

March 15, 2005

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF MOTORCOACH EXPO 2005

MOTORCOACH EXPO 2005



Exceptional Exposition

If anyone had any doubt that the North American motorcoach industry is in the midst of an economic rebound that uncertainty was blown away at Motorcoach Expo 2005. A record number of new exhibitors helped attract the largest group of attendees since the Orlando Expo five years ago. Unlike recent Expos, the show floor this year (above) was a buzz with activity from opening day to closing. Anna Di Fruscia and Michel Galland of Autobus Galland Ltee came to Las Vegas for Expo from Laval, Quebec. Complete Expo coverage begins on Page 9.

Photos by David Braun



Membership vote nears to combine ABA-UMA; 4 leaders urge approval

WASHINGTON — The drive to consolidate the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association is on the verge of moving into high gear.

After months of work by a task force composed of five board members from each association, a unification plan has been crafted that is expected to be submitted later this month or early next month to members of the associations.

A comprehensive outline of the plan, which has been kept largely confidential until now, was released to *Bus & Motorcoach News* in an effort to bring all segments of the industry up to speed on the proposal for combining the long-time rival groups.

The plan already has been approved in lopsided votes by the boards of both associations — subject to the ABA conducting a due-diligence investigation of UMA, the development of an unwind agreement and a more detailed short-term and long-term budget, and agreeing on a staff structure.

An "unwind agreement" is a legal document designed to protect organizations in case a business consolidation or merger unravels. It is a way of hedging financial risks.

UMA directors plan to conduct their due diligence of ABA once members have approved the proposal. They wanted to spare the upfront expense.

The unification plan appears to offer many members a strong incentive to vote yes. The membership fee structure outlined in the plan would result in a drop in dues for many coach operators. In some

The proposed consolidation of the American Bus Association and the United Motorcoach Association already has fostered strong agreement among the leaders of the two organizations: They're all for it.

In fact, all four of the top officers of the associations are convinced unification makes a great deal of sense, and now is the perfect time to consolidate. In the words of a popular blue-collar comedian, they just want to "git-r-done."

"For me, the biggest issue is the (industry) presence in Washington D.C.," said David Brown of Holiday Tours in Randleman, N.C., and chairman of UMA. "Right now, it really feels fragmented and we aren't always going in the same direction, which causes confusion in D.C. And, I just think as large as our industry is, a single voice there is incredibly important."

ABA Chairman Ronald Eyre of Eyre Bus Service in Glenelg, Md., agrees, saying that having two different lobbying voices confuses lawmakers to the point they wonder which group they should be listening to. "You hear something like 'someone from your industry was just here and now someone one else is coming in from the same industry,'" he said.

The seconds in command of the organizations share that view as well.

"We are a very small industry in the big picture of transportation, and in industry in general, so to have two organizations representing one rather small niche industry to me doesn't make a lot of sense," said Doug Anderson of Anderson

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Greyhound announces more cuts in West, SW

DALLAS — Early next month, Greyhound Lines will wrap up the first phase of the massive makeover of its route system, with the last of the cutbacks in the western U.S. taking place.

The nation's only coast-to-coast line-haul operator announced early this month it is eliminating another 150 stops effective April 3.

Greyhound began its "network transformation" with an announcement at the end of last June that it planned to spend the next year eliminating hundreds of stops as part of a route-slashing plan to overhaul its route structure. The restructuring has moved along faster than originally anticipated.

Since the initial cutbacks, other announcements have come, the most recent in January when Greyhound revealed the first of 68 abandonments in the southwest and western U.S. Most of those cuts were along routes off Interstate 10, 20 and 40.

The cutbacks next month also are mostly in the southwestern U.S., with more eliminations slated for Arkansas, California, Colorado, Louisiana, Missouri, Nevada, Oklahoma and Utah, plus new ones in Kansas.

Roughly 43 percent of the latest cuts will occur in California

where 64 stops are being eliminated. Three-quarters of the stations reportedly had no outbound ticket sales last year.

Many of the abandonments in California are in communities with familiar names — Irvine, Malibu Beach, Monterey, Napa, Pleasanton, Santa Monica, Sole dad, Sunnyvale, Thousand Oaks and Vandenberg Air Force Base.

"This is all part of our ongoing strategy to restructure our network and really eliminate those routes that have low-to-nonexistent customer demand," said Greyhound spokeswoman Kim Plaskett.

Places like Fillmore, along Interstate 15 in south-central Utah. Four Greyhounds stopped at the local Fillmore station daily but only picked up an average of one person a week. Statistics were similar for both Beaver and Nephi, Utah, where each station only had two or three people a week.

The cuts will leave Utah with nine remaining Greyhound stations. Next on the Greyhound chopping block will be the eastern U.S.

Throughout the abandonment process Greyhound has declined to indicate when cutbacks will be announced. Stay tuned.

Bailey buys Hegins coach division

YORK, Pa. — Bailey Coach, a York-based tour and charter operator, has purchased the motorcoach division of Hegins Valley Lines in Millersburg, Pa.

Hegins' coach division also provided tours and charters, but other units of the company operate school buses and mail trucks. Hegins retains those businesses. Hegins Valley Lines was formed 42 years ago as Schlegel Transportation. It changed its name to Hegins Valley Lines 33 years ago.

Bailey Coach, which is headed by company president John W. Bailey, purchased the Hegins operation from David and Ed Schlegel, who will continue to oversee the Bailey/Hegins unit in Millersburg. Included in the purchase were four Hegins' coaches.

Bailey is a seven-year-old company that has grown to 10 coaches, with seven based at its York location



John Bailey, left, seals deal with David Schlegel

and three operating out of Millersburg. Reservations for the combined operation have been consolidated in the York offices of Bailey.

Bailey also owns Tarbert's Airport Transportation, which provides on-demand sedan and van service from York County to the region's airports.

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THE DOCKET



HONORED. Norman Littler, senior vice president of government and industry relations at the United Motorcoach Association, presents a plaque to Deborah Hersman of the National Transportation Safety Board. UMA honored Hersman for her support of coach industry safety initiatives during the years she was a staff member in the U.S. Senate prior to joining the NTSB. Hersman spoke at Motorcoach Expo last month in Las Vegas.

Court to hear Indian fuel case

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court has decided to weigh in on the issue of taxes on fuel sold on Indian reservations.

For years, states and Indian tribes have been fighting legal battles over the extent to which the states may impose their motor fuel taxes on diesel fuel and gasoline sold on reservations.

Coach companies oft-times buy diesel fuel on reservations

because of the absence of taxes.

Late last month, the U.S. Supreme Court granted certiorari in one such case and denied it in another. The high court said it will consider whether Kansas can tax non-Indian companies that supply fuel to Indian-owned fuel outlets on the reservation.

A lower federal court had ruled that although the incidence of the tax was not directly on the tribes, it

still interfered with tribal sovereignty.

The case involves the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation.

On the other hand, the court said it would not hear a similar Idaho case, where the state's efforts to amend its law to shift the tax to a tribe's fuel suppliers were also held by a lower court to be ineffective. That case involved the Coeur d'Alene Tribe.

Transit seeks charter firms

The following public transit provider has informed the United Motorcoach Association of its 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 appropriate operators to take the time to respond to this notice:

Sioux City, Iowa. Deadline: 4 p.m. April 6, 2005. Write to: Curt Miller, Purchasing/Fleet/Transit Director, Sioux City Transit System, 2505 Fourth St., Sioux City, Iowa 51101. Phone: (712) 279-6405.

Maine governor wants to expand cell phone access across the state

AUGUSTA, Maine — Gov. John Elias Baldacci is launching a program to expand cellular phone access across the state ... which will certainly be welcomed by motorcoach operators.

In announcing his "Connect Maine" program, the governor recounted how when he was driving to Portland, Maine, his cell phone calls were repeatedly lost.

He also noted that cell service on the Maine Turnpike (Interstate 95), the state's busiest roadway, often is "plagued" by cell service problems.

His goal is to see all of Maine,

including seacoast communities like Cape Elizabeth and mid-state burgs like Sebec, have ready access to cell phone service.

As part of the program, the state Public Advocate's Office is asking cell phone users to report the location of dead zones via e-mail or the phone. Go to www.state.me.us/meopa, or call (207) 287-2445.

Additionally, the governor announced a goal of gaining broadband access for 90 percent of Maine's communities within three years.

