

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Crash test reviewed, methodology is questioned

WASHINGTON D.C. — Motorcoach passengers using lap and shoulder restraints are likely to fair better in a head-on collision than those who are either unrestrained or using only lap belts, preliminary results of a government crash test indicate.

The test, performed in December for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, revealed that while crash dummies equipped with three-point restraints showed signs of some low head-and-neck impact, the other test dummies on the bus recorded much higher impacts to the head and other parts of their bodies.

"The results are not surprising," noted Ron Medford, the agency's senior associate for vehicle safety. "We've known for some time that the best protection is from three-

point restraints."

He said other crash tests with automobiles and school buses have produced similar results.

The December crash test was the first ever done by the federal government using a motorcoach and the first of several the agency plans to conduct to study passenger restraints, roof strength, window glazing, and fires on full-size motorcoaches.

Industry onboard

The motorcoach industry has advocated for years that the federal government conduct crash and other tests with coaches before proposing any type of safety mandates for new coaches such as passenger restraints and structural modifications.

Engineers working at a facility in Ohio used a 45-foot, 54-seat 2000

MCI E-model motorcoach loaded with 22 dummies for the test, which involved crashing head-on into a barrier at 30 miles an hour.

The dummies used in the test were designed and weighted to represent both male and female passengers and were placed in various locations throughout the bus. Some were equipped with three-point restraints while others wore only lap belts or were unrestrained. All of them were wired to electronic testing equipment so researchers could evaluate their movements during the crash and the location and extent of any impact to their bodies.

According to early test readings, unbelted dummies typically made head contact with the seatback in front of them in less than a second and either ended up in the row in front of them or in the aisle.



This MCI coach was crashed head-on into a barrier wall at 30 mph.

Some of the seats in front of unbelted dummies broke or bent from the impact of the dummies seated behind them.

While all of the belted dummies remained in their seats, those wearing lap belts still recorded high

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'Bolt' is Coming

Greyhound, Peter Pan to launch new service

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. — Peter Pan Bus Lines and Greyhound Lines are setting up a joint operation to compete with the ethnic bus lines operating in the heavily traveled northeastern U.S.

The reduced-fare, curbside service will be called Bolt.

Although neither company would provide details about the new operation, a Greyhound spokesman acknowledged that the carriers have gotten together to

develop the service.

"We have formed an affiliation with Peter Pan and we are developing a customer-focused service that will target a specific consumer segment," said spokesman Dustin Clark.

He declined to elaborate on his statement and would not answer any questions.

Peter Pan President Peter A. Picknelly said the companies had agreed that any public statements

about the affiliation would come from Greyhound and he referred questions to Greyhound.

The joint venture primarily will compete with the cut-rate Chinese-American owned operations, such as Fung Wah, that serve the Boston-New York City-Washington corridor.

However, the service also is being seen as a preemptive strike to keep megabus.com from

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Feds promise more bus inspection strike forces

WASHINGTON D.C. — Encouraged by the success of one of the largest motorcoach inspection operations ever, federal safety regulators are gearing up for more roadside strike force activity this year.

Although no one will say when and where the Federal Motorcoach Carrier Safety Administration will send its motorcoach strike force next, the results of the most-recent operation, conducted in late November, make further surprise inspections of over-the-road buses a certainty.

"We recognize them as an effective and valuable enforcement tool and plan to utilize them in the future," said agency spokesman Duane DeBruyne.

There have been reports the strike force could hit again this month or next.

The value of the strike forces that FMCSA Administrator John Hill promised early last year

showed up in the results of the late fall operation, a two-week assault that targeted motorcoaches from Maine to Virginia and involved inspectors from the FMCSA and 22 state and local police departments.

Working together, they conducted more than 1,200 inspections in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia.

The crackdown resulted in 101 coaches and 50 drivers being ordered off the road for serious safety violations.

Total violations resulting from the mixture of full inspections, to walk-arounds, totaled 1,306 and included 1,018 issued for the coaches and 288 for the drivers. The total was higher than the number of coaches that were inspected because numerous buses and driv-

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Dropping off at an airport? Better know the rules first

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Here's a little piece of free advice that could save you hundreds of dollars:

If you're a small operator that makes infrequent trips to commercial airports, make sure you check with security officials before dropping off passengers at any airport you have not visited in recent weeks or months.

That's because the airport may have adopted new or revised security regulations that include stiff fines for not having an airport entry permit or transponder.

And the new rules may not have been publicized.

Sacramento International Airport is a prime example.

Two years ago, the Sacramento County Airport System adopted more than 30 pages of ground transportation rules and regulations for Sacramento International Airport.

The rules require commercial bus operators dropping off passengers at the airport to have a permit and transponder.

First offense tickets are \$500 and airport security officers do not issue warnings. No permit or transponder: Instant \$500 citation.

There are no signs approaching the airport warning operators of the requirements, and apparently the airport did not send out notices either to bus operators in the region or to the California Bus Association.

Ronald Gonsalves of American Stage Tours in Concord, Calif., thinks it is high time the motorcoach industry get serious about advocating for a uniform entry system for buses and other passenger carriers using American airports.

"I have raised this point before, but I think it is time to revisit it," Gonsalves told *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

"What can we do as an industry to have one approval process, one permit and one transponder for any U.S. airport? The approval process could be very similar to being approved as a military carrier.

"Our company currently spends hundreds of dollars per coach for each airport permit, including running as many as 90 useless miles per coach per year to go to the airport for the annual permit inspection.

"I have spoken to several operators and all of them feel this is over due," said Gonsalves.

The problem is particularly irksome to Gonsalves because there are four major airports in his region, each with its own rules, regulations and requirements. Two of the airports, San Francisco and Oakland, charge hundreds of dollars for permits.

