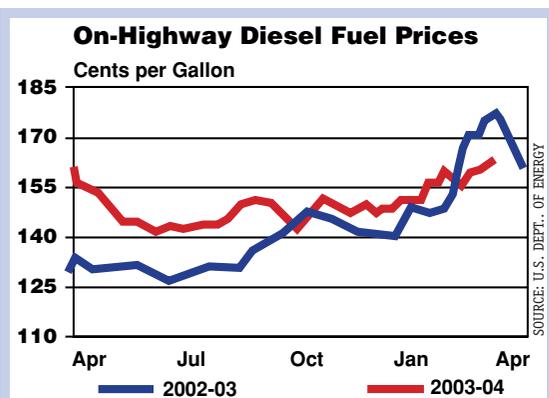


Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

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Diesel prices continue climb

The price of diesel fuel rose for the fifth consecutive week in early March, pushing the national average to nearly \$1.63 a gallon.

That's the highest level since late March of last year when the Iraq War had prices at stratospheric levels. Prices peaked a year ago at \$1.77 a gallon before moderating.

But while diesel prices are less than they were a year ago, they are more than 40 cents a gallon higher than they were two years ago when the price was \$1.20 a gallon.

That 40-cents-a-gallon difference means motorcoach operators are paying \$84 more for a 200-gallon retail purchase today than they were in early March 2002.

Across the U.S., diesel prices in early March of this year moved higher in most regions of the country. Prices moderated modestly in New England and along the West Coast and in California. Still, diesel fuel in New England remains nearly 13 cents a gallon higher than the national average. Along the West Coast, prices are 22 cents a gallon higher than the U.S. average, and in California the price difference is a whopping 30 cents a gallon.

Diesel Fuel Prices

Cents per Gallon	Price	Change from	
		Week Ago	Year Ago
U.S.	162.8	▲ 0.9	▼ -14.3
East Coast	163.9	▲ 1.0	▼ -17.6
New England	176.2	▼ -0.5	▼ -23.9
Central Atlantic	174.0	▲ 0.4	▼ -21.9
Lower Atlantic	158.4	▲ 1.3	▼ -15.3
Midwest	158.8	▲ 0.9	▼ -15.0
Gulf Coast	156.6	▲ 1.7	▼ -13.1
Rocky Mountain	162.3	▲ 2.4	▼ -15.9
West Coast	184.5	▼ -0.6	▼ -4.1
California	192.7	▼ -1.2	▲ 6.1

A Call to Action

Operators urged to fight loopholes

WASHINGTON — Motorcoach operators across the U.S. are being asked to urge their Congressional representatives to block proposed federal legislation that would allow public transit agencies virtually unrestricted authority to conduct local charter bus service.

The call to action was issued by five bus industry trade associations after it became clear that members of the U.S. House of Representatives were being lobbied by transit authorities and their unions to include the provisions in the House version of the six-year highway and transit reauthorization bill.

Last month, the Senate included the charter loopholes for transit agencies in

the \$318 billion highway bill it adopted and sent to the House.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee will take up the bill next, and its members are being lobbied by transit interests to keep the loopholes.

"Phone, fax or e-mail your senators and congressmen and women now, either at their Capitol Hill phone number or at their district office, and ask them to completely reject these new charter loopholes for transit operators," the United Motorcoach Association said in an Urgent Legislative Alert it issued.

Similar alerts were sent out by the California Bus Association, the Inter-

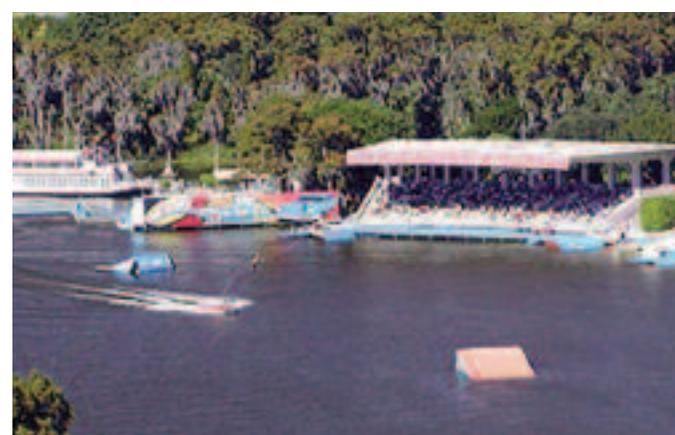
national Motorcoach Group, the National School Transportation Association and the American Bus Association.

The groups oppose two major Senate charter bus loopholes that public operators advocate. Specifically, the Senate bill would:

1) Grant transit agencies the unprecedented right to serve the charter needs of the entire non-profit sector (local governments, schools, and social service entities of "limited resources"), and

2) Allow transit agencies the right to act as "brokers" between private operators and their customers, and to pick by

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



Reopening Florida's original theme park, Cypress Gardens in Winter Haven, will reopen in a matter of weeks. See story on page 3.

Coaches needed for Dems' convention

BOSTON — The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, the public transit agency for Boston and eastern Massachusetts, has sent notices to private coach companies in its service area informing them that 125 wheelchair-accessible buses will be needed for the Democratic National Convention in late July.

The MBTA notice requests "letters of interest" from operators that can dedicate buses to the convention from 6 p.m. July 25, through 2 p.m. July 30.

The buses will shuttle convention

delegates from Boston-area hotels to the Fleet Center where the Democrats will nominate Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., to face President Bush in the November general election.

The MBTA is organizing the buses on behalf of Boston 2004 Inc., the host committee for the convention.

Last year, the MBTA asked the Federal Transit Administration for a waiver from federal charter service rules so it could provide the 125 buses the Democrats need for the convention. Instead, the regional FTA administrator

told the MBTA to work with private operators to supply the transportation services for the convention.

One aspect of the MBTA notice has caused concern among operators. The announcement says it is notifying "providers of bus transportation services, garaged within the 175 cities and towns that comprise the MBTA district, that up to 125 air-conditioned, full-sized, accessible buses will be needed" for the convention shuttle service.

The propriety of the service-area limit

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

THE DOCKET

New York City guides

Out-of-town operators must use licensed tour guides in New York City, the city's Department of Consumer Affairs says.