Interstate tolls pose coach industry threat

WASHINGTON — With Congress plowing ahead full bore on a new highway and public transportation reauthorization bill, a key element of the legislation could have a huge impact on the motorcoach industry: tolling on interstate highways.

The \$284 billion, six-year highway bill that was passed by the House earlier this month contains a provision that would allow expanded tolling authority on the interstate system.

The new bill, which is similar in most respects to last year's version, would permit three major demonstration projects, allowing states to reconstruct and rehabilitate sections of interstate roadways and impose tolls to pay for the work.

But, unlike last year's bill, the 2005 legislation also would allow states to use tolls for new construction.

The bill says a state or a group of states would be permitted "to collect tolls on a highway, bridge or tunnel on the interstate system for the purposes of constructing interstate highways."

Many in the ground transportation industry see the interstate tolling proposal as the first step in creating a long slippery slope leading to increased use of tolls to pay for federal highway and interstate construction.

Any move that increases the use of tolls — or reduces the use of fuel taxes — to finance highway construction would be particularly hard on the motorcoach industry because of the federal fuel-tax rebate the industry receives.

Additionally, once tolls are put in place, they almost always are easier to increase than fuel taxes, and larger vehicles invariably pay much higher fees than autos. This last aspect is particularly galling to the motorcoach industry because no other ground transportation sector does more to relieve congestion — by getting cars off the highways — than the over-the-road bus industry.

Mandatory tolling on existing interstate highways will clearly produce problematic and unacceptable side effects for the coach industry.

For example, converting interstates to toll roads will force many motorists onto secondary roads, which are at least four times as

dangerous as interstates.

That means congestion will increase on these local roads, plus it will disrupt communities and result in unanticipated maintenance costs on arterials that were not designed to handle the type and volume of transit that the diversion will cause.

Motorcoach operators frequently use secondary roads for sightseeing and touring, and anything that increases traffic on these roadways will reduce safety for coach passengers, as well as diminish their enjoyment of traveling (previously) "less-traveled" roads.

Rep. Mark Kennedy, R-Minn., plans to introduce an amendment to the House highway reauthorization bill to oppose tolls on existing interstates.

The trucking industry is strongly supporting Kennedy's amendment and opposing the use of tolls to increase funding for highway construction. Trucking executives say fuel-tax funds already collected should be spent in better ways, and some have even said fuel-tax hikes would be preferable to more tolls.

Steve Williams, chief executive of Maverick Transportation Co. and chairman of the American Trucking Associations, was quoted by one industry publication as saying that "preventing the imposition of new tolls ... was at the top of the list" of ATA priorities for this year.

The ATA also has sharply criticized a proposal to impose tolls on Virginia's section of Interstate 81. While saying it appreciated the attention the state was giving I-81, the ATA said Virginia's transportation department should reassess its efforts for expansion of the highway.

"Over the past three years, (VDOT) has focused entirely on a proposal submitted under the Public-Private Partnership Act that has been criticized from the start and will not succeed," ATA said. "Unfortunately, VDOT does not appear to recognize this obvious reality, and seems prepared to waste even more time and money on a doomed proposal."

I-81 is a major corridor connecting northeastern states with the South. The highway runs from the New York-Canada border to Knoxville, Tenn., passing through Pennsylvania and Maryland, as well as Virginia.

Calendar

MARCH 2005

16 Virginia Motorcoach Association Board of Directors, Howard Johnson Hotel, Fredericksburg, Va. Info: (434) 376-1150 or go to www.vamotorcoach.com.

16-19 Trailways 69th Annual Conference & Meeting, Casino Magic Casino & Golf Resort, Bay St. Louis, Miss. Info: Trailways Transportation System, (703) 691-3052 or go to www.trailways.com.

30 Pennsylvania Bus Association Marketplace 2005, York Expo Center, York, Pa. Info: (717) 236-9042 or go to www.pabus.org.

30-April 3 CrossSphere Tour Operator Spring Meet, Sacramento, Calif. Contact: (800) 682-8886, or go to www.crosssphere.com.

APRIL 2005

11-14 Society of Automotive Engineers 2005 World Congress, Cobo Center, Detroit. Info: (724) 776-4841 or go to www.sae.org.

16-21 Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance Annual Conference, Hyatt Regency Albuquerque and Albuquerque Convention Center, Albuquerque, N.M. Info: www.cvsa.org.

23-24 The Motor Bus Society Convention, San Francisco. Info: Go to www.motorbusociety.org, or e-mail glsquier@comcast.net.

MAY 2005

3-7 Travel Industry Association 37th Annual International Pow Wow, New York City. Info: (202) 408-8422 or go to www.tia.org.

15-18 American Bus Association Board of Directors, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. Info: (800) 283-2877 or go to www.buses.org.

21-27 Community Transportation Association of America Expo 2005, St. Louis. Info: (800) 527-8279 Ext. 708, or go to www.ctaa.org.

27-29 Maple City Bus Bash, Hornell, N.Y. (Hosted by Covered Wagon Tours.) Info: (815) 946-2341 or go to www.busmag.com.

Fleet training in Philadelphia

PHILADELPHIA — An online training and management resource company is presenting a series of seminars designed to help fleet managers and supervisors improve their safety performance, maintenance operations, profitability and driver recruitment and retention.

The sessions will be presented next month by coach industry safety and compliance expert Jack Burkert. Coordinating the seminars is efleetmgmt Inc.

Here's the seminar schedule to be presented in Philadelphia:

- Driver Recruitment and Retention. 6-9 p.m. April 5.
- Accident Prevention: Art and Science. 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. April 5.

Leadership for the Maintenance Manager. 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. April 6.

Essentials for Operations Supervision. 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. April 7.

Burkert says attendees will increase their knowledge and skills, allowing fleets to:

- increase efficiency and profitability
- improve regulatory compliance
- reduce loss and insurance rates
- increase driver retention
- enhance customer service
- add value to the company

Registration for each of the day-long sessions is \$199. The three-hour

evening Driver Recruitment and Retention session is \$59. Attendees can save 35 percent by registering for all four seminars (\$425 vs. \$656), or send three or more to one seminar and receive a 35 percent discount per attendee (\$129 vs. \$199 for the one-day seminars, and \$39 vs. \$59 for the Driver Recruitment and Retention session).

Registration fees include instruction, student notebook, lunch, coffee breaks, handouts and instructional materials. Plus, each student will receive a complimentary white paper focused on their educational curriculum (a \$29 value).

For information contact efleetmgmt at (518) 756-2200, or go to www.efleetmgmt.com.

Safe driver course set for March 23

HAMMONTON, N.J. — The South Jersey Transportation Authority has scheduled a free safety training course for bus drivers who will be in the Atlantic City area later this month.

The course on March 23 will tackle three topics:

- Accident prevention and reducing risks

- What a driver should do if there is an accident
- Protecting yourself and your company after an accident

Attendees will receive certificates.

The three-hour program, which includes lunch, will be at Wash's Catering Service at 128 N. New Road in Pleasantville, N.J. Pleasantville is off the Atlantic City Expressway, a few miles east of the interchange for the Garden City and Atlantic City expressways.

There will be a shuttle to Wash's from the Atlantic City Transportation Center bus parking lot.

To attend, call (888) 5NJ-SJTA, Ext. 423 or (609) 345-5572 Ext. 423.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Consolidation plan

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

cases, the decrease would be significant. However, the fee structure (listed later in this article) is not believed to be cast in concrete.

The associations are eager to get the consolidation plan before their members for a vote. They're working against a self-imposed deadline of March 31, to present the plan to members. Here's what members will be asked to approve:

The associations will be combined over a period of roughly eight months, with the exact timetable dependent on a number of factors, including contracts, leases, staffing and logistics.

Initially, the ABA and UMA boards will be combined into one large board and then winnowed down over a four-year period from 65 to 32 members, with a fixed number of representatives from five sectors of the industry. The board will meet at least annually and its meetings will be open to members.

Each industry segment — small motorcoach companies, large charter and tour operators, large line-haul carriers, tour operators and associates (both non-travel and travel), will elect its own representatives to seats on the board.

The final 32-member board will be composed of seven small motorcoach operators (19 or fewer coaches); seven large charter and tour operators (20 or more coaches); seven large line-haul operators; four tour operators, and seven others — two manufacturers, two non-travel associates and three travel associates.

Power Players

An Executive Committee composed of nine members will be created as part of the board structure. The chairman, vice chairman, secretary and treasurer of the committee will be elected by the board to two-year terms. The chairmen of the board's legislative/regulatory and finance/audit committees also will serve on the Executive Committee, with their selection reviewed annually. Plus, there will be one board member from each of the three operator segments — small operators, large tour and charter, and large line haul — on the Executive Committee.