For a small operator like Gonsalves, who only goes to Sacramento International Airport a few

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Operators contemplate lawsuit

FRESNO, Calif. — A group of operators is working to organize a class-action lawsuit against a slimy bus broker that reportedly has stiffed a number of bus companies and customers.

The target of the lawsuit would be an Alta Loma, Calif.-based outfit that has operated under several names, including We Give You Ride, My Best Ride and Tifa Xpress.

One operator reported contracting with We Give You Ride to provide coach services from Florida to Tennessee.

Prior to the trip, the operator

received a check for payment.

"Two days after returning from the trip, we learned (We Give You Ride) had placed a 'stop order' on the check. Numerous attempts have been made to collect our money... They admit they owe us money and promise to pay. It has been over six months since the trip and we have yet to receive any payment."

A church reported that We Give You Ride failed to provide buses for a youth trip to Six Flags and then refused to refund the church's \$2,400.

BusRates.com said it has had

more than a dozen complaints from operators and others that have gone unpaid or have not had their buses show up after contracting with My Best Ride and Tifa Xpress.

Among those pushing the lawsuit is Leslie Raddatz of Cloud 8 Travel in Clovis, Calif., a suburb of Fresno.

Operators possibly interested in participating in a suit should contact attorney David C. Beyersdorf of the law firm of Lee & Beyersdorf in Fresno. E-mail DavidB@LeeandBeyersdorf.com, or call

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El Camino Trailways acquires Aztec Transportation in Nevada

SAN FRANCISCO — El Camino Trailways has acquired Carson City, Nev.-based Aztec Transportation, expanding El Camino into northwest Nevada, including Reno, Sparks and Lake Tahoe, and nearly doubling the size of the company.

"With the addition of the Aztec fleet, El Camino Trailways now operates one of the largest charter bus and shuttle services fleets in Northern California and Nevada," said Mike Watson, managing director of El Camino Trailways.

As part of the deal, El Camino acquired 17 motorcoaches that had been owned by Aztec, plus another 8 managed vehicles. El Camino's fleet prior to the purchase totaled 20 motorcoaches.

During the past decade, Aztec Transportation has been one of the fastest growing charter bus operators in Nevada. The company's

growth has been fueled, in part, by contracts with Kirkwood Mountain Resort, NorthStar at Tahoe ski resort, and Sierra-at-Tahoe Resort, plus guest and employee shuttle services.

The company also operates trolley and dial-a-ride services for the town of Truckee, Calif.

"This exciting acquisition gives us competitive advantages by adding new bases in Lake Tahoe and Nevada, positioning us to serve our customers from San Francisco/San Jose to Tahoe/Truckee and anywhere in between," said Watson.

"We are delighted to join forces with El Camino Trailways, a leader in the charter bus industry in California with its aggressive growth, progressive and visionary consumer-oriented Internet/Web-based marketing, and strength and quality of its management team," said Tom

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THE DOCKET

DOT budget reduces highway funding, transit money moved

WASHINGTON — President Bush's proposed budget for the U.S. Transportation Department is coming under heavy criticism from a variety of sources.

Although spending at the US-DOT would increase slightly, highway spending is cut by more than \$2 billion from the current year.

And it proposes to borrow money from mass transit to cover a shortfall in the Highway Trust Fund.

Predictably, the proposal brought criticism from Democrats in Congress, as well as from representatives of highway users and trucking.

The administration proposed an overall USDOT budget of \$68.2 billion for fiscal '09, up from the \$67 billion it proposed for this year, but it would give the Federal Highway Administration \$40.1 billion, a cut of \$2.04 billion from 2008 and \$1 billion less than Congress authorized in the 2005 transportation law.

Most of the funding cut is in money dedicated to federal-aid highways — reduced by \$1.8 billion to \$39.4 billion from \$41.2 billion last year.

"This budget helps move us forward on a new course that delivers high levels of safety, takes advantage of modern technology and financing mechanisms and eases congestion with efficient and reliable transportation systems," DOT Secretary Mary Peters said.

Rep. James Oberstar, D-Minn., chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said Bush "stayed well inside his ideological comfort zone (with his budget). We got the same old stale proposals, the same neglect of our nation's infrastructure needs."

John Horsley, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, said, "This proposal clearly leaves highway funding short of the FY 2009 level states had been promised."

"There's a \$1.8 billion hole the administration has created in their budget, and we would hope that when Congress acts, they will find a way to fill it," said Darrin Roth, director of highway operations for the American Trucking Association. "It doesn't make a lot of sense to cut something that creates jobs and puts money into the economy. That would be counterpro-

ductive."

"The administration is going exactly the wrong way by cutting critical highway funding that keeps people and our economy moving," said Greg Cohen, president of the American Highway Users Alliance.

Despite the highway-spending cuts, Peters told reporters "the president's budget honors the commitments" of the 2005 transportation reauthorization act, which called for a total of \$286.4 billion to be spent over six years, up to September 2009.

Phyllis Scheinberg, the department's chief financial officer, said the 2009 budget "brings the total [investment] up to" \$286.4 billion in spending on highways, transit and safety programs.

The 2008 budget Congress passed last year for the DOT spent more than the 2005 bill had called for, in part because of a mechanism that allows the program to grow if trust-fund revenues rise in subsequent years, which has happened.

The budget, Peters said, "reflects a \$3.2 billion shortfall in the highway account" of the trust fund, but a \$4.4 billion positive balance in the mass-transit account.

Because of the highway shortfall, "the president is requesting temporary authority to allow 'repayable advances' between the two accounts," she said.