Page 4

Scofflaws targeted

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration wants states to crackdown on drivers who ignore traffic citation "orders to appear" and "orders to pay." Page 4

Operation Air Brake

The CVSA announces its sched-

ule for Operation Air Brake and Roadcheck 2004. Page 4

Bus rally fizzles

A major rally by California coach operators had to be called off when the Governor is a no show.

Page 4

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Cypress Gardens to reopen; big improvements planned

WINTER HAVEN, Fla. — Motorcoach operators in Florida and elsewhere are cheering a public-and-private partnership acquisition deal for Cypress Gardens, setting the stage for a reopening of the long-time tourist attraction under new ownership and with new attractions.

Dwindling attendance forced the closure of the park last April, dealing a severe blow to motorcoach operators who had been taking thousands of visitors on regular charter runs to the park for years.

“We’re extremely excited about Cypress Garden, especially because of the new owners and the plans

they have for it,” said Andy Sasfai of SMT Eastern in Winter Garden, Fla., and president of the Florida Motorcoach Association. “It’s going to be different than in the past and that’s how we’re going to promote it to our people.”

He said operators in Florida and nearby states are eagerly looking forward to putting the park back on their list of tour and charter offerings.

The park, which may reopen as early as Memorial Day, could draw even more people than it did in the past because the new owner plans to upgrade the 68-year-old theme park by adding several new

roller coasters and other rides and attractions, including water-related activities.

“There are a lot of people who have been there before who will want to go back now because of the changes,” noted Sasfai.

The deal that will lead to reopening the park was secured last month by the non-profit Florida Trust for Public Land, which purchased the 150-acre facility from owner First Gardens for \$20.5 million. The state then paid \$11 million for a conservation easement that will protect environmentally sensitive areas of the property from development, and Polk County

invested \$2.5 million to acquire 30 acres of the land, including the famed botanical gardens.

The remaining 120 acres was purchased for \$7 million by Kent Buescher, owner of the Wild Adventures theme park in Valdosta, Ga., one of two investors interested in buying the park.

Buescher plans to merge the park’s traditional attractions with the new rides and activities to make it more appealing to a wider audience. He plans to spend \$35 million within 18 months to upgrade the facility and another \$3 million to \$5 million annually for continued improvements.

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, who helped lead the effort to save the park, said he was pleased with the arrangements. “Because of the unwavering public support and the joint commitment by state, local and private partners to save this cultural icon, Florida’s first theme park will live again,” he said.

The facility was founded in 1936 by Florida real estate salesman Dick Pope Sr. and his wife, Julie, who developed it in a showpiece of more than 8,000 varieties of plants from 90 countries. The Pope family sold the park in 1985. It was sold a second time 1989 and again in 1995.



Time Lines buys Kaleo Tours, both are Oklahoma operators

OKLAHOMA CITY — Time Lines, an Oklahoma City-based charter operator, has acquired the assets of Kaleo Tours and Charters, also of Oklahoma City.

“We’re pleased we were able to complete the acquisition of this quality operation,” said Time Lines’ President and CEO Bob O’Brien. “The acquisition nearly doubles our fleet and provides a solid base for expansion into the tour market.”

Time Lines is a relatively new company, having launched operations about two years ago with a fleet of six Prevost H3-45 coaches.

The Times Lines’ fleet includes coaches equipped with such amenities as full galleys, including microwave ovens and refrigerators, power ports and plush seating.

“We are very encouraged by the response to our upscale service,” O’Brien noted.

The Kaleo acquisition also dovetails nicely with Time Lines’ fleet. The tour company operated four coaches — three Prevosts.

O’Brien said the combined operation will retain two identities. All motorcoach operations will be conducted under the Time Lines’ name.

Out of the mouths of babes ...

GLADWIN, Mich. — Emily Stange is married to a motorcoach operator and has a son who also operates a coach company.

Husband Jim Stange owns American Tour Club in the north-central Michigan community of Gladwin, and son Trenton operates Compass Coaches in Cedar Springs, near Grand Rapids.

So, it was only natural that when her two-year-old grandson

began talking she would teach him the name of the coaches his daddy and grandfather operate.

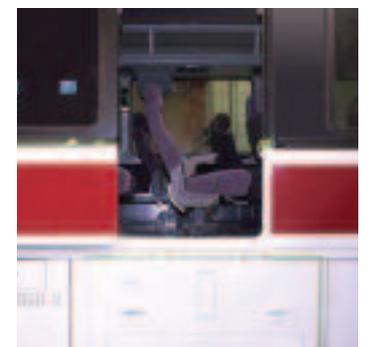
As the tike’s third birthday approached, the youngster boldly announced he was getting lots of presents for his birthday. Asked how he knew, he replied matter-of-factly that “Grandma Van Hool” had told him.

Guess what the family now calls Emily Stange?

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THE DOCKET

States warned to act against commercial driver scofflaws

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has warned states of their responsibility to take action against commercial bus and truck drivers when they get a traffic citation and fail to appear or to pay the fine.

The warning was issued as part of the FMCSA's ongoing effort to strengthen the commercial driver license program and improve state enforcement of federal CDL requirements.

In a two-page memorandum, Bonnie D. Bass, chief of the FMCSA state programs division,

reminded directors and administrators of state highway safety and CDL programs that they are required to take appropriate action when they're notified that a driver they have licensed has failed to appear or to pay a traffic citation in another state.

Bass' memo clarifies the federal definition of "conviction," and urges state officials to make sure their CDL enforcement practices comply with federal requirements for taking action against scofflaws.

Many states are not aware that a notice of "failure to appear" or "failure to pay" is the same as

being convicted of those offenses.

"Conviction means an unvaccated adjudication of guilt, or a determination that a person has violated or failed to comply with the law in a court of original jurisdiction or by an authorized administrative tribunal, an unvaccated forfeiture of bail or collateral deposited to secure the person's appearance in court, a plea of guilty or nolo contendere accepted by the court, the payment of a fine or court cost, or violation of a condition of release without bail, regardless of whether or not the penalty is rebated, suspended or

probated," Bass wrote.

She noted that a roadside citation issued for a violation of a state or local law relating to motor vehicle traffic control — other than parking, vehicle weight or vehicle defect violations — is technically an arrest. In most cases, however, the driver is not taken into custody but is released without bail on condition the driver either:

- Pay the specified fine, or
- Appear in court on the date specified to contest the ticket.

"By accepting the citation, the driver also accepts the conditions

of his or her release without bail," said Bass.