Councils will be set up to represent and identify key issues and trends for each segment of the industry. In other words, there will be a council for small operators, large operators, large line-haul carriers, non-travel associates, tour operators and travel associates. These independent councils will



advise the board, groom new leaders and potential board members, serve as forums for discussions and roundtables on critical topics, pursue issues on behalf of the board, and bring issues to the board.

Each council will have, at a minimum, an annual meeting, and all council meetings will be open to rank-and-file members. A board member from each sector will work with the association staff to set up and facilitate council meetings.

Another important element of the new board structure will be a five-member Governance Committee, composed of one board member from each of the operator segments — small, large, line-haul and tour operators, plus one associate member appointed by the board.

The Governance Committee will work to develop the criteria for service on the board and will oversee the process of attracting qualified members to run for board seats. Committee members will be expected to meet up to three times annually and participate in periodic conference calls.

Initial Chairmen

During the first year following a favorable consolidation vote, the new chairman of the ABA, Ron Eyre of Eyre Bus Service in Glenelg, Md., will chair the new association. In year two, Brian Scott of Escot Bus Lines in Largo, Fla., the current vice chairman of UMA, will become chairman of the combined association for a two-year period.

Even before the consolidation vote occurs, an ABA/UMA Policy Committee will begin work to develop joint policies and positions. Among other things, the committee will work to set policy parame-

ters, negotiate policy concerns and integrate messages across both organizations whenever possible.

The policy committee will be expected to flex its muscles to assure staff is following the committee's direction and resolve any policy or legislative disputes.

A Transition Committee composed of four board members from both ABA and UMA will oversee the consolidation process. The committee will begin its work only if two-thirds of the members of both organizations approve the plan to consolidate.

The Transition Committee will be composed of Brian Scott, Rick Hillard, Godfrey LeBron and Tom Ready representing UMA, and Ron Eyre, Charlie Zelle, Doug Anderson and Craig Lentzsch representing ABA.

The current CEOs of UMA and ABA, Victor Parra and Peter Pantuso, respectively, will co-chair a staff merger program under the guidance of the Transition Committee. The committee also will review the day-to-day activities of both associations during the transition, referee any disputes, and monitor the performance of Pantuso and Parra.

CEO Search

A six-member Search Committee, composed of directors of the two organizations, will begin a search around May 1, for a CEO to manage the combined association. Pantuso and Parra will be urged to apply for the position.

Composing the Search Committee will be Ron Eyre, Don DeVivo and Gordon Mackay representing the ABA, and David Brown, Brian Scott and Jeff Polzien representing the UMA.

Bitimec wins MCI order for washers

STAMFORD, Conn. — Bitimec International, the manufacturer of mobile bus washing machines, is selling five washing systems to Motor Coach Industries.

The Bitimec units will be installed at selected MCI regional service centers. MCI already has a Bitimec bus washer at its service center in Des Plaines, Ill.

The installations are designed to help MCI reach its goal of providing a free wash to every service

customer.

"The least we can do for a customer who has chosen our equipment — and one of our service facilities — is to return a clean vehicle that says 'thanks for coming' and make life a little easier for the coach owner," said Jerry Cignarella, executive director of MCI Fleet Support service center operations.

Mark Paterson, general manager of the MCI service center in

The CEO of the combined organization is expected to be hired by year end.

The Transition Committee will propose names for the new association and ask members to offer "write-in" names — in addition to those suggested. After getting the member input, the Transition Committee will recommend names to the combined board. The board will pick the final name.

The District of Columbia Nonprofit Corporation Act requires that two-thirds of ABA and UMA members voting in the consolidation referendum approve the unification plan for consolidation to occur. That is different from what was announced in December when the boards of the two associations approved the plan. At that time, it was thought only UMA had to meet the two-thirds requirement and a majority of ABA members were needed to give approval. It was later found that the D.C. act applies to both associations.

ABA's general counsel, Washington attorney Richard P. Schweitzer, and association legal expert, Jerald Jacobs on the law firm of Shaw Pittman, have cautioned ABA and UMA board members they could be at legal risk if they do not complete the due diligence and follow D.C. law governing consolidation of nonprofit corporations.

Of concern to board members, says Schweitzer, is if the consolidation falls apart, the board could be held liable if there is a material reduction in the value of assets or increase in liabilities.

Not to Worry?

However, D.C. law also provides protection to directors and

employees of nonprofit corporations. For example, a non-compensated director of a nonprofit corporation may be held personally liable for acts or omissions only when they involve willful misconduct, criminal acts, or bad-faith actions. Volunteer directors are otherwise immune from civil liability for their acts or omissions as directors of nonprofit corporations. However, the associations as corporations could be held liable under a negligence standard for exercising business judgment.

Neither association expects its due diligence to uncover any skeletons or undisclosed liabilities. Both associations have already traded extensive financial information, and financial executives from member companies have reviewed 2003 audited statements and found no areas of concern.

A pro forma budget for the new organization has been developed by the association staffs.

Here are highlights from the proposed annual dues structure for the combined association:

- 1-5 coaches: Dues \$250
- 6-15 coaches: Dues \$500
- 16-30 coaches: Dues \$750
- 31-50 coaches: \$1,000
- 51-100 coaches: \$2,000
- 101-500 coaches: \$3,000
- 501-1,000 coaches: \$5,000
- Mega-coach operators: \$10,000
- Associate members: \$475-\$1,250 (*Travel, equipment and business services*)
- Coach builders: \$2,000
- Tour operators: \$400

Show Business

One of the first tasks the association will tackle is whether the annual shows sponsored by the two organizations — the ABA Marketplace and the UMA Motorcoach Expo — can be combined into a single event, or conducted at a single venue back to back. Industry suppliers want the shows combined in 2007, but staffs of both associations say the earliest it can be accomplished is 2008.

Here are the names of the individuals largely responsible for developing the extensive plan for combining the associations: Representing the UMA on the Unification Task Force have been board members David Brown (UMA chairman), Jeff Polzien, Brian Scott, Godfrey LeBron and Rick Hillard (former UMA chairman).

Representing the ABA have been board members Ron Eyre (ABA chairman), Charles Zelle (immediate past ABA chairman), Don DeVivo, Doug Anderson and T.J. Morgan.

Leaders like plan

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Coach & Tours in Greenville, Pa., and vice chairman of the ABA.

Combining the organizations so there's a single voice in D.C. is a "no brainer," asserts Brian Scott of Escot Bus Lines in Largo, Fla., who is vice chairman of UMA. "Everybody can see that, and everybody knows that," he said. "Here we have two sets of resources right now trying to accomplish similar goals. It is redundancy, repetitive."

Brown maintains, too, that the single-voice concept not only would help the industry protect itself better from issues that could do it harm, but also drum up backing from political corners that it seldom gets now. "There is a lot of support we should be getting from Congress that we don't," he said. "Instead, we get taxes and we get beat up with regulations. It just seems like if we could all band together, we could have more of an impact."

The four operators say they're pleased with the progress and pace of the consolidation effort so far. They expect the issue to be submitted to a vote by ABA and UMA members later this month or possibly early next month. A two-thirds majority approval is required to be ratified.

Powerful councils

Additionally, the association leaders are enthusiastic about the proposed structure that has been put together, especially the establishment of independent councils to serve each industry segment.

Brown said the creation of separate councils for all three of the industry's primary sectors — small, large and line-haul operators — and their strong voting positions, with seven members each on a consolidated board of directors, is important because it assures all of their voices will be heard. "The largest voice (on the board) would come from the three primary groups, all of whom have something in common in that they oper-



David Brown

Ron Eyre

Doug Anderson

Brian Scott

ate buses," he said.

"We want to charge those seven members from each council to run town-hall meetings for their segments, so we can make sure they are properly represented and their issues are brought forward," continued Brown. "This is a way to involve more people than just those seven from each segment without expanding the board to some ridiculous number."

Eyre noted that the proposed council system would give all segments a voice in association policies and procedures. "That was the intent, and that's important," he said. The new association's tour operator, manufacturer and travel members, as well as its equipment and business services members, also would be represented on the consolidated board and have their own councils, so their voices also would be heard by all members.

Ending duplication

Eyre contends that the duplication of effort and services by the staffs of the two groups is another major reason for combining the associations. "There would be a cost savings among members, operators and others," he said.