The differences in the projections, Peters said, are "the basis for the advances," with the hopes the loans would "keep [the highway] fund solvent."

However, Peters cited the fund's problems to once again push for changes in the federal transportation program.

In addition to funding the nation's highway program, the DOT budget also requests \$541 million for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration — an \$11 million boost from last year. The budget proposes dividing the funds into two categories — \$230 million for federal motor carrier safety programs and \$300 million for grants to states.

The budget also provides \$851 million for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

To view highlights of the proposed USDOT budget, go to www.dot.gov/bib2009.

Inspection unit in Miss. county gets reassigned

GULFPORT, Miss. — A road-side inspection unit of the type bus and truck operators love to hate has been disbanded.

In this case, the unit was a commercial vehicle inspection team composed of county mounties, operating along Interstate 10 in south Mississippi.

New Sheriff Melvin Brisolaro of Harrison County disbanded the motor-carrier enforcement unit and moved the five deputies who had been conducting commercial vehicle inspections to his patrol division.

By doing away with the inspection unit, Brisolaro was making good on a campaign promise that was shared by nearly all his nine opponents.

"I've put those officers in the field to better protect our rural areas," Brisolaro said. "Patrol had a shortage but now we're averaging 14 patrol officers a shift. The positions were already in the budget but were vacant."

Harrison County became part of a pilot project in 2000 to use deputy sheriffs to enforce federal motor-carrier laws. A former sheriff launched the project with grants from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. The sheriff's department received more than \$800,000 for equipment and salaries.

In the project's first 18 months, Harrison County deputies were cited for removing nearly three times more unsafe commercial drivers from the highway than the national average.

Opposition to the team, however, was so strong that most of the 10 candidates for sheriff and the five who vied in the general election pledged to disband the unit if elected.

They agreed that deputies need to patrol county roads instead of devoting time to pulling over commercial vehicles for inspections for federal motor-carrier standards.

The motor-carrier team made its share of high-profile drug arrests, however, including the seizure in 2004 of 38 pounds of cocaine found in a suitcase on a charter bus traveling from Houston to Atlanta.

Coach security program has less money for 2008

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has announced it will award \$11.1 million in over-the-road bus security grants in fiscal 2008, a reduction of one-half million dollars from fiscal 2007.

The deadline for coach operators to apply for the money is noon March 17.

The money, which has been awarded annually since fiscal 2003, is to help operators pay to beef up passenger, bus and facilities security. This year's amount is consistent with what has been awarded in recent years.

And, in keeping with what has become tradition, the Department of Homeland Security has again changed the program parameters. For fiscal '08, there is a:

- Cost-sharing/match requirement of at least 25 percent for submitted projects.
- Requirement that those applying for a grant must have both a security plan and a vulnerability assessment that has been submitted to DHS.

The '08 Intercity Bus Security Grant Program is weighted in favor of the industry's largest coach operators but far less so than last year.

This year, 55 percent of the money will go to operators having 250 or more over-the-road buses, versus 70 percent last year.

Because the security grant program has two "tiers" — one for the largest operators and the other for everyone else, smaller operators

do not have to "compete" directly with the big guys for money.

Here's the dollar breakdown for fiscal '08:

- Tier I: \$6.1 million for operators that have 250 or more over-the-road buses.
- Tier II: \$5 million for operators that own 249 or fewer over-the-road buses.

There are eight operators in the U.S. with 250 or more motorcoaches that are eligible to compete for the \$6.1 million, while the remaining 3,000+ U.S. operators with 249 or fewer coaches will compete for the \$5 million share.

There is no minimum number of motorcoaches necessary for an operator to apply, but those seeking the money must provide at least 50 trips annually into areas the Department of Homeland Security has determined to be most at risk of a terrorist attack.

All Intercity Bus Security Grant requests must be completed and submitted online. Apply at www.grants.gov. Click on *Find Grant Opportunities*, click on *Basic Search*, go to the *Search by CFDA Number* box, enter 97.057, click on *Search*. The CFDA number (97.057) is bureaucratize for *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* number.

The grants will be announced in June.

The Department of Homeland Security has a set of "tools" for completing a security plan and threat assessment. Find them at www.tsa.gov/join/grants/ibsgp.shtm.

More states join UCRA plan

WASHINGTON — Seven more states have joined the new Unified Carrier Registration Agreement, the program that replaced the Single State Registration System.

In addition to the states that participated when the UCRA was launched last year, Alaska, California, Delaware, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania will be in the program this year.

The first thing a coach operator needs to do in registering for UCRA is to pick a base state. Commonly, that is the state where the operator's headquarters is located, but if that state is not par-

ticipating in UCRA, another state must be chosen.

In 2007, the first year of the program, a number of states that planned to participate in UCRA were not ready, and their carriers had to base — temporarily — somewhere else.

This year, more states are participating and registration will begin earlier, this month or next, in many states. Operators will be notified by their states.

Fees imposed under the new Unified Carrier Registration Agreement will be the same this year as in 2007 (see Feb. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*).

S.C. orders Clemson Transit to halt charter service

COLUMBIA, S.C. — The South Carolina Department of Transportation has ordered Clemson (S.C.) Area Transit to stop providing charter bus service while it investigates two separate complaints filed by the United Motorcoach Association.

UMA contends Clemson Area Transit has been routinely providing charter service in violation of federal charter service regulations.

The association, working with South Carolina operators and the Motorcoach Association of South

Carolina, filed complaints about Clemson Area Transit with the Federal Transit Administration last year and again early this year.

Operators reported numerous examples of the transit agency providing charter service at cut-rate prices.

