not designed to apply to buses. However, county sheriffs' deputies occasionally ticket unsuspecting operators. The tickets are costly: \$250-\$275.

NTSB wants highway work zones safer

WASHINGTON — Highway construction zones are too often unsafe for motorists and workers, says the National Transportation Safety Board, and it is urging the government to devise ways to make construction areas.

The NTSB unanimously voted to ask the Federal Highway Administration to issue stronger rules for designing work zones, including requiring concrete barriers or orange barrels to separate two-way traffic, and more regular monitoring of the zones.

The number of motorists and workers killed in construction zones rose to a record 1,181 in 2002, from 693 in 1997, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The board said that while drivers cause many accidents because of excessive speed or inattention, state highway departments also bear some responsibility. NTSB said work zones often have lanes that are too narrow, inadequate barriers separating oncoming traffic, and design flaws.



United
Motorcoach
Association



Subject: Operation Secure Transport

Dear Motorcoach Company Owner or Operator:

Last month, you received a letter containing important information about a vital new training program being initiated by the U.S. Transportation Security Administration, a unit of the Department of Homeland Security. This program will provide your company with valuable training and information to assist you in developing a security ready environment for protecting your passengers, employees and equipment. This critical training is being paid for by an Intercity Bus Security Grant from the TSA that is being administered jointly by the United Motorcoach Association and the America Bus Association. It is available at no direct cost to your company. This letter is intended to increase awareness of the program; this is not an advertisement.

Since the horrific events of September 11, 2001, enhanced bus and motorcoach industry security has received greater attention from both the government and the public. Because of this, UMA and ABA have committed to providing the bus and motorcoach industry with the finest security training tools available. Working with security and training experts, we have developed the nation's first comprehensive bus and motorcoach-specific security training program, called "Operation Secure Transport." We are prepared to provide a free copy of this training program to the first 2,220 companies that request it. The training program contains a student workbook, security checklist and a 90-minute video — available in VHS or DVD formats, as well as through the Internet. For a short preview of the video, go to www.onlinesafetytraining.com and click on the title "Operation Secure Transport."

The only requirement on your part is a commitment to use the materials to train your full- and part-time employees, and be willing to participate in a randomly selected pre- and post-delivery interview. We will ship the training program to you as soon as we receive your completed agreement form that was included with the letter you received.

Security starts with knowledge. The UMA and ABA sincerely hope you will show your commitment to passenger and infrastructure security by taking advantage of this unique opportunity. Request the "Operation Secure Transport" training program using the form that accompanied your letter. But keep in mind, you must guarantee you will use these important materials. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Victor S. Parra

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Victor S. Parra'.

President & CEO
United Motorcoach Association

Peter J. Pantuso

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter J. Pantuso'.

President and CEO
American Bus Association

The U.S. Transportation Security Administration has awarded grants to the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association to provide security training and information to 2,220 motorcoach operators in the United States. Letters explaining the program were sent to more than 3,000 motorcoach operators. Remember, this program is free to operators, and its training is both essential and smart business. If you did not receive a letter, call and request one today. Call either the ABA at (800) 283-2877, or UMA at (800) 424-8262.

SafeStat

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the system for years. Now, their criticisms have been confirmed by the comprehensive analysis of the DOT Inspector General.

For its part, the FMCSA readily acknowledges the system has problems but contends that some of the criticism is overblown, and it points to improvements that have been or are being made to address the problems.

Still, it is clear from the Inspector General's report that the FMCSA must adopt and meet a higher standard of quality to assure fairness to motorcoach companies and truckers who may lose business or be placed at a competitive disadvantage by inaccurate SafeStat results.

For the uninitiated, SafeStat is essentially a massive database that helps the FMCSA decide which of the more than 640,000 active interstate motorcoach and trucking companies it will target for its compliance reviews and safety oversight. Because it is impossible to inspect 640,000 companies each year, the FMCSA must have a system for determining who gets the attention. That system is the Motor Carrier Safety Status Measurement System, or SafeStat.

In reading the Inspector General's report on the system, a two-decades-old cliché keeps coming to mind: *Garbage in, Garbage Out*. Clearly, the No. 1 problem identified by the report is that much of the data foundation of SafeStat is little more than garbage.

The major shortcomings identified in the report are little short of astounding:

1. There is no updated information for 42 percent of the 643,909 active motor carriers in the SafeStat database.

2. SafeStat reported that 11 percent of the active carriers in its data base had no vehicles and 15 percent had no drivers. Yet, many of these same carriers had crashes or inspections reported against their vehicles or drivers. Were that not bad enough, neither the crashes nor the inspections negatively impacted these carriers' SafeStat scores.

3. There were no reports for the estimated one-third of the large trucks involved in accidents annually, including 37,000 crashes involving interstate carriers.

4. Reporting for about 20 percent of the crashes in SafeStat occurred six months or more after

How SafeStat works, how the feds use it

When sufficient information from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's database is available, SafeStat assigns motor carriers a percentile ranking between 0 and 100 (with 100 being the worst) in one or more of the following four safety evaluation areas: accidents (crashes), driver, vehicle, and safety management.

Carriers ranked in the 75th percentile or greater are considered deficient in an area.

Carriers deficient in two or more areas are assigned an overall SafeStat score of 150 to 550, based on the weighted accumulation of the percentile rankings. The relative weights assigned to each area are accidents 2.0; driver 1.5; vehicle 1.0; and safety management 1.0.

the crashes.

5. Serious moving traffic violations (mainly speeding) are being seriously underreported. In one state, the audit found that roughly 29,000 serious moving traffic violations went uncounted over a three-year period.

6. An estimated 13 percent of the 21,000 crashes, and 7 percent of the more than 1 million inspection transactions occurring in a six-month period, contained carrier identification errors, including failure to identify a carrier associated with the violation or, in a smaller number of instances, identifying the wrong carrier.

7. Problems with inaccurate data are compounded because there is no effective system in place to correct errors in data reporting. In fact, when the FMCSA receives a request from a carrier to correct data it has received from a state, there is no system for centrally tracking the resolution of such requests.

The overarching finding and problems identified in the audit were these:

Data Quality Weaknesses. Significant problems exist with the data motor carriers and the states provide to the FMCSA, and these data problems limit SafeStat's effectiveness and introduce bias into the ranking process.

The most serious problems lie with outdated data on the number of vehicles and drivers used by motor carriers, incomplete crash reporting from the states, and late or incomplete inspection reporting, particularly reports on serious

Of 645,551 active interstate carriers on record in SafeStat, 26 percent, or about 170,000, had sufficient data to compute a value for one or more of the four safety evaluation areas.

Of the 170,000 carriers, 7,821 were considered deficient; to the point they were classified as the riskiest carriers and placed in categories A, B, or C. Another 34,844 carriers, somewhat less deficient, were placed in categories D, E, F, or G.

FMCSA field offices are directed to concentrate their compliance review efforts on category A and B carriers, which are considered the highest risk.

The key FMCSA data sources for calculating SafeStat rankings are:

- Periodic reports that motor

moving traffic violations.