"A subsequent failure to pay the fine or appear in court to contest the citation meet the definition of a conviction" under federal law. "A state that issues a failure to appear or failure to pay notice concerning an out-of-state driver is informing the state of licensure that the driver has been convicted" under federal standards. "The state of licensure must take the appropriate sanctioning action against the driver as required by state law for in-state failure to appear and failure to pay notices."

Bus rally at California capitol fizzles; Govinator is a no show

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — A motorcoach rally designed to show industry support for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's plan to reform California's workers compensation program was cancelled so the governor could do last-minute campaigning across the state.

The demonstration by coach operators was being organized by the California Bus Association. Upwards of 100 privately owned motorcoaches were expected to surround the State Capitol on March 1.

CBA President Mike Waters of Pacific Coast Bus Service in San Francisco said the group was notified just days before the event that the governor wanted to campaign for ballot propositions that were being voted on

March 2, by Californians. The association was informed Schwarzenegger didn't want to have the rally unless he could participate.

Waters and other CBA members were disappointed both because they had gone to a lot of effort to organize the event, including involving local chambers of commerce, and because they wanted to make a statement about soaring workers comp rates.

"Right now, we're back off," said Waters. Whether the rally will be rescheduled is problematic. "Maybe we'll do it next time; maybe not," Waters said.

Workers comp rates have increased more than 100 percent over the last three years in California.

Interchange repairs begin in Detroit

DETROIT — Repairs have begun on a major highway interchange in Detroit that was damaged in October, a spokesman for the Michigan Department of Transportation told *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

The interchange joining Interstate 75 with the eastbound lanes of I-94 has been closed since Oct. 6, when a tanker truck crashed and exploded, causing severe structural damage.

Robert Morosi of the Michigan DOT said the start of repairs had been slowed because raw materials needed for the

structural steel had been delayed. Once the contractor had a firm date for getting the steel, he could begin demolishing the damaged interchange, Morosi said. The project is to be completed by the middle of next month.

I-75 runs north and south from the Canadian border to Florida, while I-94 runs east-west between the border and the upper Midwest and northern Rocky Mountain states. It eventually merges with I-90 in Montana.

Nearly 150,000 vehicles used the interchange daily.

Roadside inspection events set

WASHINGTON — The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance has announced that the 2004 Operation Airbrake inspection program will take place at locations throughout Canada and the United States on an "unannounced" day in May.

The annual surprise inspection is aimed at reducing brake-related crashes by encouraging drivers and motor carriers to increase their knowledge of brake inspection and maintenance, as well as their compliance with safety regulations and vehicle brake performance.

CVSA-certified inspectors will conduct inspections of over-the-road buses and trucks during a 12-hour period during an unannounced day in May.

The Operation Airbrake program will be repeated during an "announced" inspection Sept. 1.

CVSA also revealed that its 2004 Roadcheck will be June 8-10 in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. This year's Roadcheck, a 72-hour event, will focus on commercial vehicle safety belt use and security.

For more information, contact Steve Kepler at the CVSA by e-mail at stevek@cvsa.org, or 202-

NYC says operators must use licensed tour guides in city

NEW YORK CITY — Starting next month, the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs will begin publishing the names of guides that are licensed to conduct tours of the city.

The Internet posting is a key piece of the city's new requirement that all out-of-town companies conducting paid tours of New York City must employ a tour guide licensed by the Department of Consumer Affairs.

"All visitors to New York City deserve an accurate and colorful tour," said Department of Consumer Affairs Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra. "The law requires that out-of-town companies conducting tours within the city have to use a licensed guide who knows the lay of the land. This ensures that millions of tourists who visit each year will get both educational and fun

tours, and therefore will be more likely to come back."

Under city law, all new tour guides must take an exam when applying for a tour guide license. The test measures their knowledge of historic and public points of interest in and about the city.

Tour guides who pass the licensing exam with a score of 120 or higher will receive special recognition on the Department of Consumer Affairs' Web site, and will be part of an annual alert to NYC & Co. and national tour companies.

Guides applying for a license for the first time must take the new test and pass with a score of 97 or more out of 150.

Veteran tour guides - any guide who was licensed before May 17, 2003 - will not be required to take the new exam.

For more information, go to www.nyc.gov/consumers.

Transits seek private charter firms

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

Ottumwa, Iowa. Deadline: March 22, 2004. Write to: Pam Ward, Transit Administrator, 105 E. Third St., Ottumwa, IA

52501. Phone: (515) 683-0695.

Kenosha, Wis. Deadline: March 30, 2004. Write to: Len Brandup, Transportation Director, City of Kenosha Transportation Department, 3735 65th St., Kenosha, WI 53142. Phone: (262) 653-4290.

Mendocino, Calif. Deadline: April 11, 2004. Write to: Bruce Richard, General Manager, Mendocino Transit Authority, 241 Plant Rd., Ukiah, CA 95482. Phone: (707) 462-1422.

Tough emissions standards to take effect in Ontario

TORONTO - Diesel-powered buses and trucks operating in Ontario will face the toughest emission testing standards in North America beginning on the first day of next month.

The new standards put into place by the provincial government will apply to all heavy-duty vehicles registered in Ontario, as well as buses and trucks registered elsewhere but operated in the province.

Government spokesman Charles Ross said the "Drive Clean" testing standards are stricter than those in the United States for existing diesel-powered vehicles, including those on vehicles registered in California.

"There has been some confusion coming from the U.S., but we believe our testing standards to be the toughest in North America," he said.

The new standards take effect in two steps — the first next month and the second April 1, 2005 — and limit the particulate

matter in exhaust emissions. Acceleration snap tests will be performed to determine opacity readings, or the amount of light blocked by the particulates.

Current Ontario standards allow 55 percent of the light to be blocked by the exhaust of buses and trucks built before 1991, and 40 percent for those built later. Those are the same standards in effect for California.

Under the new Ontario standards, the percentage falls next month to 45 percent for older models and 35 percent for newer ones. In April 2005, the acceptable percentage will drop to 40 percent for older models and 30 percent for the newer models.

School buses must meet the same standard as the newer model buses and trucks, regardless of their age.

Operators will get an incentive to keep emissions low.

Beginning next year, vehicles that meet a 20 percent opacity reading or lower will receive an

exemption that will require testing every two years rather than annually.

The new testing program won the support of most industry organizations, including the Ontario Motor Coach Association.