In one instance, Atchison Transportation Services of Spartanburg, S.C., lost a charter last year, involving seven buses, when a sorority discovered that Clemson Area Transit would handle its charter at a lower price.

The South Carolina DOT got involved because federal transit funds are funneled to Clemson Area Transit through the state agency's Division of Mass Transit.

In a letter, Division Director Glennith C. Johnson told Clemson Area Transit executive director Al Babinicz to cease and desist from any bus service that could be considered charter in nature until her unit completes an investigation.

She also ordered Babinicz to submit documentation and information about possible charters to

her agency.

"Private operators have complained for years that Clemson Area Transit was taking their business," said Ken Presley, vice president of industry relations at UMA.

"We are happy that Atchison Transportation was able to provide such clear examples that allowed the (FTA) regional counsel and South Carolina Department of Transportation to take decisive action.

"The best part of this cease and desist is the operator regained the

business, and that is what we are here for, and when it comes to transits, that is what UMA is all about — seeing the business return to the private sector where it rightfully and legally belongs," Presley added.

As a result of UMA's most recent complaint and quick action by the FTA and South Carolina DOT, Clemson Area Transit cancelled a charter that originally had been booked with Atchison Transportation. Atchison was able to get the business back.

National Park Service upgrades Cherry Blossom Festival

WASHINGTON — The National Park Service has announced a series of new and enhanced visitor services for the 2008 National Cherry Blossom Festival.

The festival begins Saturday, March 31 and runs through Sunday, April 15, in Washington.

A key logistical and informational focal point for the event will be the Cherry Blossom Festival Welcome Station on the Washington Monument grounds along Independence Avenue, SW. It will be staffed daily by park rangers, as well as festival staff and volunteers,

to answer questions, distribute festival guides and brochures, and assist visitors.

There also will be gift, book and food sales at the Cherry Blossom Welcome Station, as well as information displays about the festival, the National Park Service and festival partners.

New and upgraded visitor services this year include:

- Ranger-led visitor programs. These include Cherry Blossom Walks, conducted six times daily along the edge of the Tidal Basin at regularly scheduled

times; Lantern Walks, similar to the Cherry Blossom Walks but held in the early evening hours, and Bloomin' Junior Rangers for visitors ages 7 to 11. The three programs originate or take place at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial.

- Food. The Park Service food concessionaire will provide sandwiches, snacks, roasted nuts, ice cream and beverages from kiosks and portable carts.

- First Aid. A fully-equipped first-aid tent will be erected next to the Tidal Basin at the Thomas

Jefferson Memorial.

- Portable restrooms. Portable restrooms will be positioned throughout the Tidal Basin, the Washington Monument grounds and along Ohio Drive, S.W.

- Visitor Access. Southside access to the Lincoln Memorial reopens to tour buses, beginning Saturday, March 31.

The Park Service has completed reconstruction of 23rd Street, S.W. and Daniel French Drive, providing bus pick-up and drop-off space.

This area is in addition to tour

bus pick-up and drop-off locations also serving the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the north side of the Lincoln Memorial along Henry Bacon Drive.

- Web cam. For the first time, the Park Service will provide a live Web cam feed that will offer continuous images of the cherry blossoms on the Tidal Basin during the festival. For access, go to www.nps.gov/cherry and click on the Web came icon on the right side of the page. The Web address is: www.nps.gov/nama/planyourvisit/cherry-blossom-web-cam.htm.

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Crash test

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head impacts and those using combined lap and shoulder harnesses scored lower head loads. All of the dummies registered signs of some chest and leg loads from striking the seatback in front of them.

The seat attachments on the coach remained intact in the crash, although there were two notable failures — one on a seat frame that was not designed for safety belts and another on a single ring connected to a safety belt.

'Not realistic'

Several motorcoach manufacturers and industry organizations, including the United Motorcoach Association, expressed concern

about the manner in which the test was conducted. They said that crashing the full body height and width of the bus into a rigid barrier at 30 miles an hour was not realistic and suggested that the test would be more life-like if the speed of the coach were held to 20 miles an hour.

"This approach does not replicate the realistic scenarios faced by motorcoach operations," they said in a joint letter to the NHTSA. "As the agency is aware, European testing of larger motorcoaches is conducted with a 20 MPH crash speed, a speed which we believe better reflects real-world experiences."

Medford said engineers opted for the 30-mile-an-hour test because it is easier to scale down the

speed on sled tests that will be conducted to simulate similar accidents at lower speeds. "With the data we obtained from the actual test, we will be able to simulate a crash at 20 miles an hour," he stressed.

While the test results are preliminary, Medford said the final results due out later are not expected to show anything different. They will, however, provide much more detail and include the actual video of the crash test.

The report, complete with pictures of the crash bus and the dummies, can be viewed on the Internet at www.regulations.gov. Under the heading *More Search Options* on the right side of the screen, click on *Advanced Docket Searches*. Put *National Highway Traffic Safety*

Administration in the *Agency* box and *NHTSA-2007-28793* in the *Docket ID* box. Then, click on *Submit* and when the next page appears, click on the highlighted docket number.

Meantime, the NHTSA is preparing for additional motorcoach tests, including roof crush and roll-over tests that are scheduled for late this month at a facility in Wisconsin.

The agency plans to use four early 1990s MCI and Prevost coaches for those tests. All four buses will be modified to give engineers additional data for research and comparison purposes.

Medford said the agency also is working with the National Institute for Standards and Technology to finalize some fire tests that will be done soon.

Bolt

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expanding into the Northeast, which has been an item of speculation since megabus began operating in the Midwest in April 2006.

With the exception of using Boston's South Station Bus Center, all other stops will be on street corners like the Chinatown operators.

