

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

April 1, 2004

THE NEWS RESOURCE FOR THE BUS AND MOTORCOACH INDUSTRY

Business tax relief sought in New Jersey

TRENTON, N.J. — Could there be light at the end of the tunnel? A bill has been introduced in the New Jersey General Assembly aimed at exempting motorcoaches from the state law that imposes business taxes on nonresident corporations.

A coalition of associations and Atlantic City casinos has been working for nearly two years to get such legislation introduced and it finally happened last month.

Assemblyman Jeff Van Drew, a Democrat who chairs the Tourism and Gaming Committee, introduced the bill (AB 2489). Drew, who has offices in Cape May and Millville, N.J., wants to prohibit the imposition of the state corporate business tax on out-of-state corporations that carry passengers into and out of the state in motor vehicles and motorbuses.

For the past three years, New Jersey has probably been the most aggressive state in the nation at collecting its state business tax from nonresident corporations. In the spring of 2001, a number of motorcoaches were impounded for nonpayment of the New Jersey business tax, a tax liability about which most of the companies weren't even aware.

Under New Jersey tax law, any nonresident commercial motorcoach company that carries passengers to destinations within the state, at least 6 times annually, is obligated to

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Parking, access announced for World War II Memorial

WASHINGTON — The National Park Service has announced new details related to bus access and parking for next month's opening of the World War II Memorial on the National Mall in Washington.

The memorial will be the focus of four days of events over Memorial Day weekend. Large crowds expected for the activities have prompted the American Battle Monuments Commission to restrict vehicle access to the memorial during the four days.

Information on alternative

access to the special events can be found on the American Battle Monuments Commission Web site: www.wwiimemorial.com.

Following the Memorial Day dedication celebrations, tour buses will be permitted to pick-up and drop-off passengers at the World War II Memorial. Drop-off of all visitors must be done from Home Front Drive (south of the memorial), accessible from southbound 17th Street NW.

The Park Service said that U.S. Park Police will strictly enforce no

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Charter rules battle hits critical point, House tackles issue

WASHINGTON — A critical stage has been reached in the fight by the motorcoach industry to stop Congress from giving public transit agencies virtually unrestricted authority to conduct charter bus service.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is considering its version of the highway and public transportation legislation containing the language regarding charter service by transits.

In February, the Senate passed a six-year highway reauthorization and public transportation bill (Senate Bill 1072) that contains amendments giving transit agencies carte blanche to provide local

charter service (Senate Amendment 2616, Section 3022).

The bill being considered by the House Transportation Committee (H.R. 3550) reportedly includes the Senate charter-service language, with an added provision calling for a directed rulemaking on the issue by the Federal Transit Administration.

Motorcoach trade organizations are adamantly opposed to this because of multiple past failures by the FTA to adequately enforce the current charter service rules.

"By their actions, (the FTA has) shown its contempt for the private sector and, as such, there is

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Sudden reversal will bring 450 buses to NY operators

NEW YORK CITY — The seven besieged private bus companies that provide daily commuter service throughout New York City are getting 450 new buses after a sudden policy reversal by the administration of Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

The dramatic shift was disclosed last month by Transportation Commissioner Iris Weinshall during a budget hearing before the City Council Transportation Committee.

Bloomberg had insisted for months the city would hold off on buying buses until an agreement was reached on a takeover of the private lines by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

"If we buy buses before the negotiations are complete, we run the risk of buying obsolete buses the MTA does not use and cannot service," the mayor said at the time.

The seven private companies, which serve 400,000 passengers daily in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx, operate with the help of a \$150 million annual subsidy from the city. That operating agreement, which was extended at the end of last year, expires July 1.

The city and the MTA have been conducting extended, and often-times acrimonious, negotiations regarding the proposed takeover. Based on testimony

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Eyre Bus Service beefs up security, installs GPS units

GLENELG, Md. — Last August, Eyre Bus Service Inc. won a \$202,500 grant from the federal Transportation Security Administration to beef up security on its fleet of 57 Prevost and MCI coaches.

More than one-third of the money has been used to buy and newly install a sophisticated global positioning satellite-based emergency security and vehicle location tracking system on all of its buses.