Scott also notes that operators would benefit by being able to take advantage of services that each group now offers exclusively to its own members. "There are a lot of good member benefits from ABA, and a lot of good member benefits from UMA, and we are going to keep both of those. So, at the end of the day, we should come out with a stellar organization," he said. "Basically, we would have one super organization. That simply

makes a lot of sense."

The leaders of the associations also maintain that the timing of the unification effort comes at a favorable point in the development of the industry.

"This is a good time because neither organization is hurting. Both are very strong and what they do, they do well," said Eyre, adding that neither ABA or UMA would be entering a consolidation from a position of weakness.

Added Brown, "I can't think of a better time unless it was five years ago when we talked about a merger. I think really, this is the best time. The work done five years ago, I think made everybody more aware of what the makeup of ABA and UMA are, and how similar they are. We're the same people."

Scott contends the timing is good because of the atmosphere and makeup of the political scene in Washington. "With a Republican Congress, a Republican White House and a pro-business atmosphere, we can get a lot done if we can speak with one voice right now, and I think that's pretty important."

Anderson agrees, noting that the industry has just gone through one of its toughest times ever. Now is a perfect time to bring the two organizations together, he says. "I just think it is the right time and there are good reasons in a very competitive marketplace for legislative voices and for the government representation to be speaking with one voice and really working together to preserve the little bit of positive recognition we have."

Consolidation catalyst

While the stars may be in align-

ment, Eyre says the real catalyst for unification actually came from a failed effort to create a motorcoach marketing program that would have been funded by the industry. Manufacturers, gathered at an industry meeting more than a year ago where the campaign was discussed, said they would not contribute funds unless there was only one trade group for the industry.

"We were challenged by manufacturers to try to do a consolidation so we could get the funding together to promote our industry," he said. "That led us to this unification."

Eyre said if consolidation is approved, the new organization would again propose the promotional campaign to the industry.

While a great deal of behind-the-scenes work has been accomplished in the lead-up to the members of ABA and UMA voting on consolidation, there remains much more to be done if the unification plan gains approval. The transition to a combined association is expected to take until at least Jan. 1, when the two groups would formally become one.

"The biggest challenge is going to be people working together and kind of getting used to the dynamics of the new organization," suggested Scott.

One participant in the consolidation talks said he viewed the opportunity to combine the staffs of ABA and UMA as one of the major opportunities presented by the unification. Merging the two staffs to build a new organization should be seen as a strength, he said.

Brown said the key to a successful transition would be the current

chief executives of the two groups, Peter Pantuso of ABA and Victor Parra of UMA. "They are going to have to be leaders and get everyone working together," he said.

Parra, Pantuso

Staff members of both organizations are to be retained, at least through the transition, and Pantuso and Parra are being asked to apply to become CEO of the new association. "Both Peter and Vic are encouraged to provide resumes to the search committee and as far as I know they both plan on doing so," said Scott.

Where the new association will have its offices has yet to be decided. Washington seems likely because ABA has a long-term lease on its quarters in D.C., while UMA owns smaller space in an office condominium building in Alexandria, Va. The ABA facility is larger and could more readily accommodate the staffs of the two organizations.

"That all is going to be looked at very closely through the due-diligence process about what type of escape clause we may have and what the market values of real estate might be," said Anderson.

Meantime, the leaders of the two organizations plan to push for a favorable vote by their peers.

"You know, if the industry is committed to having one organization, then the transition is going to take place," said Scott.

Anderson said that while the leaders of both groups believe consolidation is the right thing, they now have to appeal to the memberships.

"We just want to make sure we get it right so there isn't a repeat of a splinter organization a year or two, three, five years down the road, which ultimately is why UMA splintered off from the ABA.

"Our differences aren't very different.

"Their board makeup and our board makeup show we are all engaged in the same business. UMA does some things very well and the ABA does some things very well, and we want to take the best of both worlds," Anderson stressed.

Ontario Transportation Expo is set for April 18-20, 2005

TORONTO — The Ontario Motor Coach Association and its partner passenger transportation associations have kicked off registration for this year's Ontario Transportation Expo.

The show is the only joint bus event of its kind in North America, combining the school bus, motorcoach, public transit and commu-

nity transportation industries under one roof.

The 2005 expo will be April 18-20, in the Holiday Inn Select Toronto Airport. A highlight will be an appearance by Canadian football legend Michael "Pinball" Clemons, a former running back for the Toronto Argonauts who set the CFL record for all-purpose yards.

Clemons was drafted by the NFL Kansas City Chiefs and saw action with both the Chiefs and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers before moving to the CFL. He retired in 2000, and today is the head coach of the Argonauts.

Expo registration and exhibit information is being posted to the OTE Web site — www.ote.ca.

Or, contact Michele O'Bright at (866) 444-9904 or (416) 229-6622 Ext 229, or e-mail michele@omca.com.

The Ontario Motor Coach Association has five new directors. They are: Mark Hannah of Pacific Western Transportation, Ronald Malette of Tisdale School Bus Lines, Ghislain Leduc of

Leduc Bus Lines, John Crowley of Coach Canada, and Wayne Asquith of New Dimensions Travel & Tours.

Officers for 2005 are: Allan Cherrey of Cherrey Bus Lines, chairman; Dave Willis of Ayr Coach Lines, vice chairman, and Jamie Murray of Parkinson Coach Lines 2000, secretary-treasurer.

Million Dollar Baby and You

A little over a month ago, the United Motorcoach Association negotiated a landmark deal that allows its members to show movies on their coaches for \$80 per coach annually.

The licensing arrangement with a company called Motorcoach Movies covers most of Hollywood's major studios — Walt Disney, Touchstone, Universal, Paramount, Columbia, MGM, United Artists, Miramax, DreamWorks and a half-dozen others. Warner Bros., the studio that released this year's Oscar winner for best picture, Million Dollar Baby, is covered by the deal, but 20th Century Fox is not.

Operators signing up for the plan can show copyrighted movies — and all commercial movies are copyrighted — on their coaches without fear of violating federal copyright law.

That means when a customer brings a movie on board and asks the driver to show it on the video system, the driver can do it and the coach owner doesn't have to

worry about breaking any law and being held liable.

It also means coach owners can borrow, rent or buy movies from any legal source and show them as often as they want for the \$80 per year per coach fee. An operator who owns 5 coaches would pay \$400 for the privilege, and an operator who owns 20 coaches would pay \$1,600.

For operators, the arrangement is a great deal. The best any industry has negotiated with Hollywood moguls. Airlines typically pay more than \$80 to show one movie on one flight. The UMA deal is a flat \$80 for each coach for an entire year.

For operators who have been ignoring the law and not paying any royalty fee, the new arrangement is a good reason to get legal.

Showing a movie on a coach without a license can subject an operator to civil penalties ranging from \$750 to \$30,000 per movie, or as high as \$150,000 per movie if the showing was committed "willfully."

Attorneys for Hollywood studios gleefully try to extract maximum penalties when they go after violators.

Just so you'll know, a "willful violation" can occur after an operator has received a cease-and-desist letter from the Motion Picture Association of America. However, before a cease-and-desist order is issued, the movie association typically sends an operator what is called an informational letter, explaining copyright law as it applies to movies and spelling out the possible penalties for showing movies without a license.

Any coach company getting such a letter should know its operation is in Hollywood's crosshairs. Twenty-five to 30 operators in the U.S. received informational letters last year.

So, to avoid the possibility of costly fines, exorbitant legal fees and embarrassing publicity, now's a good time to contact UMA, or to contact Motorcoach Movies directly if you aren't a member of UMA.

Coach industry supports cross-country promotion

NEW YORK — An unusual cross-country bus tour this month — to promote British musical artists — owes much of its success to Coach USA and other segments of the U.S. motorcoach industry.

The stunt featured a 3,000-mile, New York-to-Los Angeles journey by a vintage double-decker London city bus carrying a small group bent on publicizing British music.

The BritBus Tour left Times Square in New York on March 1 and was expected in Los Angeles on March 12. It made stops in Columbus, Indianapolis, and St. Louis.

The trip was the brain child of a British singer-songwriter and entrepreneur Julia Jones, who has been living in the U.S. Three years ago, after reading a report commissioned by the British government that highlighted a precipitous decline in British music exports to America, Jones decided to do something to address the issue.

She came up with the idea of

the BritBus Tour and sold her belongings to finance the jaunt. She has been working since 2002 to turn the idea into reality.