A fleet of new Prevost X3-45 coaches has been ordered to operate the service (see Feb. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*) and 50-plus drivers are being hired through monster.com to staff the company.

Although both Peter Pan and Greyhound reportedly have indicated the new operation will be a union shop, that must be decided by an employee vote once the new operation begins.

Industry sources said Bolt will have its own maintenance facility in Secaucus, N.J.

It is unclear whether Bolt drivers will collect fares, like Fung Wah, or bookings will be purchased online, via the Internet, a la megabus.com.

For nearly a decade, Greyhound and Peter Pan have had a pooling arrangement for their conventional line-run services in the Northeast.

Strike force

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ers were issued multiple violations.

Not surprisingly, the top out-of-service violations for the coaches were brakes that were defective or out of adjustment, followed by general maintenance issues, steering system troubles and defective emergency exits.

Drivers who were ordered out of service were cited most for log-book violations, either for not having their seven-day reports up to

date, not having any reports or having false reports.

Other high-number violations that forced drivers off the road were for driving without a commercial driver's license and not being able to speak or communicate in English.

The inspectors also clocked the speed of motorcoaches as part of the operation and 20 drivers were ticketed for speeding.

The strike force operation was part of a general plan Hill put together to put more emphasize on

passenger safety and compliance reviews. The plan includes a commitment to conduct a compliance review on every unrated passenger carrier and a measure requiring states to submit a motorcoach inspection program as part of their annual commercial vehicle safety plan.

Several months before conducting the strike force operation in the busy Eastern corridor, the FMCSA and state and local police worked two dozen similar operations in the south, covering states from Texas to North Carolina. More than 700

motorcoaches were inspected in those operations.

Additionally, federal, state and local authorities routinely conduct inspections along the U.S. boarders and at popular destination spots, including national parks, casinos, resorts and amusement parks.

Nationwide, the number of safety inspections and compliance reviews in the past year have more than doubled, and many new entry audits are being done on an average of 4.5 months, much sooner than the required 18 months.

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Low-cost bus lines are shaking up inter-city travel

By Robert Poole
Director of Transportation
Studies
Reason Foundation

One of the justifications offered for U.S. taxpayers to subsidize Amtrak is the idea that lower-income people (students, immigrants, the retired, etc.) need an affordable alternative to using the airlines for inter-city travel.

That has always rung hollow with me, since we've had nationwide Greyhound bus service since long before Amtrak. But Greyhound has been losing money for a number of years, and its annual passenger count has been declining since 2000 — in part due to the growth of low-cost airlines.

But this decade has witnessed a proliferation of new inter-city bus companies. So far, none is of national scope, but their niche markets are growing. And they seem to be following in the footsteps of low-cost air carriers, by thinking outside the box to cut costs dramatically.

The largest such company is megabus.com, a subsidiary of the U.K.'s Stagecoach Group PLC, which cut its teeth in Britain's deregulated bus market.

Megabus offers a few seats on every bus for a \$1 fare, and uses pricing similar to that of the airlines, with low fares if purchased well in advance, and higher fares near the departure date (www.megabus.com).

All booking is done online, minimizing staff costs, and the company has no stations, picking up customers at known curbside locations. Thus far, the company is offering inter-city service in 10

states, 3 in the West and 7 in the Midwest. There are 23 cities in the network, but so far you can only travel within — not between — the regions.

In the northeast, several companies offer bus service between Chinatowns in various cities. The largest of these seems to be Chinatown Bus (Chinatown-bus.com), connecting Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington.

Fares vary, with "typical" one-way fares ranging from \$12 New York-Philadelphia to \$20 New

York-D.C. Another bus company, Vamoose, offers express service between Manhattan and two D.C. suburbs — Bethesda, Md. and Arlington, Va. for \$25.

Private companies are even moving into urban markets.

Spanish Transportation Corp. of Paterson, N.J. now runs 130 commuter buses into Manhattan each day, on three different routes. The company has grown from a van service with 14 vans in 1993 to a sizeable enterprise today. The buses are branded Express Service.

And Las Vegas now boasts a new door-to-door service among hotels and casinos on the Strip — at just \$2.50 per ride. Called Arrow, it is offered by Vegas.com, a travel and booking company. Also offered is a \$10 daily pass offering unlimited use of Arrow and the private Las Vegas monorail.

Arrow competes with the regional transportation authority's double-decker Deuce buses.

I'm encouraged to see these entrepreneurial ventures, starting up and growing despite taxpayer-

subsidized competition.

As with low-cost airlines that sprang up after deregulation, their very existence debunks the idea that airlines or intercity surface transportation or local transit is some kind of natural monopoly that must be controlled by the government.

Consumers generally win when competition can flourish, and these examples show that competition still exists in these areas.

The Reason Foundation is a Los Angeles-based think tank.

Crunch is approaching over compliance with Real ID

WASHINGTON — Dozens of states are facing a deadline of the middle of this month to decide whether they can or want to comply with the controversial federal Real ID Act.

Congress hurriedly, and without hearings, passed the Real ID Act in 2005 as part of the post-9/11 federal security push. Broadly stated, the act sets out requirements for states in issuing driver's licenses, including CDLs.

Drivers holding licenses that do not meet Real ID standards will eventually not be able to use them to prove their identity for certain "official federal purposes" — such as boarding a commercial airline flight or gaining access to at least some federal facilities, including possibly airports and ports.

Other documents, such as passports, may serve for some of those purposes but the driver's license is, of course, the identity document most often used in this country.

Complying with the rules adopted by the Department of Homeland Security in January to implement the act will be enormously expensive for states, which will have to reissue all existing licenses and use several complex security systems that have not yet been built. More than a third of the

states have so far passed legislation or made official statements to the effect that they will not comply with Real ID.