'The government's smog patrol will be on the road conducting random tests.'

"We're not afraid of the tests because we are good," said Brian Crow, president and chief executive of the motorcoach association. "We have been testing and we have looked extremely good."

He said the percentage of coaches that have been passing the test has been in the high 90s.

Crow said the association initially wanted the testing to be conducted every two years, rather than annually, but agreed to a compromise of going for two years

without a test if the initial test results met the 20 percent opacity reading. "We wanted more but we accepted the compromise."

The Ontario School Bus Association supported the measure as well, according to Richard Donaldson, executive director. "Reducing vehicle emissions is very important to us and I know that our vehicles are going to have results that are even better than the Drive Clean standards," he said. "The opportunity for biennial testing when we exceed those standards is a strong, additional incentive to make sure our vehicles are clean."

Ross said testing would be done when vehicles go through the annual registration process, or when they have been sold and are being registered by a new owner.

Additionally, he said the government's "smog patrol" will be on the road conducting random tests of heavy-duty vehicles driving in the province that are registered elsewhere.

Drivers that fail the test at registration will not be able to register their vehicles until they pass, while out-of-province vehicles that are tested on the road and fail will be fined \$425 and then released.

Crow said he does not expect very many random tests of buses from other areas unless a vehicle is belching large amounts of black smoke. "If a bus goes by and you can't see it because of the black smoke, it probably will be stopped and taken off the road. But for random tests, I don't expect to see too many," he said.

Ontario is the only province in Canada with an emissions testing program for heavy-duty vehicles.

In the U.S., 15 states have some type of testing program for heavy-duty vehicles — Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Utah and Washington.



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Key representatives to contact regarding charter service rules

WASHINGTON — Here are the names, mail and e-mail addresses, and phone and fax numbers for members of the important House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highways, Transit and Pipelines.

These congressmen and women will play a major role in deciding whether to include the Senate bill language on charter service in the House bill.

If you write or contact a House member not on the committee, please solicit a promise from that member to contact the chairman (Republican) or ranking member (Democrat) of the committee or subcommittee.

Unless noted, all room numbers are in the Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515.

REPUBLICANS

Don Young, Committee Chairman, Alaska. Room 2111. Phone: (202) 225-5765; Fax: (202) 225-0425. E-mail: don.young@mail.house.gov.

Thomas Petri, Subcommittee Chairman, Wis. Room 2462. Phone: (202) 225-2476; Fax: (202) 225-2356.

Sherwood Boehlert, N.Y. Room 2246. Phone: (202) 225-3665; Fax: (202) 225-1891.

E-mail: rep.boehlert@mail.house.gov.

Howard Coble, N.C. Room 2468. Phone: (202) 225-3065; Fax: (202) 225-8611.

E-mail: howard.coble@mail.house.gov.

John Duncan, Tenn. Room 2267. Phone: (202) 225-5435; Fax: (202) 225-6440.

John Mica, Fla. Room 2445. Phone: (202) 225-5744; Fax: (202) 226-0821. E-mail: john.mica@mail.house.gov.

Peter Hoekstra, Mich. Room 2234. Phone: (202) 225-4401; Fax: (202) 226-0779. E-mail: telhoek@mail.house.gov.

Jack Quinn, N.Y. Room 2448. Phone: (202) 225-3306; Fax: (202) 225-226-0347.

Steve LaTourette, Ohio. Room 2453. Phone: (202) 225-5731; Fax: (202) 225-3307.

Susan Kelly, N.Y. Room 1127 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-5441; Fax: (202) 225-3289.

Richard Baker, La. Room 341, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-3901; Fax: (202) 225-7313.

Bob Ney, Ohio. Room 2438. Phone: (202) 225-6265; Fax: (202) 225-3394.

Frank LoBiondo, N.J. Room 225 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-6572; Fax: (202) 225-3318.

E-mail: lobiondo@mail.house.gov.

Jerry Moran, Kan. Room 1519 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-2715; Fax: (202) 225-5124.

E-mail: jerry.moran@mail.house.gov.

Jim DeMint, S.C. Room 432 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-6030; Fax: (202) 226-1177.

E-mail: jim.demint@mail.house.gov.

Doug Bereuter, Neb. Room 2184. Phone: (202) 225-4806; Fax: (202) 225-5686.

Johnny Isakson, Ga. Room 132 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-4501; Fax: (202) 225-4656. E-mail:

ga06@mail.house.gov.

Robin Hayes, N.C. Room 130 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-3715; Fax: (202) 225-4036.

Robert Simmons, Conn. Room 215 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-2076; Fax: (202) 225-4977.

Shelley Moore Capito, W.Va. Room 1431 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-2711; Fax: (202) 225-7856.

Henry Brown, S.C. Room 1124 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-3176; Fax: (202) 225-3407. E-mail: Writehenrybrown@mail.house.gov.

Timothy Johnson, Ill. Room 1229 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-2371; Fax: (202) 226-0791.

Dennis Rehberg, Mont. Room 516 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-3211; Fax: (202) 225-5687.

Todd Platts, Pa. Room 1032 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-5836; Fax: (202) 226-1000.

Sam Graves, Mo. Room 1513 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-7041; Fax: (202) 225-8221.

Mark Kennedy, Minn. Room 1415 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-2331; Fax: (202) 225-6475.

Bill Shuster, Pa. Room 1108 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-2431; Fax: (202) 225-2486.

John Boozman, Ark. Room 1708 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-4301; Fax: (202) 225-5713.

Bob Beauprez, Colo. Room 511 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-2645; Fax: (202) 225-5278.

Michael Burgess, Texas. Room 1721 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-7772; Fax: (202) 225-2919.

Max Burns, Ga. Room 512 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-2823; Fax: (202) 225-3377.

E-mail: max.burns@mail.house.gov.

DEMOCRATS

James Oberstar, Minn. Room 2365. Phone: (202) 225-6211; Fax: (202) 225-0699.

Nick Rahall, W.Va. Room 2307. Phone: (202) 225-3452; Fax: (202) 225-9061. E-mail: nrahall@mail.house.gov.

William Lipinski, Ill. Room 2188. Phone: (202) 225-5701; Fax: (202) 225-1012.

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Key points to make in communicating with representatives

WASHINGTON — Here are key points that can be made when contacting a member of Congress regarding the charter service language in the Senate bill that will be considered by the House:

1. The private motorcoach industry needs help to continue offering service to the more than one-half billion passengers it serves annually.