Her goal was simple: Use the iconic red bus to attract enough media interest in the seven cities where the tour stopped to draw attention to British music artists and the latest British albums.

The Doves, Embrace and Ellie Lawson are among the artists being featured during the campaign, and the groups' record labels arranged for The BritBus Tour team to meet the bands at the end of the journey in Los Angeles.

The bus Jones obtained for the trip was in poor condition but Coach USA, its Gray Line New York Sightseeing unit and others were enlisted to spiff it up, rebuild its running gear and make it road-worthy.

Stagecoach Group, parent company of Coach USA, and the United Motorcoach Association also supported the effort.

Pipelines fail contamination tests

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Two major fuel suppliers say new tests confirm that it's impossible for them to deliver ultra-low-sulfur diesel fuel through the nation's pipeline system without picking up too much sulfur along the way.

Traci McCall, a representative of Marathon-Ashland Petroleum, and Jim Scandola of Buckeye Pipeline Co., told a trucking association that tests the two companies had independently performed resulted in ULSD being delivered to truck stops with too high a sulfur level.

Beginning in June 2006, the U.S. Environmental Protection

Agency will only allow ULSD to be sold with 15 parts per million of sulfur or less.

The test results, and a request by a large pipeline company for an extension of next year's deadline for delivering ultra-low-sulfur diesel, has prompted an association of fuel suppliers and pipeline companies to ask the federal government to allow them to sell diesel fuel with slightly higher sulfur levels than the new rules permit.

The pipeline companies say they need more time to isolate and repair areas in their systems where sulfur would contaminate the new low-sulfur fuel.

TSA to prohibit lighters on planes

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Transportation Security Administration has given travelers yet another reason to use a motorcoach.

The TSA announced last month that all lighters will be prohibited beyond security checkpoints in airports and onboard aircraft. This action is in response to a provision in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, which was signed into

law by the President on December 17, 2004, and requires that "butane" lighters be added to TSA's Prohibited Items List.

TSA said that after carefully evaluating the security threat, Congressional intent and operational considerations, it had determined that passengers should be prohibited from carrying lighters in their pockets or purses or in carry-on luggage in the sterile areas of airports or on board an airplane. The

policy will be fully enforced beginning April 14.

"By creating policy to add lighters to the Prohibited Items List we are closing a potential vulnerability in air travel security," said Rear Adm. David M. Stone, USN (Ret.), assistant secretary of Homeland Security for TSA.

The prohibition includes butane, absorbed-fuel (Zippo-type), electric/battery-powered and novelty lighters.

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UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION

MOTORCOACH EXPO 2005**Operators report rebound but new concerns surface**

Business is booming for many motorcoach operators.

Most motorcoach operators interviewed at Motorcoach Expo 2005 in Las Vegas late last month say they rebounded last year from the doldrums of the two previous years following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

"It was banner year for us," said Brian Scott of the tour and charter company Escot Bus Lines in Florida. "We turned things around and had our best year ever."

He said the difficulties the industry faced in 2002 and 2003 appear to have helped weed out some marginal businesses, leaving a little more work for the survivors. "Now we're in the best shape I have ever seen," he added.

Tony Fiorini of Silver State Coach, which operates mostly casino runs in Southern California, agreed: "We're doing exceptionally well," he said, adding that although he did not suffer as sharp a loss as many other operators, he did see a nice upturn in the business last year.

Michelle Petelicki of Panorama Tours in Wanaque, N.J., saw it too, noting that although students are taking shorter school charters—not going the distances they did in the past, the number of student trips she has been booking has increased substantially. "Things really picked up last year and we're hoping it continues through this year, too" she said.

"We're finally at a point in our industry where we are going into good times," added Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City.

Other operators offered similar comments, solidifying the belief that much of the industry has moved beyond the troubled years of the past and the tragic event that created most of the problems.

"I know one carrier that no longer allows 9/11 to be brought up anymore in their office," said Tour Group Magazine Publisher Carl Wassink.

Most operators now are looking for ways to keep the momentum going.

Steve Haddad of Carl R. Bieber Tourways in Kutztown, Pa., aware that a lot of people still



UMA CEO Victor Parra, far left, moderates the keynote panel that features (left to right) Steve Haddad, Jeff Polzien, Brian Scott and Craig Smith.

Bottom-feeders are threat, says panel of top operators

While most motorcoach operators have largely recovered from the debilitating aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, many are now facing another financial hurdle—a growing number of renegade carriers are undercutting them with drastically below-market rates.

Panelists participating in Motorcoach Expo's kick-off session, called "Building of a Strong Foundation," said the number of operators involved in price cutting has increased so rapidly during the past two years that the practice could be the top problem now facing the industry.

"We are our own worst enemy," declared Steve Haddad of Carl R.

Bieber Tourways in Kutztown, Pa.

Others on the panel—Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City, Brian Scott of Escot Bus Lines in Largo, Fla., and Craig Smith of Gold Line Inc. in Tuxedo, Md.—agreed, stressing that the time has come for operators to replace the damaging practice with charter and tour rates that allow for a quality return on investments.

"We need to get out of this mode that the only way we can sell is by dropping our prices," emphasized Polzien. "I really think we need to take that message home."

He suggested that operators begin selling and emphasizing outstanding service and other quality

features of the motorcoach industry to attract business rather than trying to entice customers with unrealistic prices that not only put an immediate hurt on individual operators, but eventually harm the entire industry.

"You're never going to get the price if you don't ask for it," he maintained.

In addition to healthy rate schemes, there are dozens of other ways operators can bolster their future, including diversifying their offerings and investing in good sales people, checking out the used coach market and investing in good sales people, said the panelists.

"You've got to have revenues

coming in from different directions," stressed Haddad, adding that carriers that rely on a single-service offering run a financial risk if the revenue stream is interrupted.

Scott said good used coaches offer operators an opportunity to upgrade their fleets without having to put out the large amount of money required for new coaches. "We used to buy all new coaches, but shifted to take advantage of the used-coach market," he said.

It also pays, said Smith, to hire outstanding sales people, including some from other industries who have no experience in the motorcoach business. "They go into areas to sell what we had not thought of before," he said.

Group travel picks up with new twists, turns

Group travel is headed in one direction—upward.

That was the word from motorcoach operators and others who have concluded that the business has rebounded strongly from the troubled years of 2002 and 2003.

Tour Group Magazine Publisher Carl Wassink said strong evidence that the business turned around sharply in 2004 came from tour operators who again bought 12-month contracts for advertising in his magazines.

Most of them dropped their long-term agreements immediately after 9/11 and began placing few ads.

"A lot of people out there think their future is very bright and they have faith in the future," he said. "They've moved past 9/11."

He said tours involving only women, military reunions, big city visits and sports activities all appear to be back.

While many of the old tours are back, a number of regular customers who have returned to coach riding—and some people new to the market—are looking for new adventures in traveling, forcing some changes in the business.

David Benedict of David Thomas Tours in Philadelphia said

his company has become adept at developing customized tours in response to new demands by customers. "We spend weeks and weeks coming up with new tours," he said.

To ease the development efforts, he said, the company will now craft a special tour for one group and, if it goes well, will re-market it later to similar organizations such as colleges.

Loren Jones of Northwest Iowa Transportation said his company also goes after new riders with specialized tours. Among them, he said, was one built around the appearance

of an old, but still popular musical group that was sold to baby boomers. "It has to be something near and dear to their hearts," he added.

Week-long mystery tours have regained popularity as well, according to Autumn Dipert Brown of Dan Dipert Coaches. "We continually sell out," she said. "It shows that our clients trust us."

Benedict said he also has noticed an increase in the number of days people are willing to take a tour. "We had been packing one-day tours, but now we are seeing that people also want two-day or three-day tours," he said.

MOTORCOACH EXPO 2005

Jose Velez of EZ Bus in Orlando, left, and Karen and Rory Ellinsky of Sterling Tours in Jackson, N.J., walk from one Expo session to another.

Putting the Web to work for your coach company

Motorcoach operators interested in gaining new business without spending much money need only look to the Internet.

That's the advice from Internet marketing guru Tom Antion who says he makes more than \$1 million a year using Web pages that cost next to nothing to build and maintain.

"Put some effort into your Web site and it will pay off 24 hours a day, seven days a week," he stressed.

Antion, a Solutions Seminar speaker at Motorcoach Expo, presented at a session called Making Your Web Site an Integral Part of Your Sales and Marketing.

He said the key to putting the

Web to work is not having a fancy and expensive Web sites, but rather single pages that serve as powerful magnets that capture people who are looking for motorcoach businesses through Internet search engines.