Citizens of these states may be in a pickle since the deadline for states for complying with Real ID requirements is May 11.

The Department of Homeland

Security will extend this deadline for at least three years for any state that asks, but a state must ask by the middle of this month. DHS says it won't budge on that.

What remains to be seen is whether states will ignore the DHS deadline. And what, if anything, Congress will do.

IRS steps up small business audits

WASHINGTON — It's tax season and, for the paranoid, it's time to fret about an IRS audit.

Well, the good folks at the Internal Revenue Service have released some numbers that quantify the agency's audit program and provision of taxpayer assistance services.

Audits of businesses in general, including Subchapter S (closely held) corporations, were up nearly 14 percent.

Audits of just S corporations increased to 17,681, up 26 percent

from the fiscal '06 total of 13,984.

Audits of partnerships increased to 12,195 during 2007, up almost 25 percent from the prior year's total of 9,777.

Audits were up last year, increasing by 84 percent among individuals with more than \$1 million in income, and by 7 percent overall for individual income tax payers.

A total of 31,382 audits were performed in fiscal '07 of individuals with income of more than \$1 million.

The increase in audits produced more money for Uncle Sam, with total audit and other enforcement revenue climbing to more than \$59 billion, from under \$49 billion in 2006.

The service also reports that 57 percent of taxpayers filed electronically last year, and there were 217 million hits on the IRS Website in 2007, up more than 10 percent from 2006.

For more information, or to try the Website, go to www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=177701,00.html.

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ISSUE NO. 118

Tires/wheels: Leasing vs. buying, aluminum vs. steel

By Dave Millhouser
ABC Companies

It was the middle of the night and the bus was handling funny, so Don decided to stop and thump his tires. Things went OK until he swatted for the drive axle's left outer... nothing. It had disappeared into the night, a shiny radial that was part of a brand new set.

You can imagine the abuse he took when he got home: name tags glued to his other tires, milk cartons with photos of wheels. You really do need ALL those lug nuts.

Back then, most coach tires were mounted on stud-centered steel wheels, and there were only two sizes. Today you have choices, both in tires and wheels.

Tire size, tread pattern and brands are a complex topic (another way of saying I'm not smart enough to figure all of that out).

Another big decision is whether to own tires or rent them.

Coach builders currently offer buyers the option of supplying your own tires, and many operators choose rentals. When tires are part of your coach purchase, you end up financing them for the life of the

bus loan, generally substantially longer than the life of the tires.

Rentals are paid for by the mile, so cash is not tied up in expensive rubber. Even better, the only time tires cost you is when they're rolling.

You can choose from a variety of plans with several manufacturers. The cost per mile is determined by your willingness to use re-caps, where appropriate, and by how quickly you grind off tread. The tire leasing company rewards you for taking good care of its tires.

The downside is that you have fewer choices. If your preferred brand doesn't have a lease program, or you need special tread patterns, you'll need to own your tires.

When you buy a bus, it's important to know if tires are included in the deal.

About wheels

For many years almost every coach used "stud-centered" wheels. Similar to automotive wheels, the convex lug nuts fit into concave holes in the wheel. If installed correctly they both position the wheel and bear the weight.

They offer a couple of oppor-

tunities for mischief. On a dual tire, there is an inner and an outer nut. It's VERY difficult to tell when the inner is loose, and if these jewels shear, you lose the whole dual.

A loose nut doesn't help bear weight so the others work harder (until they fail). It was a stud-centered wheel that abandoned Don.

Incorrectly installed lugs leave the wheel poorly centered and the concave holes are eventually beaten out of round. There also is a danger of the wheel cracking between the studs.

Hub-centered wheels have grown in popularity. Coach builders like them because they bear more weight, which is supported by the hub. Lug nuts only serve to keep them firmly on the hub and a single nut clamps both wheels on a dual. Nothing sneaky here.

A well-intentioned bus salesman (THIS time I'm innocent) once became so convinced of the benefits of hub centered, that he spec'd them on every new bus.

This created a nightmare for unsuspecting customers who weren't equipped to administer

two types of wheels on similar bus models. The two don't mix, and installing a wheel on an incompatible hub is an invitation to star on the evening news.

Playing dress-up

Many operators feel aluminum wheels dress up a coach, and may offer additional benefits. They are lighter and tend to carry heat away more efficiently than steel. It's hard to measure but ride quality may be better, too, with improved brake and tire life, and they seem to have fewer balance problems.

Aluminum wheels are now available with coatings that both keep them shiny and help prevent corrosion. Some operators feel that modern aluminum wheels require less maintenance than steel because you don't have to sand-blast or paint them.

The down side is that they are substantially more expensive than steel wheels. Mixing them in a fleet can create problems because they use different length studs. Mating aluminum with a steel inner (on a dual) can cause breakage or corrosion (dissimilar metals) unless a separator plate is installed between

them. You can save the expense of two aluminum wheels but which do you carry for a spare?

There's probably no definitive

answer as to whether aluminum wheels pay for themselves in a purely economic sense, but clearly many operators feel the added curb appeal is worth a great deal.

The wheel and tire universe has grown complicated, with opportunities for both benefits and nastiness. You want to be sure your maintenance folks are on board with what you are doing in terms of tires and wheels, with sizes and styles matched up in a safe way.

We never found Don's tire, and perhaps that's for the best. I wouldn't have wanted to meet a guy that had discovered it rolling at him along the highway.

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



Dave Millhouser

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Martz, Fullington mark 100 years

Two of Pennsylvania's best-known motorcoach operators, the Martz Group of Wilkes-Barre and Fullington Trailways of Clearfield, are marking 100-year anniversaries.