Poor Crash Data. Six states (including 2 of 10 states visited by Inspector General auditors) did not report any crashes in the six-month period reviewed by the IG.

The six states were the District of Columbia, Florida, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Vermont. One of the 10 states reviewed reported only fatal crashes to FMCSA, but failed to tell the agency about 5,816 non-fatal large truck crashes that occurred in the state.

Poor Data on Moving Traffic Violations. State reports on roadside inspections are supposed to

include data on serious moving traffic violations but often do not. In addition, large state-to-state variations exist in the reporting of traffic violations. For example, California reported 115 serious moving violations to the FMCSA database in fiscal 2001, compared to Indiana, which reported about 25,000.

Inaccurate Data Records. Even when crash and inspection data reach the FMCSA database, errors or omissions occur during the processing of the data that could influence SafeStat scores.

The IG estimates that errors occurred in approximately 13 percent of the crashes. A critical mistake that occurred in an estimated 11 percent of the errors was that the wrong carrier was held accountable for a SafeStat-related violation.

Insufficient Disclosure of Weaknesses in Publicly Disseminated Data. To mitigate problems posed by public dis-

carriers submit to FMCSA, which include information on the number of drivers and vehicles used by the motor carrier.

- Police accident reports on crashes involving commercial vehicles.

- State reports on vehicle and driver violations found during roadside safety inspections, which include serious moving traffic violations such as speeding.

- FMCSA compliance review and enforcement records on motor carriers.

The FMCSA uses SafeStat to identify and prioritize high-risk motor carriers for compliance reviews.

To find a motorcoach operator's SafeStat rating go to: www.safersys.org.

semination of inaccurate data, the FMCSA should ensure that public users of SafeStat are aware of any known data quality weaknesses.

In the past, the SafeStat Web site pointed to problems with data provided by carriers, but did not disclose reporting problems with states. Following the issuance of the IG's draft report in December, the FMCSA placed a more comprehensive disclaimer on its Web site, and promised to provide state specific information in the future.

Ineffective Systems for Facilitating Data Correction by the States. Motor carriers cannot easily correct inaccurate crash and inspection information in SafeStat because carriers must deal with individual states to obtain corrective actions.

Since the IG audit was initiated, the FMCSA and the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center have developed a prototype for a data quality tracking system to centrally accept and track challenges motor carriers make to the states. The system currently is being put into operation.

Insufficient Reviews of Data Quality. The audit found that states have limited controls to ensure the quality of data submitted to the FMCSA. Compounding the lack of state controls, the FMCSA does not routinely conduct its own oversight reviews targeted at fixing the system.

Ineffective Use of Sanctions and Incentives. Overall, the FMCSA has not effectively used existing sanctions and incentives

to promote better data reporting by states and motor carriers. The FMCSA also has not imposed sanctions, such as the withholding of Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program grant funds from states for failing to correct data quality problems.

The Inspector General noted that many of SafeStat's shortcomings are caused by the states and police agencies that generate and process much of the safety data going into the system, and that this presents challenges for the FMCSA.

At the same time, however, the IG contends the FMCSA could do a much better job of hammering the states to do better.

One consequence of the lousy reporting is that SafeStat rankings are geographically biased against carriers operating in states that provide more complete data. In other words, such data variations across geographic locations mean the FMCSA may fail to target certain high-risk carriers simply because of where they operate.

So, carriers operating in states that do a terrible job of reporting traffic and safety information to the FMCSA stand a better chance of getting away with more safety violations.

At the same time, inaccurate or misleading data provided by carriers can produce errors in SafeStat calculations and cause some high-risk carriers to be missed.

The FMCSA was given a chance to respond to a draft of the Inspector General's report and the agency said it agreed with the concerns about improving data quality and it cited a number of improvements being implemented to address recommendations in the report. The improvements include:

- Hiring a contractor to conduct a new study to revalidate the SafeStat model.
- Implementing an improved system for tracking public challenges to the accuracy of SafeStat data.
- Providing SafeStat users with comprehensive information on data limitations.
- Assigning staff to review state reports that address state data quality issues and to work with the states to resolve them.
- Establishing goals for completeness, accuracy, and timeliness of data.
- Making state grant funding contingent on participation in certain data quality programs.

Buses to circle California capitol in support of workers comp reform

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Upwards of 100 privately owned motorcoaches were expected to surround the State Capitol here Monday, March 1, in a show of support for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's plan to reform California's beleaguered workers compensation program.

The demonstration by operators was being organized by the California Bus Association.

"Please help us support the governor in his effort to reform workers compensation," CBA member Kevin Creighton of West Valley Charter Lines in Campbell, Calif., said in an e-mail to other operators. "Our goal is to surround the capitol with 100 coaches."

Creighton urged operators to contact their local Chambers of Commerce and ask if they wanted to send members on the coaches to lobby legislators while the buses are in Sacramento.

The event was scheduled to last from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The coaches will assemble at Raley Field in Sacramento and then move on to the capitol.

CBA organizers even made arrangements for signs for the coaches.

Among the companies signing up early for the event were: Amador Stage Lines, American Stage Tours, Best Tours, Classic Charter, All West Coachlines, CUSA-San Francisco, Discovery, El Camino Lines, Orange Belt, Pacific Coast Bus, Peninsula Charter Lines, Storer Coachways, Super Sightseeing Tours and West Valley.

In California, workers compensation premiums have seriously affected the viability of many businesses, including coach operators. Workers comp rates have increased by more than 100 percent over the last three years.

Only hours after he took office in November, Schwarzenegger acted on one of the cornerstones of his campaign, unveiling a sweeping plan to overhaul the state workers comp system.

Republican Schwarzenegger submitted a plan to the legislature, which is controlled by Democrats, that would squeeze as much as \$11 billion in costs out of the system.

The Schwarzenegger plan is generally favored by employers, while legislators have been pushing a plan that's more acceptable to labor.

In his State of the State address last month, Schwarzenegger set a March 1 deadline for a reform plan to be adopted.

Workers compensation is

designed to ensure that employees who are injured or disabled on the job are provided with fixed monetary awards, eliminating the need for litigation.

Workers comp insurance also is supposed to protect employers from claims resulting from injuries to employees.



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**Technology you can trust.
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When we set out to build the most advanced luxury coach on North American roads today we knew that value would be top priority for our customers. So we equipped the Setra S 417 for maximum cost-effectiveness with:

- State-of-the-art diagnostics
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- Intelligent cost-saving innovation
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- Comprehensive, proactive service

Add to that DaimlerChrysler backing and 20 years of Setra commitment to the North American market and you've got value you can count on.

Talk to your Setra representative, test-drive the new Setra S 417 and discover the new benchmark in both luxury and value.

SETRA

Setra of North America, Inc.
6012-B High Point Road, Greensboro, NC 27407, toll free 1-800-882-8094
email: setra-na@setra-usa.com, www.setra-coaches.com

It's free, its painless

Last September, we ran a Page One story about the disconnect between most motorcoach operators and federal administrators whose mission it is to assure transportation security and freedom of movement for people and commerce.