"They don't have to be fancy, they just have to work," he said.

Antion suggested that operators use the www.overture.com Web site to find out what words and phrases most people are using each month to search for motorcoach businesses and then connect single pages to those words that link to their company's individual Web site.

According to overture.com, in January 17,947 people searched with the words "bus tour," while

only 2,037 used "motorcoach;" 870 used "motorcoach tour" and 383 used "luxury motorcoach."

Antion said operators who are not linked to the most-used search words will miss out on hundreds of potential customers every month.

"So get your ego out of this and put in the key words that people are typing in," he said, adding that few people search for a motorcoach trip by using the name of an individual company.

Most of the single-pages, he said, can be built in minutes by high school or college students — he calls them "propeller heads" — who are proficient in computers and the Internet and who would work for \$8 to \$10 an hour.

Travel domain could aid industry growth

Finding motorcoach companies, tours, charters and related activities on the Internet might be getting a little easier.

Ronald Andruff, president of Tralliance Corp. of New York, said he expects to hear soon from the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers on a request to add ".travel" to the list of first-

level domain addresses.

If approved by the Internet protocol regulator, the travel and tourism industry would have its own domain for information, joining such popular domains as .gov, .biz, .info and .edu.

Andruff, who has been working with the United Motorcoach Association, said the industry needs

its own domain because it has become a dominant force in the Internet.

In fact, he said, 28 percent of all online sales are travel related and more than 168 million travel searches are made each year.

Andruff spoke at the annual Operator Lunch at Motorcoach Expo.

Operators report

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

have a negative view of motorcoaches, is getting people on-board his coaches by using them for charity work.

He parked a coach at a silent

auction so people could take a look at it before bidding on a trip, and he left another at a charity event where people were invited to fill it with canned food. "First you got to get them on the coach so they can see what it's like," he said.

Another operator said he has

come up with a near-perfect method of gauging the success of his television and newspaper advertising, allowing him the opportunity to spend the most marketing money where it brings in the most customers.

Dave Benedict of David Tours in Philadelphia said he has 65 toll-

Congressman Sodrel vows to fight for coach industry

U.S. Rep. Mike Sodrel says he's not about to forget his past as a motorcoach operator as he takes on his new job in Washington D.C.

The freshman Republican congressman from Indiana promised to keep a close eye on an industry menace — federally supported transit agencies competing for charter work.

Before being elected to Congress in November, Sodrel headed The Free Enterprise System, a large motorcoach operation based in southern Indiana. He was a featured speaker during the annual Legislative and Regulatory Update session at Motorcoach Expo.

Sodrel said there are only two things a member of Congress can do to emphasize a position, speak and vote.

"Every time I have the opportunity to speak and vote against competition to the motorcoach industry from transit, I'll do it," he vowed.

He said he is acutely aware that federal funds flowing to public transit systems are not to be used to subsidize competition against private motorcoach operators, and he vowed to do all he can to make certain that it does not happen.

Sodrel suggested, too, that motorcoach operators get to know their own congressional representatives so they can convey to more lawmakers their concerns about transit and other important issues facing the industry.

Another speaker, Phil Hanley, passenger division safety chief of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, said his agency is cracking down on a band of low-fare carriers — most of them owned



Rep. Mike Sodrel

by foreigners — who violate safety regulations while operating along the busy northeast corridor.

A seven-state task force, he said, has been stopping drivers for these companies, who face fines of up to \$10,000 for violations that include hours of service and drug and alcohol use. He urged operators who have information about the operators to contact his office.

In addition to the task force, Hanley said the agency has a goal of requiring new carriers to have safety audits within nine months of beginning operations, rather than 18 months as its required by federal law.

And, the FMCSA is improving its Web site to help educate operators and the public about safety issues.

Debbie Hersman, the newest member of the National Transportation Safety Board, said she is proud of the motorcoach industry's safety record and is working to see that it continues.

Of 43,000 highway deaths in the U.S. last year, only 20 of them were on motorcoaches. "That's a record you can be proud of," she said.



INTERACTION. Al Ambrosini of International Truck & Engine ponders comments by Wayne Eggen, center, of Charter Bus Lines in Delta, British Columbia, as John Fehr, right, of Beaver Bus Lines in Winnipeg listens.

free telephone numbers for his company and he uses a different one for each of his advertisements. "We track every call that comes in," he said, adding that he knows immediately which advertisement brought in the most calls and which ones are not getting much response.

Others operators say they are looking at developing variable pricing schemes that allow them to reduce their rates during slow periods and increase them during peak times when demand for charters and tours is the greatest.

Winners are named for top awards

Motorcoach Expo's biggest event, the 2nd annual Vision Awards Gala, honored four leading motorcoach operators.

The banquet was again a first-class event, treating attendees to music, dinner, desert and drama as four special awards were handed out.

Frank Henry, the long-time chairman of the Martz Group in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., received the United Motorcoach Association Safety Leader of the Year Award, the top safety honor in the over-the-road bus industry.

In presenting the award, Carmen Daecher of The Daecher Consulting Group of Camp Hill, Pa., said Henry had overhauled his companies, increasing the commitment to safety.

Named Operator of the Year by *Metro* magazine was New World Tours of Bristow, Va., and its president Dave Bolen. Ty Bobit, president of Bobit Business Media, publisher of *Metro*, cited New World's training program and renewed commitment to excellence.

All Aboard America! of Mesa,



Steve Haddad



Dave Bolen



Frank Henry

Ariz., and its owner, Jack Wigley, was named winner of the BUSRide magazine Motorcoach Industry Achievement Award. All Aboard America! was cited for its professionalism, innovation, and ethics.

There were co-winners of the UMA Vision Award.

The Martz Group and Frank Henry received the award, as did Carl R. Bieber Tourways of Kutztown, Pa., and its president Steve Haddad.

The Vision Award goes to an operator that has sound business practices, an excellent safety record, and uses innovative approaches throughout its operation.

The most touching moment of the evening came when Steve Haddad accepted the award. He noted he had purchased Bieber Tourways nine weeks before 9/11. He thanked his employees for supporting him and making it possible for the company to win the award; Motor Coach Industries and its CEO Tom Sorrels and other executives for standing behind him; the board and staff of UMA, and his wife for being willing to take the risk with him during the dark days of 2001.

Also honored was Kevin Whitworth of Whitworth Bus Sales for chairing Expo's popular Maintenance Interchange.



Enjoying Expo

Noel Patterson of Prevost Car, left; Gene Wright of B&W Charters in Kalamazoo, Mich., and Larry Williams of L.W. Transportation in Falmouth, Va., paused during Expo's Welcome Reception. Posing at the conclusion of the Vision Award Gala were Julia Clough and her mother, Nancy McCann, of Northeast Charter and Tour in Lewiston, Maine.



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'Great Show.' Expo vendors see return of better days

Business was booming on the floor of Motorcoach Expo.

With more than 30 new exhibitors and the strongest turnout of motorcoach operators in at least five years, activity on the show floor was robust from the time doors opened Wednesday afternoon until they closed Friday noon.

"It was a great show," said Robert Jones, vice president of sales and marketing for Setra of North America. "We are very happy," echoed Gaetan Bolduc, president and CEO of Prevost Car.

Similar sentiment was expressed by Bob Foley, COO of ABC Companies, and Michelle Silvestro, assistant vice president of National Interstate, the insurer. "The turnout was great," she said.

Las Vegas, as it turns out, was a great draw for the annual trade event sponsored by the United Motorcoach Association, with registration reaching upwards of 1,800 individuals, which is hundreds more than Expos of recent years.

The best evidence of the show's success was the pace of early sign-up for Expo 2006 in Tampa.

One UMA official said exhibitors "blew out the space" for Expo '06. One large industry supplier reserved an additional 6,000 square feet of space for next year and a number of smaller vendors increased their space as well.

Meanwhile, here's what the industry's largest suppliers were showcasing this year:

ABC Companies

ABC exhibited two 2005 Van Hool coaches and an upgraded ABC M1035 bus at its stand.

The M1035 gets a new engine for 2005, a Caterpillar C7. The in-line, six-cylinder power plant is available in horsepower ratings of 190 to 230. The M1035, which is built on a Freightliner chassis, features a lavatory, increased noise abatement, special ride and handling package, Amaya seating and Allison 2400 transmission.

ABC marked the addition of the new Cat engine with a press briefing and unveiling ceremony on the Expo floor.