"Passenger security is paramount today and this system permits us to instantly determine the location, movement and route of any coach operating in our fleet — it's just like an air traffic control system," said Ronald L. Eyre, president of the company bearing his family name.

"Whether passengers are one of the thousands of students we transport on school trips annually, a packaged tour by a church group to New York City, or one of our 75 daily commuter runs in and out of Washington, D.C., our passengers can have the confidence of knowing that the whereabouts of their vehicle can be instantly pinpointed and assistance — whatever the need — can be dispatched immediately," Eyre added.

The roughly \$70,000 cost of the on-board tracking equipment and installation, plus additional government-approved passenger security enhancements, was paid for with the grant awarded Eyre by the TSA.

Eyre was one of 57 motorcoach companies, plus New Jersey Transit, the United Motorcoach Association and the America Bus Association, to be awarded security grants that ranged in size from

\$9,900 to more than \$5 million. Operators in 24 states were given a total of nearly \$20 million to make security improvements.

"Our request included amounts for the security system for all 57 buses, plus the installation of protective driver screens for each vehicle, and the application of identification decals on the outside roof of each vehicle," said Steve Parker, operations manager at Eyre (which is pronounced "air").

Eyre drivers also have been equipped with Nextel 2-way radio phones for nationwide voice communication.

The GPS system picked by Eyre Bus is called "FleetTrack" and is produced by Integrated Systems Research Corp. of Halethorpe, Md., a company specializing in wireless fleet management systems. The ISR technology provides real-time location monitoring — anywhere in the U.S. — of every coach in the Eyre fleet.

Each bus is equipped with a driver-activated keypad which, in the event of an emergency, transmits a distress message to Eyre's operations headquarters in Glenelg, Md., where 911 police assistance is then dispatched. Eyre has defined "an emergency," as an attempt by a passenger or others to commandeer the coach.

At the Eyre operations center, a real-time computer mapping display tracks the movement of every coach on the road, 24 hours a day. The mapping display software, similar in graphics to a Yahoo or MapQuest screen, can zoom from an area the size of the entire mid-Atlantic region, down to a single city block, showing the location of

New tracking system for buses

BALTIMORE — International Truck and Engine Corp., maker of cutaway bus chassis, is poised to introduce a telematics system that will allow bus fleet managers to track vehicles and monitor their performance.

The system includes an electronics module, an antenna and a GPS receiver antenna. International says it is the first OEM to offer such a factory-installed system for truck-chassis vehicles.

The initial International vehicles with the system will be medium-duty bus chassis and trucks.

"Telematics puts the fleet owner in every vehicle," said Mark Schumacher, marketing manager

of truck electronics for International, who gave a presentation on the system last month at the National Truck Equipment Association Work Truck Show here.

The International system communicates information from the vehicle through a wireless system to a desktop computer at the home office, accessible via the Internet, Schumacher said. The system, which has been under development for two years, will be rolled out in July.

International's system will encompass three areas — vehicle positioning, performance monitoring and maintenance and service.

For positioning, the system will

show a fleet's location by route tracking and "geo-fencing." That is, making sure vehicles are operating where they're supposed to be.

For performance monitoring, the system checks operating and idle hours and monitors equipment, accessories and fuel-tax reporting. The latter is important when routes cross state lines.

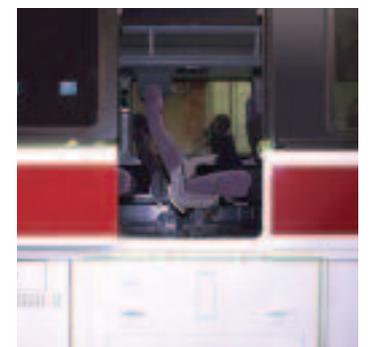
The system checks fault-code monitoring for maintenance diagnostics and service requirements.

The list price for the system will be about \$750 per vehicle, with access fees of \$20 to \$30 per month. Schumacher said the International system will be adaptable to vehicles by other makers.

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THE DOCKET

Security train-the-trainer workshops begin this month

WASHINGTON — A series of motorcoach security train-the-trainer workshops kicks off April 13 in Boston and moves on to nine other cities across the U.S. during the remainder of the month and into next month.