Our article reported the results of a "vulnerability study" of the coach industry conducted by the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center. The study found that in the wake of September 11 and the threat of terrorist attacks in the future, plans and programs were needed to improve coach passenger security. However, motorcoach operators who were the focus of the study weren't at all convinced that additional industry security measures were warranted.

It's six months later, and opinions on both sides appear not to have changed much.

U.S. Transportation Security Administration officials continue to urge operators to become more security conscience and proactive. The agency has awarded more than \$1.6 million to the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association to offer free voluntary security training to more than 2,000 coach operators nationwide.

The associations are rolling out their programs. (See the latest announcement on page 5 and a story on page 3.)

But so far, the response from operators has been underwhelming. Several hundred operators have signed up, but coach companies have not inundated the associations with the forms used for signing up for the program. That's regrettable, and here's why.

If the response continues to lag, the feds will more than likely mandate security training for the industry, and what is mandated may be far more onerous than the voluntary program that is available today. Any time the government requires something, it comes with strings, and forms, and reporting and posting requirements, and general bureaucratic overkill.

On the chance that all of that can be avoided by being proactive, consider signing up for the voluntary program today. If you already have, let us know what you think of it when the material arrives later this month, and you've shared it with your staff and completed the training.

Maybe others will be encouraged to sign up once they learn it's relatively painless. Unlike a federal mandate.



By Thomas D.
DeMatteo
Vice President &
General Counsel
ABC Companies

Title insurance is a contract which provides insurance to pay the cost of a loss if any interest adverse to the property owner is not reflected in the policy. The insuring company promises to defend the title against adverse claims, subject to the provisions of the policy.

Title insurance is not an absolute guarantee as to the status of title or of possession of property. In the event of loss of possession or other title defect, the insured will receive money damages measured by the amount of actual loss or damage sustained, subject to the face amount of the policy. The insurance company will also pay the costs and expenses incurred in defense of the title.

Title insurance is unique from other forms of insurance in that it is retrospective in nature. It protects against defects that arose in the past, but are discovered in the future. It protects against title losses resulting from defects which exist as of the date of the policy, rather than anticipating some future defect.

The rate charged for title insurance includes services for searching the public records and examining the title, as well as the agent's commission and the underwriter's premium for risk.

Because title insurance companies are insurers who take risks for a premium, title insurance provides greater pro-

tection against title defects than is generally available under the abstract and attorney's opinion method of assuring title.

For example, an abstract with attorney's opinion discloses only discoverable defects in title, that is, defects which are apparent from the public record, as evidenced by the abstract from which the attorney's opinion was prepared. However, a title insurance policy not only protects against these discoverable defects, it also protects against certain hidden risks. All of the following defects could cause the invalidity of a conveyance essential to the chain of title:

1. Fraud, forgery or duress in the execution of documents affecting title.
 2. False impersonation of the owner of land.
 3. Documents which appear on their face to be deeds to transfer title but which are intended between the parties to be collateral security for some debt.
 4. Execution by a minor or incompetent person.
 5. Undisclosed heirs or family members.
 6. Wills not discovered at the time of the owner's death.
 7. Improper notice of judicial proceedings to those with interests in real property.
 8. Deeds executed but not actually delivered.
 9. Deeds conditionally delivered where non-occurrence of the condition renders the deed void.
 10. Deeds delivered under invalid power of attorney.
 11. Marriages or divorces not disclosed by the public record resulting in property rights.
 12. Abstractor or other company's error.
- Few insurers in other fields are able

to say that one of the functions of their policies is risk elimination. Its own personnel conduct the search and examination of the records so that all known title defects which the company is not "insuring over" may be noted on the preliminary commitment and cured, or eliminated, prior to or at the time of closing. Before the company issues its final policy, these various record defects are either eliminated, or shown as exceptions to the policy coverage.

The commitment to insure is the initial document issued by the title company, stating the terms on which the insurer will issue the title insurance policy. The final policy gives the status of the title on the effective date of the policy and insures against loss in the event the title ends up being different from that reflected on the policy.

The primary types of final policies are the owner's policy and the loan policy. The primary types of coverage are standard coverage and extended coverage. The owner's policy may be used to insure an estate of ownership, occupancy or possession. Liability under the owner's policy continues for as long as the insured either has an insurable interest or has liability under any conveyance given.

It is important to remember that the named insured is the only person or entity protected by the specific policy. The loan policy does not insure the owner's interest, and the owner's policy does not insure the lender's interest.

Footnote: Gilmore, Barbara, Title Insurance Basics, Minnesota State Bar Association, June 2003.

Thomas D. DeMatteo also is an adjunct professor of law at Hamline University School of Law in St. Paul, Minn.

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Blue Bird shifts managers, forms Coachworks unit

FORT VALLEY, Ga. — The new president and CEO of Blue Bird Corp., Jeff Bust, has shuffled the company's top management team for second time in six months, and announced a consolidation of Blue Bird's coach, luxury motor home and commercial bus divisions.

Born out of the reorganization is Blue Bird Coachworks, which consolidates all of the company's non-school bus units and gives them a common marketing identity.

"Our company's coach, motorhome and commercial bus areas have introduced all-new product offerings over the last three years," Bust said in announcing the changes. ... The establishment of Blue Bird Coachworks is an important step in our overall plan to grow the company's non-school bus business," he added.

Emerging as the top executive in the shake-up is Wayne Joseph, who becomes vice president/general manager of Blue Bird Coachworks. Joseph joined Blue Bird early last year as vice president/general manager of RV and coach. Previously, his career included 25 years in the transit bus industry, including long stints at Flxible Corp. and North American Bus Industries.

Richard Maddox becomes vice president of sales and marketing for Blue Bird Coachworks. During a 30-year career at Blue Bird, Maddox has held a number of top jobs, including being company president for four years and head of the school bus operation.

Buddy Cox, who had headed sales and marketing for the commercial bus operation, becomes

director of sales and marketing for both coach and commercial bus.

Bryan Hays continues to lead sales and marketing for the RV market.

"We are excited about the

establishment of Blue Bird Coachworks," said Joseph. "We have organized a strong team of leaders throughout the division that have a shared commitment to excellence in quality and cus-

tomer service."

The Blue Bird Coachworks product line up includes the XCEL 102, Ultra LF, Ultra LMB, Express 4000 and 4500, and Wanderlodge M380 and 450 LXi.



Wayne Joseph



Richard Maddox

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INDUSTRY NEWS

New Prevost president focuses on quality, value, customers

ATLANTA — It all fits.

Gaetan Bolduc is an engineer by education and experience. His jobs during his 22 years at Prevost Car Inc. have been production, engineering, research and operations related.

So, when he was promoted to company president on Jan. 1, it seemed appropriate that he would commit to those characteristics that are near and dear to the heart of engineers.

Like, continually improving quality.

Expanding customer satisfaction.

Delivering long-term value.

Being a reliable partner.
And, setting standards.

"From the standpoint of the values we embrace as a corporation — and with the advantage of many years of experience behind us — it's clear that chasing after market share is not the way to deliver lasting value," Bolduc explains.

"We know that the only road to success is to take care of our customers during good times and bad. It's what makes Prevost a solid, reliable partner for the long term,"

Bolduc continues.