The Van Hool coaches on display were an enhanced T2145 and enhanced C2045 with wheelchair lift.

The T2145 was equipped with a Cummins ISM 450 horsepower EGR engine, Allison B500 transmission, Amaya Brasil leatherette seats with fabric inserts, Isringhausen driver seat, Alcoa wheels, REI A/V system with five monitors, Pro Heat auxiliary heater, Monogram flush-type lavatory, and Carrier Sutak integrated HVAC.

The C2045 was equipped with a Cat C13 ACERT 430-horsepower engine, ZF AS-tronic transmission, Ricon Stewart & Stevenson wheelchair lift, Amaya Brasil seats, Alcoa wheels, Monogram flush-type lav, REI A/V system, Pro Heat heater, Isringhausen driver seat, and Carrier Sutak HVAC.

ABC had a second booth at which it marketed its parts and maintenance services. The company used Expo to launch a predictive maintenance program. The service, which is aimed at fleet users and coach operators, focuses on the savings users can expect by adopting an interval service program.

"According to a major fleet study it was revealed that for every \$1 of oil testing spent, users saved \$6.57 in repairs," said Carl Malecha, ABC national service manager. "Our program is designed to apply that basic ratio to every major equipment component to help fleet operators protect their assets and net significant savings over the long term."

Overall, the program helps fleet owners reduce equipment downtime by eliminating costly repairs and service redundancy.

Also promoted at the show was ABC's online parts ordering Web site. The system lets users search, view, price, order and track a comprehensive range of parts and accessories offered by ABC Parts Source. Customers use their own PCs.

The system is available around the clock, contains user search-and-sort links and has downloadable parts manual links.

Bird Bird

Blue Bird Coachworks may have had the only 2006 model coach on the Expo floor — the Blue Bird Express 4500.

The economy-priced, multi-purpose coach was equipped with a Caterpillar C13 ACERT engine, Allison B500 transmission, Alcoa wheels, Michelin tires, REI System 2000 A/V system, air-ride driver seat, rear-vision camera with driver monitor, Meritor independent front suspension and air-disc brakes, Excel thermopane frameless windows, and I/O Controls multiplex electrical system.

Also available at the Blue Bird stand was information from the coach builder's financing partner, ORIX Financial Services. Loan rates from 5.95 percent and lease payments from \$4,200 monthly were being featured.

MCI

Motor Coach Industries had two, must-see coaches on display — a restyled D-model and an E-4500 tricked out with a custom luxury package.

MCI used Expo to launch its new-look D4005 and D4505 models, with the D4005 on the show floor quickly overwhelming the glitz and glamour of Las Vegas in the eyes of Don Sanders of Louisiana Coaches Trailways in Marrero. Sanders bought the coach on the spot.

Sanders, his wife, Merina of Trips Unlimited Inc., and son Louis were impressed with the D4005's curb appeal and new standard features such as disc brakes and multiplex system. But it was Merina's reaction to the leather seating that prompted him to buy the coach.

"We liked the quality, the new design, the safety features, including the tire-pressure monitoring system, ... and the 40-foot size," said Don Sanders. The CAT C13 engine was an additional incentive. "We've been wanting to see how that engine performs," Sanders said.

The coach was spec'd with 39 seats, giving it extra legroom and openness. Louis Sanders, who is responsible for day-to-day operations at the company, said they will add 8 seats to bring the coach up to its 47-passenger capacity.

The Sanders plan to market the coach to high-end tour clients, corporate accounts and wedding parties. "It was a proud moment for us," said Louis Sanders. "This coach is so different, and it's good to be first."

"Louisiana Coaches Trailways has been a good customer of MCI for many years, and it was an honor for us to have them take this model. It's testimony to the success we believe the new-look D will bring to the market," said Tom Sorrells, president and CEO of MCI.

MCI honored another long-time customer, Tri-State Tours of Galena, Ill., and its vice president Rick Hillard. Tri-State was the first company to order the new-look D4005. Tri-State is buying six of the coaches.

The other MCI coach on display was an E4500 LX. The \$517,000 model was extensively modified by Amadas Coach of Suffolk, Va. In response to an inquiry from Bus & Motorcoach News, Matt Hotchkiss, bus and motorcoach finance specialist at Wells Fargo Bank, said that with a \$100,000 down payment, an 84-month loan on the luxury E4500 would mean a monthly payment of \$5,625.

The LX E-coach features an enhanced entry way and drivers area, custom interior features, a galley, custom overhead storage lockers with premium laminated finish, Internet system electronics, high-capacity electrical system, enhanced lavatory, upgraded REI A/V system and high-capacity water system.

The gold-painted coach had 42 leather Amaya seats, and is powered by a Detroit Diesel Series 60 hooked to an Allison B500 transmission.

The two MCI coaches helped frame what was one of the most unusual events ever at a Motorcoach Exp — a lavish wedding ceremony. Some might have considered the scene a little bizarre but, remember, Expo was in Las Vegas home of Elvis wedding chapels and more weddings than anywhere else in the U.S.

MCI played cupid for Jamie Murray, owner of Parkinson Coach Lines of Brampton, Ont., and his fiancée, Lynn Hewitt, who handles human resources and is a safety and training officer for Murray's company.

When Murray learned that Motorcoach Expo 2005 would be in Las Vegas, he approached MCI and asked if he could marry Hewitt at a ceremony in the company's booth. All this would be a surprise to Hewitt, who accepted Murray's proposal and ring a week before the show.

"It's a happy occasion, and we're pleased to share in their special day," said Patricia Ziska, MCI vice president of corporate marketing and major accounts.

"We've been buying MCI coaches since 1976," said Murray. "I like the idea that so many of my friends in the industry, and others I've invited, can help me celebrate surrounded by the MCI folks. The bus industry is my life," he said.

MCI had a second booth at Expo where MCI Fleet Support previewed a prototype, interactive parts manual. Official release of

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MOTORCOACH EXPO 2005**Expo vendors**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

the electronic manual will happen in June.

The manual on a CD will allow an operator to click on a picture of an MCI coach and drill down to locate the part that is being sought. The program also will link to the maintenance manual and schematic drawings, if available.

Additionally, the Fleet Support booth made literature available on a retrofit kit MCI is marketing that will allow operators to update the look of their D-model MCI coaches to mirror the look of the restyled D4505 and D4005.

The retrofit kit is sold in two versions. Option 1 is a complete D4000 or D4500 appearance kit that includes: Frameless side windows; new front exterior panels; new headlights; new side rub rails for the entrance door, and new side rub rail for the junction box door and bumper.

Option 2 is the same as Option 1 except it does not have the frameless side windows.

MCI employees at the Fleet Support booth also demonstrated online parts ordering.

Prevost/Nova Bus

Prevost had more coaches at its booth than any other manufacturer; it also had the priciest model.

Besides an updated H3-45 and Le Mirage XL-II, the Prevost stand also included a Featherlite Vantare Prevost conversion coach that was priced in the \$1 million range, and Prevost subsidiary, Nova Bus, displayed its new suburban coach.

Florida-based Vantare is one of the nation's largest bus converters and it deals almost exclusively in Prevost shells. The luxury Vantare model on the Expo floor was a show stopper, attracting lots of attention.

But for one afternoon, the Vantare was overawed when NASCAR legend Rusty Wallace visited the Prevost stand and signed autographs.

Wallace is one of NASCAR's top-10 all-time winningest drivers. He pilots the Miller Lite No. 2 Dodge. He has announced that this will be his last year of racing.

Not coincidentally, Wallace is a Prevost conversion coach owner.

Motorcoach Expo was the coming out party for a new customer magazine from Prevost. Called *The Prevost Connection*, the slick, semi-annual publication contains a letter from Prevost CEO Gaetan Bolduc, information about upgrades and enhancement to Prevost coaches, reports on regulatory issues, features about Prevost customers and employees, a calendar of events, and locator lists for Prevost sales and service representatives.

The two Prevost-branded coaches on the company stand contained the latest upgrades.

The H3-45 model was equipped with a Detroit Diesel Series 60 EGR engine, Allison B500 transmission, Jacobs engine brake, REI A/V system, Isringhausen air-operated driver seat, Amaya seats, Xenon headlights, a Pocatec destination sign, Webasto auxiliary heater, Ricon wheelchair lift, Alcoa wheels and Michelin tires.

It also had Prevost's advanced multiplex system that it is introducing for the 2005 model year.