The security training road show is designed to build industry awareness of important motorcoach security-related issues, as well as assist operators in getting their employees trained on security issues and practices.

Information presented at the workshops will be tailored to all companies and employees, and will consist of five modules: security considerations for motorcoach drivers, maintenance personnel, terminal employees and company managers, plus incident control

and operations shutdown during a security threat

The workshops are being organized for all coach operators by the American Bus Association and the United Motorcoach Association under grants awarded by the U.S. Transportation Security Administration. There is no requirement to be a member of ABA or UMA to participate.

The two-day workshops will provide information attendees can take back to their companies and communicate to employees in virtually all aspects of the business. Conducting the workshops will be The Daecher Consulting Group of Camp Hill, Pa.

There is no charge to attend the workshops, but there is no reimbursement for travel expenses

associated with attendance. A working lunch will be provided both days, and on day two, if the hotel does not provide breakfast to registered guests, a continental breakfast will be provided.

Those interested in the program can request registration information by sending an e-mail to security@safetyteam.com. Or, information and a registration form is available on both the ABA and UMA Web sites, www.buses.org and www.uma.org.

All of the workshops are being conducted at hotels, where discounted room rates have been secured. The sessions will be from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on the first day, and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on day two.

Questions? Call Daecher Consulting Group at (717) 975-9190.

Here are the dates and locations for the ABA-UMA workshops:

April 13-14 Boston: Holiday Inn Boston/Logan, 225 William F. McClellan Highway, Boston, MA 02128. Phone: (617) 569-5250.

April 15-16 Chicago: Hampton Inn & Suites Chicago Downtown, 33 W. Illinois, Chicago, IL 60610. Phone: (312) 832-0330.

April 20-21 Charlotte, N.C.: Hampton Inn & Suites, 9110 Southern Pines Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28273. Phone: (704) 525-3333.

April 22-23 Pittsburgh: Holiday Inn Pittsburgh Airport, 1406 Beers School Rd., Coraopolis, PA 15108. Phone: (412) 262-3600.

April 29-30 Memphis, Tenn.: Holiday Inn Select Memphis Airport,

2240 Democrat Rd., Memphis, TN 38132. Phone: (901) 332-1130.

May 4-5 San Francisco: Hilton Garden Inn SF Airport Burlingame, 765 Airport Blvd., Burlingame, CA 94010. Phone: (650) 347-7800.

May 11-12 Phoenix: Hampton Inn Phoenix Airport North, 601 N. 44th St., Phoenix, AZ 85008. (877) 777-3210.

May 13-14 Denver: Hilton Inn, 16475 E. 40th Circle, Aurora, CO 80011. Phone: (303) 371-9393.

May 18-19 Dallas: Holiday Inn Select DFW Airport North, 4441 Highway 114 at Ester Blvd., Irving, TX 75063. Phone: (972) 929-8181.

May 20-21 Tampa, Fla.: Double Tree Hotel Tampa West Shore Airport, 4500 W. Cypress St., Tampa, FL 33067. Phone: (813) 879-4800.

Transportation union chief pleads guilty to racketeering

HOUSTON — Byron Boyd Jr., international president of the United Transportation Union, pled guilty in U.S. District Court here last month to federal racketeering and conspiracy charges.

Assistant UTU President Paul Thompson assumed Boyd's duties.

In September, the federal government indicted Boyd, former UTU International President Charles Little, former UTU Insurance Association Director Ralph Dennis and former Boyd special assistant John Rookard on charges of racketeering conspiracy, mail fraud, wire fraud and commercial bribery.

The government said that during a seven-year period beginning in 1995, the four union officials

conspired to violate federal mail fraud and wire fraud statutes, and commercial state bribery statutes by using their positions to solicit and collect cash and other objects of value from attorneys doing business with the union.

Little, who served as president between 1995 and February 2001, pled guilty to the federal charges in January. He will be sentenced April 9. Dennis and Rookard also pled guilty and await sentencing. Boyd will be sentenced in June.