"Over the past few years we've put a lot of effort into protecting the value of the investments our customers have made in our organization and in our products. ... Prevost is a partner of choice because customers know they can count on us for a wide range of quality products and services that meet their needs," Bolduc adds.

The new top executive at Prevost intends to keep the Quebec-based coach builder on a path of quality improvement and growing customer satisfaction,

drawing on the skills of the Prevost team to accomplish those goals.

"We mean to prove our worth on an ongoing basis," he says, "by setting new standards in product and service quality and, above all, safeguarding the investments our customers make in what we do."

Bolduc joined Prevost in 1982, as a technician and moved steadily up the corporate ladder, becoming manager of industrial engineering, methods and tooling in 1986, vice president of production and material in 1993, and executive vice president of operations in 1998.



**Gaetan
Bolduc**

He is a graduate of the University of Quebec's engineering technology program, which no doubt reinforced and expanded his focus on quality and value.

MCI

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ing off the Winnipeg assembly line will include a mix of G4500, J4500 and E4500 models.

The new G-coaches will mark the rebirth of that model. MCI has not manufactured any G models for nearly a year.

Production of G models stopped after MCI announced in February 2003, it was closing its manufacturing plant in Mexico and moving the assembly line to Winnipeg.

Sorrels said the company has

orders for 30 G models, many of them from Greyhound, which has long been MCI's largest customer.

While adding the G model to the production schedule will help expand the work load in Winnipeg, the main reason for stepping up daily production and adding a fifth work day is because of increased orders for the J-model.

Sorrels declined, however, to reveal how many orders the company has for the J model, which was the best-selling tour and charter coach in the industry the past two years, but called the increase significant.

"It feels like folks are traveling again, and many of the motorcoach companies we have talked to are reporting they had a very good fourth quarter last year," said Sorrels. "There are a lot of deferred purchases out there and we are starting to see activity from people who have not purchased in a few years."

Meanwhile, the increased activity has not reached MCI's Pembina, N.D., plant where the company produces its D models, primarily for the transit industry. "The transit markets remain relatively flat," said Sorrels.

orders ready to go," said Jones. "Our deliveries are off to a favorable start and we have a significant number of spec'd buses scheduled for spring delivery."

One of the customers waiting for coaches is Colonial Bus Lines in Mount Prospect, Ill. "The S417 has helped our business tremendously," says company Vice President Rocky Ceravolo. "We don't have to 'sell' the bus anymore because everyone wants to ride in it. We're looking forward to turning the fleet over and to a long-term relationship with Setra."

Setra

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

a coach that was introduced to the European market in 2001 as the TopClass 400. It won Coach of the Year 2002 at Busworld in Kortrijk, Belgium, for its features and design. There are more than 2,000 TopClass 400 coaches in operation throughout Europe.

While 2003 was a record year for Setra in the U.S., the company foresees more success. The company has set a sales goal of 120 S417s for this year.

"We started the new year with

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MOTORCOACH EXPO 2004



Expo develops personality

ATLANTA — Trade shows are a lot like the people who populate them.

Like humans, there's a basic sameness about trade shows: They come around like clockwork every year; they attract many of the same vendors and suppliers, and they sprawl across hundreds of square feet of giant warehouses with fancy facades.

Yet, every trade show is unique. They develop a personality.

They are, it seems, organic and attuned to the times.

Motorcoach Expo 2004 certainly took on its own personality.

Both vendors and attendees were clearly more optimistic and upbeat this year than a year ago. Caution loomed large, of course, but attendees — both in the booths and those walking the aisles — were palpably more positive.

You heard it from operators both at the day-long educational seminars that kicked off the first full day of Expo and subsequently as they strolled the exhibit hall looking at the vendor wares.

You also heard it from suppliers manning the more than 120 booths and stands that populated one of the exhibit halls in the gigantic Georgia World Congress at the edge of downtown Atlanta.

"We had a very good Sunday

and a very good Monday," reported Michael Rochette, vice president of new coach sales at Prevost Car and a veteran of many Expos.

Ron Cornell, president of ABC Companies echoed Rochette's assessment.

"Good quality operators" came by the Setra stand, reported Robert Jones, vice president of sales at Setra of North America.

Perhaps indicative of the improving economy and industry outlook, Motorcoach Expo attracted nearly two-dozen new vendors this year, ranging from specialty coachbuilders, to bus washing system manufacturers, to truck stop operators, to leasing companies.

LaFrance Industries of LaFrance, S.C., was one such new exhibitor.

In May of last year, LaFrance jumped into the North American motorcoach industry by purchasing the transportation group of STI/Kings Plush Products, a company that has been supplying upholstery fabrics to the industry for nearly 20 years.

Executives of LaFrance say they got a positive and favorable reception at their first Expo.

"I must say, I am quite pleased with the positive response and support we received at UMA," said company President Charles Little.

"To meet with and receive encouragement from the leaders of the motorcoach market is very encouraging."

LaFrance not only attracted the management and sales teams from every coachbuilder attending Expo, but it had a steady flow of motorcoach operators visiting its booth to see the company's new fabric stylings.

"We are very pleased with the response to our new product offerings for the motorcoach market," said Danny Grant, vice president of product development. "We were particularly pleased with the response to the royal purple, electric blue and black obsidian fabric collections. Based on the positive feedback, we are moving expeditiously to complete the emerald green and red shock introductions," Grant added.

A veteran of 15 Expos was at the LaFrance booth lending his expertise. Joe Brinkmeyer, formerly with STI-Kings Plush, is heading the coach industry sales effort for LaFrance.

Little said LaFrance intends to take advantage of its unique position as a domestic producer of fabrics. "After completion of our first Motorcoach Expo, we are even more enthusiastic and committed," he added.

FMCSA chief outlines road safety initiatives

*By Tonya Layman
Special Correspondent*

ATLANTA — Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Administrator Annette Sandberg says her agency is moving on several fronts to improve highway safety, including getting uninsured and illegal motorcoach operators off the road.

"We are not willing to accept what has become far too commonplace — people dying on our roads every day," she said. "To accomplish our goal we must choose to end the acceptance of death on our roads. Last year we lost nearly 43,000 people on our nation's highways."

Sandberg spoke to a room full of motorcoach operators on the opening day of Motorcoach Expo 2004 in Atlanta.

Each year, she noted, the motorcoach industry carries more than 500 million passengers in the United States, and is an integral part of the economy. "At the same time, motorcoaches are one of the safest forms of commercial passenger transportation," she said.

Sandberg outlined a number of safety initiatives underway at FMCSA and made a pitch for the Bush Administration's surface transportation and public transit bill, called the Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003.

Included in the \$256 billion proposal, said Sandberg, is funding to reduce fatalities and increase security on the highways.

Meanwhile, she said the FMCSA continues to take steps to get uninsured and other illegal motorcoach operators off the highways. In the past three months, for example, the agency has revamped its insurance revocation process by reducing administrative processing time, mailing revocation letters sooner, and notifying law enforcement partners faster.