2. Senate Bill 1072, the Senate's version of the reauthorization of TEA-21, contains language which will adversely affect the service these bus operators can offer the public.

3. Section 3022 of the amended Senate Bill 1072 would allow publicly funded transit agencies to offer charter services to local governments and social service agencies, plus schools, universities, hospitals and senior citizens.

4. Current law reserves the opportunity to offer charter services to the entities noted in No. 3 to private bus operators unless there is no private carrier "willing and able" to provide such service. Over the years, some publicly funded transit agencies have flouted this law and now seek to enshrine their non-compliance into law.

5. Publicly funded transit agencies can get up to 90% of

the cost of their equipment paid for by federal taxpayers, giving them a huge cost advantage. These transit agencies use this advantage to charge prices below those of private operators and ultimately drive private operators out of business.

6. Because of this inequality, Congress gave private operators "first crack" at charter opportunities. That long-standing protection is now under attack by the transits.

7. A lobbying effort is underway by the transits and their unions to import the Senate bill's charter language into the House bill (HR 3550).

8. These loophole provisions will severely affect private operators' ability to provide charter service and may force them out of business.

9. I operate a motor coach company in (where), (state) and provide service to (number of) passengers each year. My family and I and my (number of) employees depend on charter service to local government and social service entities to remain in business. In fact, charter service to social service agencies accounts for percent of my business.

10. Please help me stay in business.

Loopholes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

low bid which company will operate the charter service.

At least one key congressman reacted swiftly and positively to the industry's appeal. Rep. James L. Oberstar, D-Minn., and the ranking Democrat on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said it was his intention that the House version of the bill, H.R. 3500, not include the egregious Senate language. "I will oppose this Senate provision when the bill is taken up in the House and Senate conference committee," Oberstar wrote to several operators.

However, the transit sector turned up the heat on March 8 and 9, when more than 700 members of the American Public

Transportation Association descended on Washington to press Congress for passage of the six-year highway and transit reauthorization bill.

UMA is urging operators who write letters to Congress to keep their messages simple and to the point: "Keep charter bus work with the private sector, and penalize public operators that violate the current charter rules; oppose the Senate charter bus loopholes.

"No private company can compete with competition that receives the majority of its operating funding from government subsidies. This is blatant unfair government competition with the private sector," UMA says.

The Senate highway bill is S. 1072. The offending charter language is contained in Senate Amendment 2616, Section 3022.

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OPINION

Current federal charter rules could rule for a while longer, but that may not be all bad

One possible outcome of the current Congressional battle over possible changes to the federal charter rules may be that lawmakers won't take any action at all on the issue during the current session.

Last summer, Congress asked the American Public Transportation Association and the American Bus Association to negotiate new charter service language that could be inserted into federal law.

The negotiations produced changes that much of the motorcoach industry found unacceptable. (See Page 1 and the March 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

If common ground cannot be found by the time Congress finishes drafting and adopting a new highway and surface transportation bill, then the issue could be left languishing — once again.

But that may not be all bad.

At a minimum, the industry has succeeded in convincing a handful of important congressmen that the Federal Transit Agency is doing a lousy job of enforcing the current rules, as stated in Title 49 of the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations (Section 604).

In the appropriations bill Congress passed in January for the U.S. Department of Transportation, the House issued a conference committee report that strongly criticized the FTA

for its slipshod enforcement of the rules that prohibit public transit agencies from providing charter bus service in competition with private operators.

Specifically, the committee said it was "concerned that despite these statutory regulations, many local transit agencies continue to provide charter service under the guise that it may be 'regular and continuing service.'

"The committee is concerned that FTA is not enforcing this statute to the full extent of the law. These activities present a great injustice to private operator services, which should not have to compete with a government entity that uses federal subsidies to purchase their equipment.

"The committee directs FTA to revisit its enforcement of this statute and ensure that it is not being exploited."

The House ordered the FTA to review the situation and submit a report to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations.

Rep. Ernest Istook Jr., R-Okla., chairman of the House Transportation and Treasury Appropriations Subcommittee, was responsible for inserting the language in the House report.

Obviously, Istook is on the right track. Someone needs to hold the FTA accountable for its inconsistent and inept enforcement of the federal charter rules.

TSA chief advocates action

ATLANTA — The top highway passenger security official at the U.S. Transportation Security Administration wants more motorcoach operators to participate in the free security training programs available to them.

Speaking at Motorcoach Expo 2004 here last month, Dan J. Commiato, branch chief in TSA's maritime and land division, said the training available from the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association is important in combating terrorism and protecting passengers, employees and equipment.

He noted that TSA has rule-making authority, hinting that if coach operators fail to sign up for the voluntary security training available from the two associations, the federal government may eventually require them to complete security training.

In his remarks, Commiato also announced that Bus Security Grants will be available again this year for intercity operators. Last August, TSA awarded \$20 million worth of grants to motorcoach operators in 24 states.

Commiato expressed disappointment, however, that only 82 of the 3,700 motorcoach companies in the U.S. applied for the federal money that operators could use to make security-related improvements.

Meanwhile, Commiato said TSA has distributed 100,000 pamphlets and tip cards designed

to increase security awareness among motorcoach drivers and operators.

Highway Watch program to grow

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Transportation Security Administration is working with the American Trucking Associations to expand the Highway Watch program as part of the national effort to fight terrorism.

Highway Watch, which was created six years ago, trains truck drivers to spot and report unsafe highway conditions, and to report potential security threats, including activities related to terrorism.

The expanded program is expected to eventually include motorcoach drivers.

Initially, the program was designed as a way for truckers to report dangerous driving conditions, accidents and aggressive driving behavior. The emphasis on security training was added after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The program is a partnership between the ATA, the federal government, many state governments, and drivers.

Currently, Highway Watch operates in 29 states and is expected to be expanded to all states.

The long-term goal of the program is to train upwards of 3 million trucking industry personnel, mostly drivers, and expand the training to intercity bus driv-

ers, law enforcement officers and emergency responders.

In a conference report on the TSA's fiscal 2004 budget, Congress indicated it would provide TSA with \$20 million this year to be used exclusively to fund a nationwide trucking security and safety initiative using the Highway Watch program.

U.S. Customs agents at foreign airports

Robert Bonner, commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, said the federal government is working on a plan for U.S. inspectors at foreign airports to screen passengers headed for the United States.