The XLII also had a Detroit Diesel Series 60 EGR engine, ZF AS-tronic transmission, Jacobs brake, Webasto heater, Alcoa wheels, Isringhausen air-operated driver seat, back-up camera and monitor, REI A/V system with five monitors, Xenon headlights, Multina seats, and Michelin tires.

The Nova LFS Suburban that was unveiled at Expo is a 49-seat, low-floor bus that offers low operating costs and passenger comfort.

Nova Bus announced at the show that it has become the first North American heavy-duty bus manufacturer to obtain ISO 14001 certification for environmental management of its operations.

"We are very proud of having achieved the ISO 14001 certification. This highlights Nova Bus' commitment to the implementation of best practices in environmental and waste management, noise and waste emissions control, and prevention of ecological

accidents," said Gilles Dion, president and CEO of Nova Bus.

Setra

Setra of North America displayed two S 417 coaches with its newest passenger features.

New options on the buses were the "TopSky," a glass roof running the length of the aisle; a Scenic View system, and new flexible seating.

Top Sky will enable passengers to see everything from skyscrapers during the day to starry skies at night. The double-glazed, tinted roof is 2 percent translucent, which is comparable to the visibility of ski goggles.

Scenic View allows all passengers an unobstructed view from the front of the coach. It uses a small camera mounted on the dash near the driver to transmit the forward-view image to monitors throughout the cabin.

The new seating flexibility enhances passenger comfort with four reversible seats that can be quickly and easily switched to form club seating areas.

"These new S 417 coach options will add to the passengers' overall experience," said Patrick Scully, chief commercial officer for Setra. "In addition, these new features will enable coach operators to differentiate their business from competitors."

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State Association Summit is big success on first try

LAS VEGAS — A first-ever summit of representatives from state motorcoach organizations resulted in a better-than-expected turnout and an airing of issues that are frustrating coach operators across the U.S. and Canada.

The State Association Summit was organized by the United Motorcoach Association and its Legislative and Regulatory Committee, and conducted one day before the start of Motorcoach Expo 2005 here last month.

UMA President and CEO Victor Parra and Senior Vice President for Government and Industry Relations said the catalyst for the summit was the growing realization that the greatest governmental threat to private bus operators today "is from the states, not from Washington, D.C."

During the past three years, said Parra, states have been seeking to boost their revenues by taxing and increasing fees paid by private businesses, including private motorcoach operators. Littler had a label for the trend: "Death by a thousand taxes."

Parra, Littler and UMA board member Godfrey Lebron, chairman of the association legislative and regulatory committee, said they put out the call for the summit because they wanted representatives from state coach associations to hear directly from their peers and share information that could help each other.

In addition, Littler explained a "listserv" the association has launched to provide leaders of state

associations with timely information about government actions that may affect their members.

A listserv is a computer program that automatically sends messages to multiple e-mail addresses on a subscriber list. When someone subscribes, the listserv will automatically add the address and distribute future e-mail messages to that address along with all the others on the list. The term looks like it's missing an "e," but that's how it's spelled.

Much of the summit was devoted to attendees introducing themselves and reporting on critical issues they are facing. By the time everyone spoke, there was a long list of shared problems and a consensus that future summits were warranted.

At least 27 state, provincial, regional and national associations were represented at the gathering.

Among common problems identified by attendees were these:

- Public school districts using their school buses for charters
- Airport access issues
- Soaring registration fees
- Charters and other unfair competition from public transit agencies
- Efforts by local governments to regulate operations
- Parking and parking fees in large cities
- For-profit charters offered by churches
- Sales taxes on charter bus service
- Absence of bus inspections in 24 states



Linda Morris speaks up at an Expo session

- Canadian border issues
- Corporate taxes in New Jersey and Virginia

- Joint and several liability
- Climbing roadway tolls
- Elimination of exemptions
- Money hungry state legislators

• Shared-ride services turning into full-blown charters

Attendees also shared thoughts on ways to strengthen their associations, and to become more adept at dealing with political issues.

Linda Morris of Morris Meeting Management in Gladys, Va., which provides staffing for six state motorcoach associations, said the key to a strong and growing state association is fostering a dynamic committee structure. "Active committees

is how associations will thrive, instead of just survive," she said.

Romain Girard of the Quebec Bus Owners Association said his association works hard to build consumer awareness of its members services, including managing a Web site that promotes Quebec operators.

Two attendees said it was vital to build relationships with state and local politicians. Another attendee echoed that sentiment, saying you never know when you're going to have to call on a state legislator for help and waiting until there is a crisis is too late to try to establish a relationship.

Another attendee said that same advice should apply to state and local regulators, who probably

don't understand the nuances of the coach industry.

Chuck Andrews of World Strides in Luray, Va., the student travel organization, delivered a similar message. He urged the state association leaders to "make sure your members know their legislators in their area. If you know them on a first-name basis, it helps enormously," he said.

Dave Bolen of New World Tours in Virginia offered something of a reverse spin. He said state associations should attempt to help the national coach associations by aiding them in gaining access to key members of the U.S. Senate and House.

Steve Haddad of Carl R. Bieber Tourways in Pennsylvania said that when he testified before a legislative committee last year in New Jersey he was surprised by how unaware the legislators were of the impact of the coach industry in the Garden State.

Of course, New Jersey has almost as much bus traffic as any state in the nation and has one of the highest concentrations of motorcoaches.

"We need to educate the people making these decisions" about how much money the coach industry is bringing, said Haddad.

At the end of the session, those attending the summit elected Linda Morris to represent them as a "state voice" on the UMA Legislative and Regulatory Committee. During the next two years, she will report at least twice annually on state issues.

New directors join UMA board; departing directors honored

LAS VEGAS — Four newcomers have become directors of the United Motorcoach Association, taking seats on the UMA board at its semi-annual meeting following Motorcoach Expo 2005 here late last month.

Joining the board from UMA's Region I was Larry Benjamin of Northfield Lines in Northfield, Minn. Northfield offers a variety of coach and bus services and is a member of the International Motor Coach Group. Benjamin sits on the IMG board. Region I includes the western two-thirds of the U.S., plus the western provinces of Canada.

Elected to the UMA board from Region II was Dave Bolen of New World Tours in Bristow, Va. New World is a 10-year old company that Bolen has made one of the most interesting in the industry. UMA Region II is comprised of 13 states stretching from Michigan to

Louisiana and Florida, plus the District of Columbia and Ontario.

Steve Brown of Brown Coach in Amsterdam, N.Y., joins the board from Region III. Brown's company has four divisions that provide coach and travel services, tours, and contract school transportation. UMA Region III is comprised of 13 northeastern states and the eastern provinces of Canada.

Also joining the board was Michelle Silvestro, assistant vice president and national marketing manager at National Interstate Corp., the coach industry insurance company. Silvestro was elected the UMA board's lone non-coachbuilder associate representative at a meeting of associate members at Motorcoach Expo.

She succeeds her boss, Alan Spachman, president of National Interstate, whose term as non-coachbuilder representative on



UMA's board expired this year.

In other action, the UMA board filled two vacancies created by a by-laws change that phased out what were known as "permanent directorships" on the board.

Appointed to the board for two-year terms were William Allen of Sierra Trailways and Allen Transportation in Sacramento, Calif., and Dale Krapf of Krapf Coaches in West Chester, Pa. Krapf also is president of the National School Transportation Association and Krapf Coaches is a member of IMG.

All five permanent directors have left the UMA board during the past six months, including Bill Rohrbaugh of Bill Rohrbaugh's Charter Service in Maryland and John Silvanie of Sururban Charter Service in New York. Both had served the association for many years.

Three other former permanent directors, who had been active in the association for decades, were recognized by the UMA board by being named "honorary directors." The three are Warren Miller of

Pacific Coast Bus Service in San Francisco; Robert L. Quick of Quick-Livick in Staunton, Va., and Alex Allen of Amador Stages Lines in Sacramento. Allen is the father of newly-appointed board member William Allen.

The senior Allen, Miller and Quick join four other living honorary directors: Joseph M. Lewis, Harry E. Eyre, Joe Ready and Chuck Busskohl.

At the same meeting, the UMA board elected Tom Ready of Ready Bus Lines in LaCrescent, Minn., its secretary. Ready succeeds Godfrey Lebron of Paradise Trailways in New York, who could not be re-elected because of term limits. Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Charter in Oklahoma City was re-elected treasurer.

UMA announced that its roster of active (i.e. operator) members had climbed to more than 850.

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The new D4505,
also available, the new D4005

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