The amount of time a motorcoach company can hold operating authority without insurance has dropped to six days, she said. Before the changes, uninsured companies wouldn't get their revo-



Annette Sandberg
cation letter until almost three months had passed.

"UMA played a critical role by alerting us to the need for this change. Thank You! This is a great example of industry and government cooperating to make our roads safer," said Sandberg.

FMCSA will soon start cross-matching insurance revocations with inspection and crash databases and generate automated claim letters for prompt field enforcement action, she said.

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

Sandberg said the agency also is developing a section on its Web site to help consumers select a safe bus company. It will provide objective, unbiased guidance of what type of vehicle or service could meet certain needs.

Once the consumer has chosen a suitable vehicle and the appropriate geographical area, the Web service will provide safety and licensing/insurance information about the potential service providers to help consumers make safe transportation choices.

"We expect this project to be implemented and available to the public later this year," Sandberg said.

EXPO 2004

Manufacturers upgrade offerings, highlight differentiation

Here's what the coach builders were showcasing at Expo.

ABC Companies / Van Hool

ABC Companies used Expo 2004 to unveil two enhanced models of Van Hool coaches.

The ABC/Van Hool stand adopted a hunting and fishing theme, complete with a small cabin and a demonstration of fly tying. Entertaining visitors was World Artistic Pool Champion Mike Massey.

The T2100, C2000 and M1000 coaches on display at the ABC stand completed the outdoor sports theme with striking graphics completed by Turbo Images. The graphics on the T2100 were voted the best at Expo by show attendees.

Changes to the T2100 model for this year include both practical and styling improvements, while the upgrades to the 2004 C2000 model include technological and appearance enhancements, plus refinements in the cabin. The

changes inside the C2000 give it passenger appeal.

Seamless side glass on the T2100 and C2000 provide both coaches with a sleeker exterior appearance, as well as unobstructed passenger viewing. Maintenance-free king pins offer a significant labor savings over the life of the new T2100, as well as the C2000.

Other changes to the C2000 include a revamped passenger entry that provides greater safety and comfortable boarding via a ramped entry aisle and padded foam grab rails.

"The added features on the new C model are designed to offer buyers extended road life, enhanced resale value and even more curb appeal," says Ron Cornell, president and CEO of ABC Companies.

The exterior changes to the T2100 include a lower entrance-door window to increase the driver's view, individual high- and low-beam projector headlamps,



and a new baggage door design that features larger grip handles.

New two-piece right and left windshields on the T2100 bring the glass to the vehicle's roofline, eliminating the cross bar.

Blue Bird Coachworks

Blue Bird brought two versions of its Express 4500, which it introduced to the market a year ago at Motorcoach Expo 2003.

The economical Blue Bird Express is now available in both

45- and 40-foot lengths. The major difference between the two 45-foot models on the Expo show floor was that one was equipped with a Ricon wheelchair lift.

The Express is the only coach on the market that comes standard with a Caterpillar C-13 engine. The 410-horsepower Cat powerplant is mated to a B500 Allison transmission.

The list of options on the Blue Bird Express coach has grown to include seating from three differ-

ent manufacturers — American, National or Amaya. Seating plans for the suburban express market also are available on the coach.

Buddy Cox, who has taken over sales and marketing for the multi-purpose Express coaches, says Blue Bird will be aggressively pursuing the commuter and suburban shuttle markets.

Motor Coach Industries

At the MCI stand, company executives and representatives were marketing both new and used coaches, as well as rocking 'n rolling with legendary twister Chubby Checker, still svelte and energetic at the age of 63.

On display at the MCI stand were models of the company's two flagship coaches, the top-of-the-line E4500 and its popular sibling the J4500.

MCI used Expo to unveil its first-ever Certified Pre-owned Program, which is designed to assure customers better access to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18



DCCB unveils luxury cutway

ATLANTA — The newest of the new at Motorcoach Expo was the CL 300 mid-size luxury coach from DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses.

The cutaway bus, which is available in both 30- and 35-foot models, is the first built on the heavy-duty Freightliner business class M2 chassis. The chassis features a stylish, sloping hood, 10-inch steel frame members, a 96-inch wide body, and a GVWR of 25,500 pounds.

As with other DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses, the CL 300 is available with the company's Smart Choice option packages that bundle features for different applications, making it easier to spec.

Four Smart Choice packages are available for the CL 300, the Luxury Tour, the Day Tour, the Shuttle Tour and the Transit. The Luxury Tour package features seating for 33 passengers, plus driver; Tarabus Helios flooring with deluxe fabric interior; full-width, drop-down rear lug-

gage storage area, back-up camera, lighted parcel racks, Freedman forward-facing seats and premium A/V system with four seven-inch monitors.

The other packages offer seating ranging from 25 to 37 passengers. None of the packages feature a lavatory.

"This new midsize coach meets a real need for smaller, yet sophisticated and maneuverable vehicles in the marketplace," said Jeff Shank, vice president of sales and marketing for DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses.

Described as fast and agile, the CL 300 is powered by a Mercedes-Benz 906 diesel engine with 210 horsepower. The engine is mated to an Allison 2000 series transmission.

"This coach is all DaimlerChrysler, from the chassis and body down to the engine and components, and that will make maintenance and servicing easier," said Shank.

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Expo gala is highlighted with top industry awards

ATLANTA — Motorcoach Expo 2004 was both a trade show and celebration for the United Motorcoach Association.

That's because this year's show marked 20 years of Expos, with the anniversary celebration climaxing at the first-ever Vision Award Gala Banquet & Reception.

The banquet, which replaced Expo's annual awards breakfast, was a super-sized hit, drawing rave reviews from attendees.

The event was hosted by UMA President & CEO Vic Parra.

The highlight of the evening of dining, jazz, dancing, gaming and table talk was the presentation of special awards to individuals and companies.

Alex Guariento, safety director of Greyhound Lines Inc. for the past seven years, was named winner of the 2003 United Motorcoach Association Safety Leader of the Year Award, the top safety honor in the over-the-road bus industry.

In presenting the award, Carmen Daecher of The Daecher Consulting Group in Camp Hill, Pa., said Guariento is a recognized leader both in upholding and improving the motorcoach industry's leadership position in passenger transportation safety. He was nominated for the award by four different people.

Named winner of the UMA Vision Award was Arrow Stage Lines of Omaha, Neb.

In presenting the prize, UMA board member Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City said the award honors an operator that demonstrates best practices, an excellent safety record, and uses innovative approaches throughout its operation.

Accepting the award was company President Steve Busskohl who said the award demonstrated the value of individuals to an organization. "You've got to hire service-oriented people," he said. Also contributing to Arrow's success was its ability to leverage a powerful management team.

Named Operator of the Year by Metro magazine was Cyr Bus Line of Old Town, Maine.

In presenting the award to company President Joe Cyr, Metro Publisher Frank DiGiacomo cited both the company's 90-plus-year record of achievement, as well as its signature colorful coaches.

New World Tours in Lorton, Va., and its president, Dave Bolen, received the BUSRide magazine

Motorcoach Industry Achievement Award.