U.S. inspectors are already stationed in Canadian airports.

Bonner said the goal would be to stop anyone with fake travel documents and to stop terrorists from getting on U.S.-bound planes.

Mexico to help in terror fight

Mexican President Vicente Fox says his country would continue to cancel flights if needed and take additional precautions at airports and along the U.S.-Mexico border to prevent terrorist attacks in North America.

Fox said that although an investigation had not turned up any evidence terrorists had operated from Mexico, "U.S. intelligence is enough for us to act in a preventative manner and avoid problems of this magnitude."

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DaimlerChrysler Buses reorganizes

GREENSBORO, N.C. — DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses North America has realigned its top management in a move designed to strengthen its sales efforts.

The announcement was coupled with the release of bus sales figures for 2003, which were up 32 percent from 2002, to 1,160 units. Revenue also was up 32 percent, to \$306 million.

To further strengthen and integrate its commercial bus activities, the company has made three significant organizational/management changes:

- All three DaimlerChrysler commercial bus units in the U.S. and Canada — Setra of North America, Orion Bus and DaimlerChrysler Commercial

Buses North Carolina are being further integrated and have been made divisions of DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses N.A.

- Tony Domabyl, previously president of DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses North Carolina, has been given the new title of executive vice president—chief operating officer of DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses North America. He is now responsible for manufacturing and materials for the complete group.

- Patrick Scully, previously president of Setra, assumes the role of executive vice president—chief commercial officer for the entire group, taking responsibility for sales and aftermarket support for the company's complete line of motorcoach and bus products.

Andy Strecker continues as CEO of DCCBNA with direct responsibility for all divisions.

Rick Solon, president of Orion Bus for the past three years, has left the company.



Andy Strecker



Pat Scully



Tony Domabyl

Fleet operations training offered

BALTIMORE — A three-day seminar designed to improve the skills of fleet operations managers, supervisors, dispatchers and safety supervisors will be conducted later this month at the Community College of Baltimore County.

An important focus of the training will on the key role opera-

tions supervisors and dispatchers play in driver retention and efficiency. The day-long training sessions will be March 30-April 2, on the Essex Campus of the Baltimore college. The cost is \$495.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Magazine survey reveals top-selling motorcoaches

POLO, Ill. — Purchases of new motorcoaches by U.S. and Canadian operators dropped again last year, the fifth year in a row of declining sales, reports *National Bus Trader* magazine.

In its Annual Coach Trends Survey, the magazine found that 2003 new-coach sales fell to their lowest level in a decade — 1,771 over-the-road buses. The total was 631 fewer than were sold in 2002, or a drop of 26 percent.

Still, the total for 2003 was higher than the early years of the 1990s when the industry was recovering from a deep slump and even earlier times when a 1,500-unit year was considered vibrant.

At the same time, last year's total appears puny when compared to the bubble of the late 1990s when a confluence of factors, including easy credit, an overabundance of lenders, aggressive selling, cheap insurance, a healthy



economy, strong consumer confidence, new models, flush government entities, an energetic travel market and an accelerating transition to 45-foot coaches produced sales of more than 3,500 units in both 1998 and 1999. (See chart.)

Those salad days are but a fond and receding memory as the slide that began six years ago grinds to a slow halt.

MCI's workhorse D4500 was the No. 1 selling coach in 2003, a

title that model has held for nearly 10 consecutive years. Sales of the D-coach, long a favorite of tour and charter operators, have been buoyed during the past five years by transit operators buying them for upgraded commuter service. The cruiser is serving long-distance riders in New Jersey, New York, California, Utah and elsewhere.

Other findings in the *National Bus Trader* survey include:

MOST POPULAR SEATED COACH MODELS

2000	2001	2002	2003
1. MCI D4500	1. MCI D4500	1. MCI D4500	1. MCI D4500
2. Prevost H3-45	2. MCI D4000	2. MCI G4500	2. MCI J4500
3. MCI E4500	3. Van Hool C2045	3. MCI D4000	3. Van Hool C2045
4. Van Hool T2145	4. Prevost H3-45	4. MCI J4500	4. Setra S417
5. Van Hool C2045	5. MCI E4500	5. Van Hool C2045	5. Prevost H3-45
6. MCI D4000	6. Van Hool T2145	6. Prevost H3-45	6. MCI G4500
7. LeMirage XLII 45	7. MCI G4500	7. MCI E4500	7. MCI E4500

SOURCE: NATIONAL BUS TRADER MAGAZINE



Calco Travel Lutchter, La.

Calco Travel has added three Setra S417 motorcoaches to its 12-coach fleet. Calco provides charter and tour services locally, as well as throughout the U.S. and Canada.

"We wanted to offer our customers the very best in motorcoach travel," said Callen Hotard, president of Calco. "The S417 strikes the perfect balance between quality and superior craftsmanship, and comfort and affordability."

The Calco S417s are equipped with Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines and Allison B500 transmissions.

The company has served residents of Louisiana for more than 65 years. Founded as Hotard Bus Line in 1935, the organization operates today under the Calco Travel name. Its base in Lutchter is mid-way between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, La., and it serves

both markets with charter, tour and travel services. It has a maintenance facility in nearby Convent, La. The company Web site can be found at www.calcotravel.com.

"We're excited to welcome Calco Travel to the Setra family," said Robert Jones, vice president of sales at Setra of North America.

Arrow Stage Lines Omaha, Neb.

Arrow Stage Lines has added 14 Setra S417 luxury motorcoaches to its fleet of 135 vehicles, including coaches, shuttles, transit and school buses, and vans.

Arrow, which marked its 75th anniversary as a family-owned business during 2003, is one of the largest privately held bus companies in North America. It has 12 locations in seven states and offers service throughout the U.S. and Canada. Last month, Arrow received the United Motorcoach Association Vision Award for 2004.

"We're a customer-driven company and it was time to purchase coaches designed with customer service



V.I.P. Tour & Charter Bus Co. Portland, Maine

V.I.P. Tour & Charter Bus Co. has acquired a new 55-seat, disabled-accessible Prevost LeMirage XL II coach. The LeMirage increases to 22 the total number of motorcoaches and specialty vehicles in the V.I.P. fleet.

"This new addition to our family-owned business will continue to allow us to provide the very best in charter, transit and shuttle services to our customers," said V.I.P. President Ray Penfold. V.I.P. has

been operating since 1982.