Martz was founded in Plymouth, Pa., in 1908 by Frank Martz, to transport miners. Today, the company is a multi-state, multi-division enterprise, operating along the entire East Coast.

The business is in its third and fourth generations of family leadership, with Chairman Frank M. Henry celebrating 44 years at the helm this year. Son Scott Henry represents the fourth generation.

The company employs about 400 people and operates more than 270 motorcoaches.

In 1908, Emerson Fullington purchased a nine-passenger, horse-drawn serry to transport residents to the local train station, founding Fullington Auto Bus Company.

With 450 employees and a fleet of 50 motorcoaches, 250 school buses and 10 limousines, the company is still run today by the Fullington family.

Emerson Fullington's great-granddaughter, Aerial Fullington



Weisman, is president and CEO, and Michael L. Fullington, Emerson's great-grandson, is vice president and chief operating officer.

Martz was a founding member of the Trailways Transportation System, while Fullington was an early member of Trailways.

Martz is marking its anniversary by committing to operating a younger and more modern fleet than ever. It has reduced the average age of its fleet to five years. And this year it is adding 30 new MCI coaches.

The livery of the 15 new MCI J4500s and 15 MCI D4505 coaches includes a special Martz anniversary logo.

"As we celebrate our past and

the rich history of our organization, we are looking forward to the future by introducing the latest models and features that MCI has to offer, including more passenger amenities and technological advances," said Craig Smith, CEO of Martz.

"We're proud to walk side by side down the road of transportation history with Martz," said Tom Sorrells, president and CEO of MCI, which is marking its own 75th anniversary this year.

Throughout this year, Fullington will feature special anniversary tours, celebrations, prizes and gifts, said Lory Fullington, vice president of charter, tour and school bus services.

Arthur Lewis, former head of ABA, dies

SILVER SPRING, Md. — Arthur D. Lewis, one of this nation's most accomplished transportation executives, who headed the American Bus Association in the late 1970s and early 1980s, died in January but his death was not

reported publicly until last month. He was 89.

During a long career, Mr. Lewis worked in the airline and bus industries, but most significantly he led the formation of Conrail, which consolidated many of the nation's

freight railroads. At the time, it was the largest corporate reorganization in American history.

Mr. Lewis was considered an expert in salvaging bankrupt and troubled companies.

In 1974, President Richard M. Nixon appointed Mr. Lewis chairman of the U.S. Railway Association, a government agency responsible for overhauling rail freight lines. After three years there, he joined the American Bus Association during a troubled period for the intercity bus industry.

He also helped found two airlines.

He is survived by his wife of 61 years, Hildegard, a son, Gregory, of Chevy Chase, Md.; a daughter, Kimberly K. Lewis Gibson, of Vienna, Va., and a sister.

El Camino

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Parker Sr., who was president of Aztec Transportation and whose family owned the company.

Parker becomes director of El Camino Trailways' Nevada Operation, which is based at the former Aztec location in Carson City.

"After evaluating several acquisition opportunities, we selected Aztec for its strong presence in these markets and strength of its customer relationships," said Kumar Shah, chairman of El Camino

Trailways. "Our merger allows us to capitalize on the growth opportunities in tour and travel and the conventions market in the Lake Tahoe and Reno markets."

El Camino Trailways, which is based in South San Francisco, operates throughout northern California.

The company has been in business for more than 45 years, and in 2006, it was named by INC magazine a "Top 100 Fastest Growing Transportation Services Company." For more information go to www.elcaminotrailways.com.

Broker lawsuit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

(559) 252-7000.

We Give You Ride calls itself "the Internet's fast-growing, worldwide provider of charter bus, lim-

ousine, executive sedan, passenger vans and more."

Said one operator of We Give You Ride: "This company has no scruples. Caution to those who have any idea about contracting with this company."

Airport rules

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

times a year, there is one small saving grace.

Buried in the 30 pages of regulations is information about a "special event permit."

"If you visit the airport infrequently you can call ahead for one of the special event permits," he said. "There is no charge for the permit which allows drop off."

The permit must be on the dash of each "special event" vehicle. To obtain one, phone the Sacramento airport at (916) 874-0762.

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Coach America is buying transporter of railroad crews

DALLAS — Coach America has signed a letter of intent to acquire Renzenberger Inc., one of the nation's largest transporters of railroad crews.

When the deal is completed, Renzenberger will become the third rail crew transporting company owned by Coach America.

In mid-2005, Coach America, which was known as CUSA at the time, purchased Crew Shuttle Services Inc. of Pocatello, Idaho, which operated 100 vehicles, providing rail crew transportation in Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

When CUSA-Coach America was formed out of the western and south central operations of Coach USA in 2003, one of the companies

that came with the deal was Express Shuttle of Bismarck, N.D., which had been acquired by Coach USA in mid-2000. Express Shuttle operated a fleet of 20 vehicles providing rail crew transportation in upper plains and western states.

To manage this segment of its business, Coach America has formed a new operating division, Coach America Crew Transport, to provide employee transportation to a variety of vocational industries across the United States, including rail, mining, oil and gas, airline and construction.

The acquisition of Kansas City-based Renzenberger "is consistent with our strategy to expand our footprint in the crew transportation industry," said FlN Neve, vice presi-

dent Coach America Crew Transport. "It demonstrates our commitment to our customers and our employees in the crew transporta-

tion segment and our vision to be the leader in the crew transport market. We are very excited about the potential for these combined

companies."

Renzenberger has a fleet of more than 1,500 vehicles — mostly vans, operating in 23 states.