Bolen, whose company inadvertently polluted and was prosecuted by the U.S. Justice Department and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, thanked those who had supported him through the ordeal, specifically mentioning the United Motor-

coach Association and ABC Bus Companies/Van Hool and the Cornell family, the long-time principals of ABC.

During his years as director of safety at Greyhound, Guariento has been instrumental in reducing accidents at the company by 13 percent overall and cutting serious accidents by 60 percent.

Guariento's safety leadership extends beyond Greyhound to the entire motorcoach industry. He is the chairman of the Bus Industry Safety Council; a member of the Transportation Research Board; a member of the National Safety Council, and an active participant in the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance.

UMA's Safety Leader of the Year Award is given to a person who has been involved in the industry for at least five years; who has been active in industry initiatives and organizations, as well as non-industry activities, and who has demonstrated achievements for his or her company and/or the industry.

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CP0005

Panelists are cautiously optimistic, see opportunity

By Tonya Layman
Special Correspondent

ATLANTA — It's called "uncertain optimism." And it's what many motorcoach operators are feeling these days.

Business is picking up from the depths of the past two years but operators remain worried another bomb might drop — literally.

That uncertain optimism was broadly reflected by four operators who participated in a panel discussion that opened the first full day of Motorcoach Expo 2004 in Atlanta last month.

The operators comprising the panel were from four parts of the country: Jot Bennett of Capital Trailways in Harrisburg, Pa.; David Brown of Holiday Tours in Randleman, N.C.; Rick Hillard of Tri-State Tours in Galena, Ill., and Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City.

The quartet responded to questions from moderators Victor Parra, president and CEO of the United Motorcoach Association, and Steve Klika, president of the International Motorcoach Group.

The discussion covered a wide variety of topics, including changes they see coming down the pike,

adapting to new technology, and coping with every day challenges, ranging from personnel issues to the competition.

The consensus of the four is that 2004 will be a year of cautious optimism, as operators experience an increase in bookings and inquiries but harbor concerns about the long-term outlook. They seemed to agree with Bennett's concise assessment:

"We're on the edge of better times."

Polzien said he thought the industry was entering a period of opportunity, a time to move forward through new public relations efforts and reaching out to new markets.

A perennial challenge facing the industry, the panel said, was personnel issues. The men agreed that the era of 30-year bus drivers probably has ended.

People change companies and industries much more frequently than ever before. Therefore, operators must encourage employee participation and provide increased training to give employees more buy-in.

"One of our new focuses is on training," said Brown. "We have



Jot Bennett

weekly sales and driver training, including more customer service training. With our changing customer base we need employees who can adapt to changing needs," he added.

Polzien agreed, saying employees must be given "the tools to do their job. There is no such thing as a bad employee; there is only bad management. Listen to employees and empower them and train them to optimize their skills," he said. "Make it a fulfilling job for them and they will excel."

The key to building an ideal employee is to motivate and communicate, said Bennett, adding that his company has done this by

adding an internal newsletter, building an incentive program and boosting communication between management, drivers and sales.

There was a consensus among the panel members that as the travel industry changes, the motorcoach operators that are going to survive will be those that adapt to change and use it as an opportunity to make their businesses better.

"Business problems are business problems," said Polzien. "We have been bringing in talent from outside our industry to help us. We (as an industry) have never been sales and marketing oriented, and we tend to wear blinders."

Bennett said his company also has gone outside the industry to find personnel to help it adapt to change. He has hired a cruise expert and a high-end tour builder and they are offering more canned tours and concentrating more on niche marketing.

In a discussion of competition, several of the panelists said they have partnered with competitors to build an alliance against low-ballers.

"An alliance allows us to form a friendship and increase our offerings to our customer base, thus

increasing profits without major increases in overhead," said Hillard. "We need more role-model companies in this industry."

Polzien said "good competition is the best thing you can have." Studies show it boosts productivity, customer service, profits and efficiency.

The men said that while low-ballers are a nuance, they don't spend time fretting about them.

"We ignore them," said Bennett. "I know what I need to make a profit. We aren't in the business of just running buses. Push your name and push the concept of value."

Each of the operators said they are taking steps to take advantage of the opportunities the improving economy and travel outlook present.

"We're redefining our sales process," said Brown. "We're using outside sales training and we have hired an inside sales trainer. We want to work on building the relationship by listening to the customer. They will tell you what they need," he said.

Hillard plans to seek new opportunities and take some chances. "You can't be afraid."

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What it takes to drive your business.

To Motorcoach Expo Attendees:

I'd like to sincerely thank all of you who attended Motorcoach Expo 2004 in Atlanta last month--a truly great time was had by all. The 55,000 square foot exhibit hall was packed with over 120 exhibitors that displayed countless products and services indispensable to our industry. Quite a few of these exhibitors were new to the UMA show in 2004—we hope the show was successful for them and that we'll see them in Las Vegas in 2005!

As always, the education sessions and maintenance seminar were informative and really helped the operator attendees pioneer some new ideas in the areas of marketing, operations, and finance. Solutions to the industry's most pressing problems were presented in insightful and practical ways.

The newest addition to the first-rate hospitality events at Motorcoach Expo was the Vision Awards Banquet and Gala. The first ever dinner and awards presentation will surely be a tradition for years to come. Great food, company, brandy, and cigars--what a great way to cap off a wonderful show!

I look forward to seeing all of you in Las Vegas in 2005! And for those of you who didn't get a chance to join us in Atlanta, Motorcoach Expo 2005 is shaping up to be the best show yet so plan on joining us in Las Vegas February 23-25, 2005!

Sincerely,

David R. Brown
Chairman, UMA Board of Directors

INDUSTRY NEWS

Charter rules

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

potential to deal a severe blow to our industry," said David Brown, chairman of the United Motorcoach Association and president of Holiday Tours in Randleman, N.C. "To even think that someone would put that business up for grabs, particularly to transits, is downright criminal."

A long-time industry lobbyist echoed Brown's view: "If all the measures in this bill come together it could deal a death blow to the majority of the (private bus) industry."

The potentially destructive language is contained in the \$318 billion surface transportation and public transit bill adopted overwhelming by the Senate last month.

UMA, the California Bus Association, the International Motorcoach Group and the American Bus Association have linked up in an effort to revise the bill in the House. Their goal is to replace the offending sections with language that protects private motorcoach operators from unfair competition at the hands of public transit agencies.

Many motorcoach industry leaders consider the threat posed by the Senate bill to be so pervasive and pronounced that they were preparing to launch a take-no-prisoners lobbying effort to fight it. That could still happen.

"A fair reading of the (charter bus service section of the Senate bill) can only lead to one conclusion: (a) the private charter bus industry in North America will be driven out of a thriving market, the non-profit sector, by a government statute designed solely for the benefit of federally subsidized public transit operators, and (b) public operators will be allowed to establish charter brokering departments to siphon off portions of local private bus charter markets," says CBA President Michael R. Waters of Pacific Coast Bus Services in San Francisco.

The controversial provisions contained in the Senate bill resulted from months of negotiations between the ABA and the American Public Transportation Association, which represents scores of public transit agencies across the U.S.