In addition to providing university and local shuttle services, V.I.P. also offers daily excursions to Foxwoods Resort and Casino in Connecticut. It serves groups ranging in size from 21 to 55.

The new V.I.P. Prevost LeMirage features a four-monitor REI video entertainment system and a Ricon wheelchair lift. It has a Detroit Series 60 engine and Allison B500 transmission.



and satisfaction in mind," said company President Steve Busskohl. "Our drivers say the passengers love the ride and quietness in the coach."

The S417 features a Detroit Diesel Series 60 engine, Allison B500 transmission, and integrated multiplex electronic and on-board diagnostic systems.

Vote begins on contract at Greyhound

WASHINGTON — Voting by Greyhound drivers and mechanics on a new multi-year labor agreement begins March 16 and continues to March 26.

Greyhound Lines and the union representing its drivers and 300 of its mechanics reached at tentative agreement on a 34-month contract at the end of January.

Since then, the union has been preparing a package of materials for members explaining the agreement and why the executive board of Local 1700 of the Amalgamated Transit Union is recommending approval.

Greg Herbold, president and business agent of Local 1700, says the ratification vote on the proposed contract "is without a doubt one of the most critical and crucial contract votes in years."

Voting will be conducted by telephone and online.

The agreement is the third to be considered by Greyhound employees since talks between the company and Local 1700 began almost a year ago. Two previous contract proposals were overwhelmingly rejected by Greyhound's ATU members.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MARCH 2004

16-18 The 71st Family Motor Coach Association International Convention, State Fair Grounds, Albuquerque, N.M. Info: (800) 543-3622 or go to: www.fmca.com.

22-26 Carrier Transicold Advanced Bus Air Conditioning Service Training Course, Syracuse, N.Y. Info: Call Carrier Transicold Customer Training (315) 432-3015.

23-25 Busworld Asia 2004, Shanghai New Intl Expo Center, Pudong District, Shanghai, China. Info: Go to www.busworld.org.

24-27 National Tour Association Tour Operator Spring Meet, Little Rock, Ark. Info: (859) 226-4444 or go to www.ntaonline.com.

29-April 2 Carrier Transicold General Bus Air Conditioning Service Training Course, Atlanta. Info: Call Carrier Transicold Customer Training (315) 432-3015.

Eastern Bus spring meeting is next month

FAIRFAX, Va. — The regular spring meeting of the Eastern Bus Maintenance Management Conference will be the middle of next month in Saddle Brook, N.J.

The Eastern Bus Maintenance Management Conference is an organization of bus maintenance managers who gather twice a year in closed-door meetings to discuss key maintenance issues. The roundtable discussions provide members with valuable information and technical support.

Special activities for the spring meeting include a trip to the New York City Transit Authority overhaul facility. Harry Berkowitz, crisis intervention coordinator for New York City Transit, will discuss how their properties handle crisis situations. Activities also include a vendor trade show and members/suppliers reception dinner.

The meeting will be April 19-20 at the Holiday Inn and Conference Center in Saddle Brook, which is off I-80, east of Patterson in northern New Jersey.

For information, e-mail LTBusOne@aol.com, or go to www.ebmmc.org.

Correction

The Van Hool coach pictured on page 1 of the March 1 issue was incorrectly identified. It is a C2045 model.

31 Pennsylvania Bus Association Marketplace 2004, York Expo Center, York, Pa. Info: (717) 236-9042 or go to www.pabus.org.

APRIL 2004

3-8 Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance Annual Conference, The Peabody Hotel, Little Rock, Ark. Info: (202) 775-1623 or go to: www.cvsa.org.

13-14 Operation Secure Transport Train-the-Trainer Workshop, Holiday Inn

Boston/Logan Airport, Boston. Info: (717) 975-9190 or e-mail security@safetyteam.com.

15-16 Operation Secure Transport Train-the-Trainer Workshop, Hampton Inn & Suites Chicago Downtown, Chicago. Info: (717) 975-9190 or e-mail security@safetyteam.com.

17-18 Motor Bus Society, Spring Convention, New Orleans. Info: Go to www.motorbussociety.org or e-mail

glsquier@comcast.net.

19-20 Eastern Bus Maintenance Management Conference, Holiday Inn and Conference Center, Salle Brook, N.J. Info: Go to www.ebmmc.org or e-mail LTBusOne@aol.com.

20-21 Operation Secure Transport Train-the-Trainer Workshop, Hampton Inn & Suites, Charlotte, N.C. Info: (717) 975-9190 or e-mail security@safetyteam.com.

22-23 Operation Secure Transport Train-the-Trainer Workshop, Holiday Inn Pittsburgh Airport, Pittsburgh. Info: (717) 975-9190.

23-25 Bush Bash at Medieval Times, Exhibition Place, Toronto. Info: www.bus-mag.com, click on Bus Bash link, or call (815) 946-2341.

29-30 Operation Secure Transport Train-the-Trainer Workshop, Holiday Inn Select Memphis Airport, Memphis, Tenn. Info: (717) 975-9190.

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SCENES FROM MOTORCOACH EXPO 2004



Peter Kapich of ZF Transmissions (above left) discusses the AS Tronic transmission with Ron Waller of CUSA.

The Motorcoach Expo 2004 show floor (left) in the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta offered plenty of space for the increased number of vendors that had booths for the event.



A panel discussion led by UMA President & CEO Victor Parra (far left) and Steve Klika, president of the International Motorcoach Group (far right), featured operators Jot Bennett, David Brown, Rick Hillard and Jeff Polzien.



Building your image through differentiation, enthusiasm

ATLANTA — Scott McKain is billed as the most qualified man in America at creating compelling experiences for customers.

At the annual Operators Luncheon at Motorcoach Expo 2004, McKain urged a room full of motorcoach company managers and owners to do a better job of creating compelling experiences for their customers.

McKain, who is vice chairman of a multi-million dollar company called Obsidian Enterprises Inc., said "customers expect an experience to be part of the process.

"You are creating experience whether you realize it or not. The purpose of business is to profitably create experiences that are so compelling to customers that their loyalty is assured."

But as businesspeople you have to constantly look for opportunities to differentiate yourself, McKain said.

"You can differentiate anything. Look at Starbucks — they did it with coffee, and Evian did it with water. It can be done."