Holiday Tours is recipient of 2008 IMG safety award

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. — Holiday Tours of Randleman, N.C. has been named recipient of the 2008 International Motor Coach Group Safety Award.

The award acknowledges the company's commitment to and standards for safety.

"This is a great honor because IMG is a private consortium consisting of nearly 60 of the industry's elite motorcoach carriers, operating over 7,000 vehicles in the U.S. and Canada," said IMG President Steve Klika. He noted that

Holiday Tours maintains top

safety ratings, and safety has been a key to its business success.

Holiday Tours is the 34th largest motorcoach operator in North America, according to *Metro Magazine*, with a fleet of 56 coaches and 7 other buses. The company currently is celebrating its 30th anniversary.

David Brown, a former chairman of the United Motorcoach Association and long-time UMA board member, heads Holiday Tours. In 2003, Brown and Holiday Tours won the BusRide magazine Motorcoach Industry Achievement Award.

ABA Marketplace sets records

WASHINGTON — The American Bus Association reports its 2008 Marketplace, held last month in Virginia Beach, set records for registration in every delegate category, producing the best-attended Marketplace in the event's 27-year history.

"During Marketplace, we had a total of 3,300 ABA-registered dele-

gates in attendance," said ABA President and CEO Peter J. Pantuso.

Marketplace delegates included nearly 700 registered "buyers," up from 626 last year; roughly 2,300 "sellers," up from 1,950 last year, and more than 200 associate members (suppliers).

The 2009 Marketplace will be in Charlotte, N.C.

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.

Crawford County, Mich. Deadline: Feb. 28, 2008. Write to: Julee Dean, Manager, Crawford County Transportation Authority, 4276 W. North Down River Road, Grayling, MI 49738 Phone: (989) 348-8215.

Pontotoc County, Okla. An-

nounced deadline: Feb. 29, 2008. Write to: Danna Laxton, Director, Pontotoc County Public Transit Authority/Call A Ride Public Transit System, 15425 CR 3540 Ada, OK 74820. Phone: (580) 332-7056. (Note: This notice may violate Federal Transit Administration rules, requiring a 30-day period for responses. This notice has a response period of 18 days.)

Tuscaloosa County, Ala. Deadline: March 14, 2008. Write to: Jimmie Cain, Transit Manager, Tuscaloosa County Parking & Transit Authority, 2450 Hargrove Rd. East, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405. Phone: (205) 556-3876.



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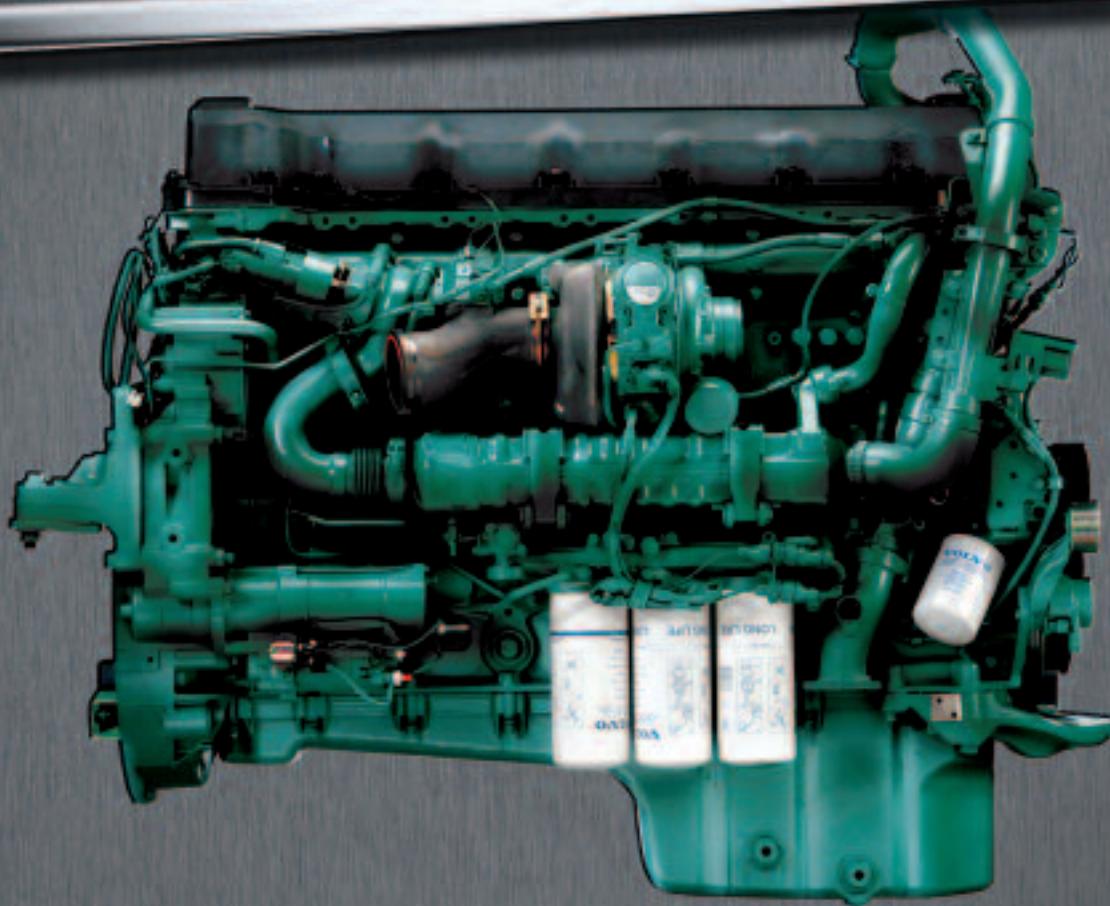
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