After representatives of ABA and APTA testified before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs in early June, members of the committee and the House Transportation and

Infrastructure Committee asked the two associations to get together to work out differences over coach industry concerns about unfair competition from public transit agencies.

Congress had indicated it did not want to impose its own solution to the transit competition issue. It wanted the public and private sectors of the industry to come up with a solution. APTA reportedly had indicated a willingness to resolve the issue without expanding the charter role of transits.

Some are now questioning whether APTA bargained in good faith or had a hidden agenda.

Other industry associations, including UMA and CBA, deferred to the ABA on the issue because it had developed strong charter service rules language and had been asked by Congress to work with APTA.

Joining the ABA and APTA during the negotiations was the Amalgamated Transit Union, which primarily represents thousands of public transit workers.

The charter service provisions that grew out of the meetings ended up in the Senate bill. According to the ABA, Congressional staff members had made it clear there were only a limited number and type of charter operations they would write into the bill. The staffers also suggested that language in the reports that generally accompany bills to the floor of the Senate or House could be used to further detail the charter operations outside the scope of the exceptions included in the Senate legislation.

"This final segment of the language had yet to be agreed on when the Senate expedited its timetable for floor consideration of the reauthorization bill," ABA President Peter Pantuso said in a memo circulated in the industry.

The Senate adopted its transportation bill, which will fund highway and mass transit projects for the next six years, after four days of debate, and without filing the written report the ABA expected would accompany the legislation. The House will now follow the Senate with its own version of the transportation bill.

Pantuso says the intent of the provisions in the Senate bill are being misinterpreted. He said the language was intended to allow, for example, a mayor to hire a transit bus to shepherd state legislators around the city to showcase its transit services. Another example would be for a transit system to

provide charter service to non-profit agencies that can't afford to pay for transportation services.

"The challenge is trying to put in some definitions to make sure that is, in fact, all they're allowed to do, that it doesn't include government agencies, i.e., the schools, or moving a convention when it comes to town," said Pantuso.

However, the bill that escaped the Senate contains no explicit language indicating transits would be restricted to chauffeuring visiting dignitaries, and there is no committee report limiting the scope and exceptions.

"We have serious concerns with several potential outcomes of (the) legislative language drafted and currently included in the Senate bill," the ABA, CBA, IMG and UMA said in a memorandum submitted to APTA a week after the Senate bill was adopted.

"Unless these provisions are

'Pantuso says the intent of the provisions are being misinterpreted.'

supported by more specific legislative language addressing potentially significant loopholes that could result in loss of business for our operator members, we will not be able to support this language," the associations told APTA.

The associations submitted new language to APTA they said would address "these unintended loopholes and gain the support of our organizations."

Whether there will be further discussions involving APTA appears problematic. After the four associations sent their memo, APTA cancelled a negotiating session and indicated that a way needed to be found to inform Congress that an agreement between itself and ABA no longer existed.

The CBA considers the loopholes in the Senate bill to be so gapping that it says the proposed law will give public transit agencies carte blanc to provide charter service to virtually the entire non-profit sector in their communities, including churches, schools, governments and even local convention centers.

West Coast transportation industry consultant Jim Seal says the Senate language will permit public operators to provide free or less-than-cost service not only to schools and local governments but also to "social service entities with limited resources, whatever that means. Yale University could qual-

ify as having limited resources if fundraising is not up to par," Seal adds.

"In short, this statutory language is a dream come true for thousands of federally subsidized transit agencies across the country," says Waters. "Their sole motivation is to give their constituents free or highly subsidized charter service on instant demand in order to curry local support for more taxes for transit at the local, state and federal level."

Pantuso says the charter service provisions of the proposed law "must contain appropriate limitations" and "must not result in private operators losing current business." ABA and the other associations are now working to get rid of the damaging provisions.

Two other sections of the Senate legislation also are abhorrent to the coach industry.

On page 123 of the 200-page bill, public transit "recipients" — as transit agencies are referred to in federal legislative speak — are assigned a proactive role in brokering charter services in their communities. Yes, you read correctly. Your local transit agency would be able to broker charter service in your town if the Senate bill becomes law.

Here's the way the CBA interprets this section of the proposed law:

"In the 'Charter Bus Service' subsection ... public transit operators are inserted into the role of solicitation and brokering of all types of charter trips. Under (A)(iii) public (transit) operators are allowed by statute to receive continual daily requests for charter bus service and then direct those requests to private operators who have 72 hours to respond, otherwise the public operators perform the service."

"This language is identical to the concept proposed by SunLine Transit District (of Thousand Palms, Calif.) and forcefully and unequivocally rejected by the California Bus Association only a few months ago," says the CBA.

"What SunLine failed to accomplish locally is now being codified in federal statute. The result will be that thousands of daily charter trips across the country will now be solicited and eventually controlled by local transit agencies for the purpose of driving a wedge between our customers and charter bus companies. This is unacceptable."

"It took almost 8 years for SunLine's charter shop to be shut down by FTA under existing

statute and regulations. This section alone will open the floodgates for public agencies to interfere in our everyday charter operations for the sole purpose of gaining market access to the third-party market for charter bus services. This provision will create chaos in the local charter market because public transit operators will have a federal statutory incentive to become brokers and ultimately providers of charter service across the USA," according to CBA President Waters.

A whole other twist to the legislation is added by Steve Diaz, a Washington-based transportation attorney and small business advocate. He contends the assault on the charter rules was very carefully conceived and orchestrated, and Orwellian in its implications.

Section 3002 of the bill, says Diaz, changes certain definitions, particularly "mass transit," which becomes "public transit." At the same, private mass transportation companies are defined as private companies engaged in public transit.

"Such changes are not idle, they are there for a purpose," says Diaz. "I suggest that changes in definitions of the type we find in this draft are directed to long-term revisions in the concept of 'competition.' Public transit agencies are being redefined as 'companies,' which they clearly are not."

"And private transit companies are being redefined as private companies engaged in public transportation. This is an Orwellian spin by which private companies, which invented mass transportation in this country, are identified as interlopers in a public — that is, governmental — activity."

ABA, CBA, UMA, IMG and their allies will be pushing to get the House to adopt their revised language to close the loopholes in the Senate bill.

Among other things, the revised language says transit agencies would be able to provide incidental charter bus service in their service area only when a private bus company is not available to provide the service.

A transit agency also would not be able to initiate, solicit, design, configure, pool or otherwise broker or interfere with the scheduling or timing of third-party requests for charter bus service.

The only exceptions would be for social service organizations that are otherwise not able to access private charter bus service, and local government for purposes of transporting local government officials.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

David Brown becomes chairman of UMA; other officers picked

ATLANTA — David R. Brown, president of Holiday Tours Inc. in Randleman, N.C., became chairman of the United Motorcoach Association at the conclusion of Motorcoach Expo 2004.

Brown succeeds Rick Hillard of Tri-State Tours in Galena, Ill., who became chairman of UMA two years ago under a revamped officer-succession system. Hillard remains on UMA's board.

Other new officers of UMA are Brian Scott of Escot Lines in Largo, Fla., vice chairman, and Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Tours in Oklahoma City, treasurer.