But, adds McKain, a sales force must be able to create a picture of

that compelling experience. "In our drive for speed we have stopped listening. We miss out on opportunities for connection."

Part of the problem, he said, is that a company's history and culture oft-times get in the way. There is a mentality that this is the way they have always done business. Therefore, they will continue to do it that way. There is no room for change.

To combat this mindset, companies should adopt a "high concept." That is, a short, powerful statement that describes the busi-

ness. "You need to determine if you can describe your organization in a short phrase and what differentiates you from your competition and other forms of travel. If you can't do this, no one can," McKain said. "It is the power of story. You don't have to be more effective. The goal is to be more persuasive."

McKain encouraged attendees to return home and share what they learned at the conference. "Enthusiasm is contagious. Your driver is your company. Your salesperson is your company. You need to up your level of service.

"Know your customers' preferences. Find ways to make a difference. I have heard that this is the age of the never-satisfied customers. It is only if you allow it to be."

He said the motorcoach industry is about helping people get away from their challenges.

"Everyone deals with challenges," he said. "The more you help people deal with their challenges, the easier it is to deal with yours. Don't be so busy showing people this country that you miss it. Make each day count."



The Vision Award Gala Banquet (above) and reception (top) were new events for Motorcoach Expo and won rave reviews.

The opening reception for Motorcoach Expo 2004 was on the 74th floor of the Westin Peachtree Plaza Hotel in downtown Atlanta. It is the tallest hotel in the western hemisphere.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

contained in the MBTA notice could not immediately be determined. The restriction will likely be questioned by operators in nearby states.

Coach companies interested in supplying buses to Boston 2004 Inc. — for dedicated use during the convention — are asked to submit the following information in a Letter of Interest:

- Name, mailing address and garage location(s) of company.
- Corporate capacity to meet bonding and insurance requirements.
- Total number of buses that can be made available for the length of the convention. Include model, type, length, seating capacity and whether or not each bus is ADA compliant.
- Other relevant information the MBTA and Boston 2004 Inc., should consider regarding company qualifications.

The letters are due by 3 p.m. March 25, 2004, at the MBTA Materials Department, Room 2810, Ten Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116-3974. The notice states that all eligible parties submitting a Letter of Interest will be included on the mailing list for the service.

The notice was signed by Robert A. Johnson, director of materials management at MBTA. The main switchboard telephone number for the MBTA is (617) 222-5000.

The FTA regional administrator for Massachusetts is Richard H. Doyle, Transportation Systems Center, Kendall Square, 55 Broadway Ste. 920, Cambridge, MA 02142. Phone: (617) 494-2055.

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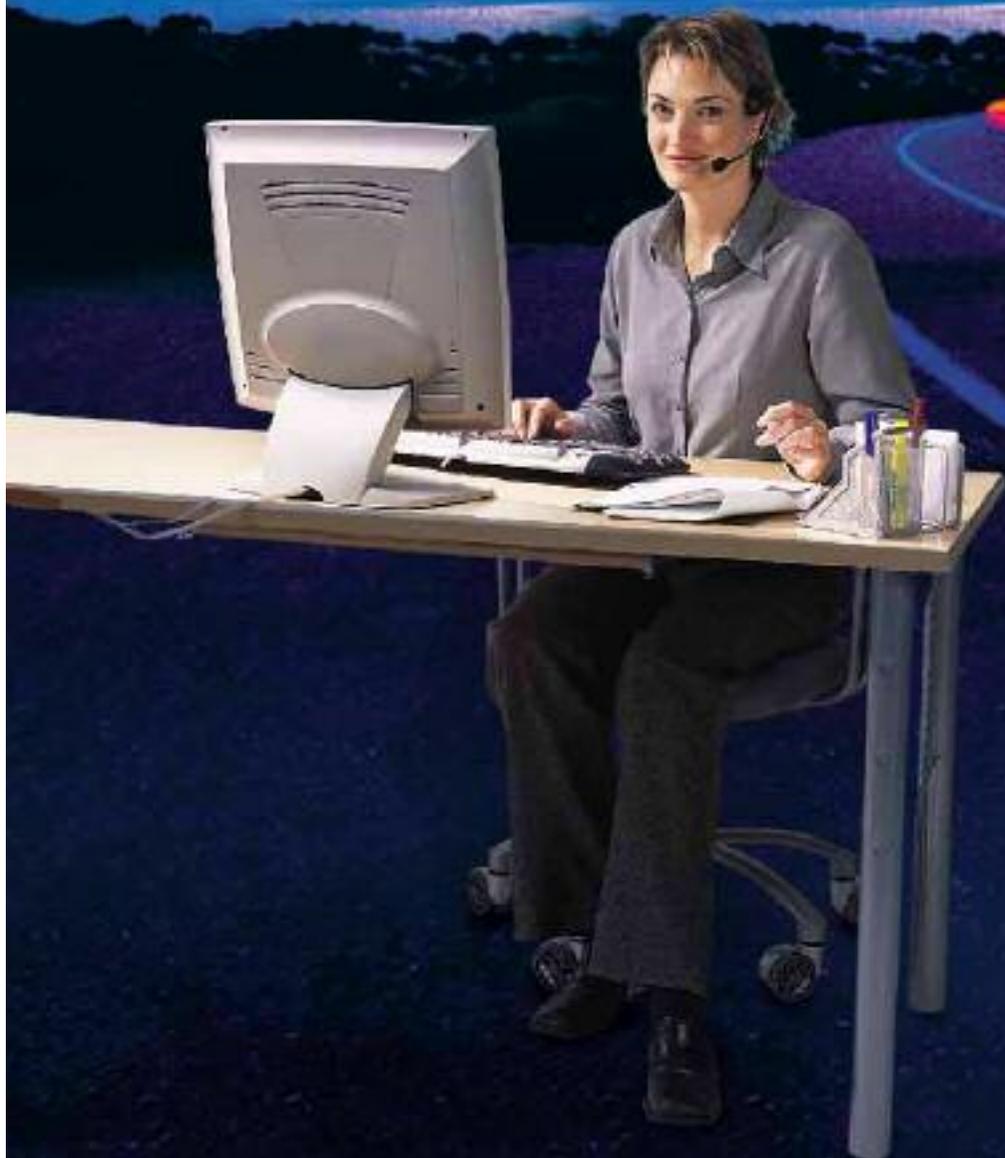


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