Godfrey LeBron of Paradise Trailways in West Hempstead, N.Y., was re-elected secretary. Scott is now on track to become

chairman in two years.

A native of Greensboro, N.C., the 46-year-old Brown holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an MBA from Duke University in Durham, N.C.

After obtaining his MBA he went to work for Burlington Industries in Greensboro, remaining there four years before joining Holiday Tours, a company founded in the late 1970s by his mother, Nancy Thompson, and her husband, Dwight Thompson.

Holiday Tours was started as a tour operator and soon after became a motorcoach company. By the time Brown joined the company in 1984, it had been in business six years. Today, the

David R. Brown

company offers motorcoach charter services, as well as group tours.

Holiday Tours operates a total of 50 coaches and has the largest all-Prevost fleet in the U.S.

Mitch Guralnick, a member of UMA's board for the past 10 years, was honored for his service to the association at the gala banquet Monday night. Guralnick has headed the board committee responsible for Motorcoach Expo every year. He is a sales manager for MCI.

Expo (see related story on page 12), was decorated with a composite rendering of Petty's famous No. 43 stock car.

Besides the new CL 300, the Setra/DaimlerChrysler stand featured two Setra S417 luxury coaches and a Sprinter Shuttle.

For the exhibit hall opening Sunday night and Monday, the S417s appeared with standard Setra promotional graphics. But overnight Monday, the graphics for both coaches were completely changed.

Staff members from Turbo Images of Saint Georges, Quebec, stripped off the Setra graphics and replacement them with the livery of the coaches' buyers, Arrow Stage Lines in Omaha, Neb., and Thrasher Bros. Trailways in Birmingham, Ala.

Vista Motorcoach

Vista Motorcoach of Colleyville, Tenn., brought its Vista Cruiser luxury limousine bus to Motorcoach Expo for the first time.

The coach seats from 16 to 20 passengers in group or individual seating arrangements. Built on a Freightliner chassis and powered by a rear-mounted 330-horsepower Caterpillar engine, the Vista Cruiser has a variety of applications, ranging from luxury touring, to executive shuttle, to mobile conference center.

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Manufacturers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

select late-model MCI coaches. MCI says it will certify only those coaches, 2000 models or newer, that are found to be in excellent condition, have an extended powertrain warranty, and pass a rigorous 100-point inspection.

Each certified coach will roll off the lot with a factory-authorized limited warranty, with the first 60-days covered similar to a new coach. The Certified Pre-Owned units also qualify for MCI Emergency Roadside Assistance and MCI financing. Qualifying coaches include E4500s/102EL3s, D4500s/102DL3s, J4500s and G4500s.

"We know there's a demand for top-of-the-line MCI pre-owned coaches," said Scott Baer, MCI manager of pre-owned coach sales.

MCI also announced at Expo that it had added three more independent service centers to its list of authorized MCI service providers. The three new facilities are W.W. Williams, with locations in Detroit and Atlanta, and Alban Engine Power Systems of Elkhorn, Md.

The three service providers will offer maintenance, troubleshooting and warranty service, plus stock MCI OEM parts.

Prevost Car

Prevost brought the largest fleet of new coaches to the floor of Expo.

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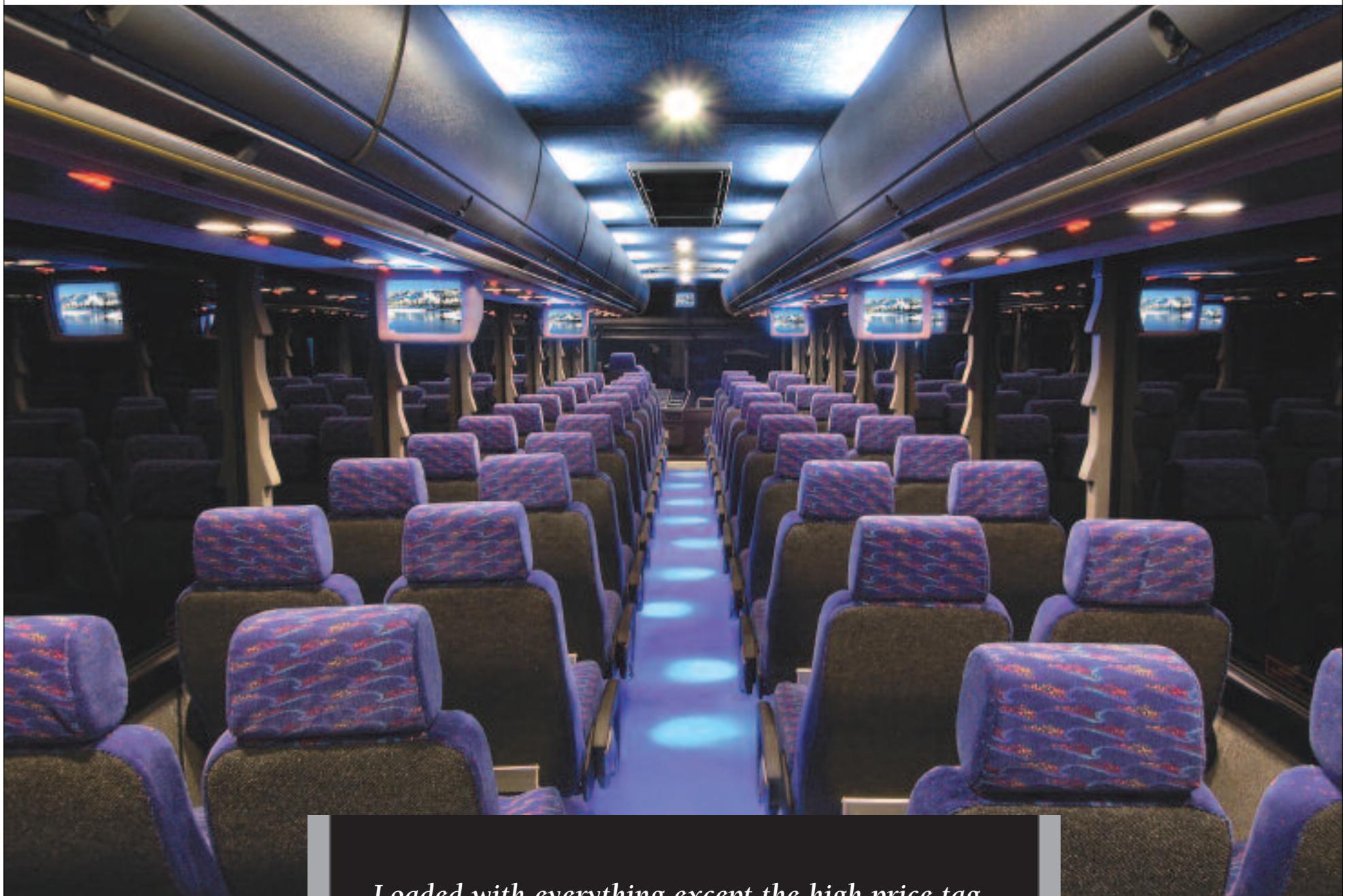
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