"Today is a day of great sadness and personal regret," Boyd said in a statement. "I take full responsibility for my actions and make no excuses. What I have pleaded to is a burden that falls squarely on my shoulders, as it should."

Delaware tests new CDL procedures

WILMINGTON, Del. — The Delaware Division of Motor Vehicles is pilot testing a new CDL testing program on behalf of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

Three sections — 10, 11 and 12 — of the CDL test manual have been changed. The sections relate to pre-trip inspections, skills tests and on-road driving tests. The Delaware DMV has prepared an insert for the CDL

manual containing the three revised chapters.

The pre-trip inspection change allows inspectors to specify what they want inspected. In the Basic Control Skills Test, new parking maneuvers have been added, including a 90-degree backing turn.

The changes also allow applicants to make two free pull-ups and take two free looks for each skill.

Carriers like on-line renewal of credentials

TOPEKA, Kan. — The Kansas Department of Revenue reports that the state's on-line commercial vehicle registration system continues to gain in popularity.

The Kansas DOR inaugurated the Internet-based, on-line registration system for motor carriers last year. It was set up for use in registering vehicles under the International Registration Plan and in filing fuel-tax returns under the International Fuel Tax Agreement.

According to the department, more than 1,000 IRP accounts renewed on-line during the most recent quarter, with more than two-thirds of these paying their fees electronically as well. The system also is routinely handling IRP supplemental filings.

Additionally, more than 800 Kansas-based commercial carriers filed their fourth quarter 2003 IFTA reports on-line.

For more information, go to www.truckingKS.org or ksrevenue.org. The chief of the Kansas DOR Motor Carrier Services Bureau is Al Gerstner at (785) 296-1165, or at Al_Gerstner@kdor.state.ks.us.

Three 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 respond to these notices:

Hampton, Va. Deadline: April 2, 2004. Write to: Carol Russell, Service Planning Manager, Hampton Roads Transit, 3400 Victoria Blvd., Hampton, VA 23661. Phone: (757) 222-6000.

Macon, Ga. Deadline: April 15, 2004. Write to: Joseph McElroy Jr., Executive Director,

Macon-Bibb County Transit Authority, 815 Riverside Drive, Macon, Ga. 31201. Phone: (912) 746-1318.

Mexico, Maine. Deadline: April 19, 2004. Write to: Eugene R. Skibitsky, General Manager, Western Maine Transportation Services, 56 Pine St., Mexico, ME 04257. Phone: (207) 364-3639.

The notice from the Macon Transit Authority is of the outrageous variety.

It specifies that the charter service can only be provided "utilizing 28-passenger trolleys."

Any guess who has the only 28-passenger trolleys in Macon and environs?

Motorcoach operators can apply for Oregon tax credit on-line

SALEM, Ore. — Motorcoach operators can now apply on-line for the state income tax credit for diesel engines purchased in Oregon and meeting the 2002 EPA emissions standard.

The credit is limited to vehicles weighing more than 26,000 pounds, and declines in value with the size of the fleet, from

\$925 per engine for fleets of 10 vehicles or fewer, to \$400 for fleets of over 100 vehicles.

The tax break was enacted in last year's transportation budget bill. Applications for the tax credit are available at the Web site of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, www.deq.state.or.us/msd/taxcredits/truckengine.

TSA and Florida team up on seaport security

WASHINGTON — A new partnership to strengthen security at Florida seaports may simplify the security measures that motorcoach operators face when picking up or taking passengers to Florida cruise ship terminals.

The U.S. Transportation Security Administration, Florida state House and Senate leaders, and the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles announced the new partnership late last month.

The partnership defines requirements for background checks and state-of-the-art identification credentials for drivers, dockworkers and others who require unescorted access to the secure areas of the seaports.

The TSA will provide the infrastructure of its Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC), which seeks to balance the needs of commerce and individual privacy with those of security.

The program provides a high-tech credential that verifies workers' identities and ties each worker to a background check to ensure that high-risk individuals are denied access to sensitive areas of the nation's transportation system.

"This partnership is an example of what can be accomplished when federal and state governments work together," said Lolie Kull, TSA's program manager for TWIC. "By pooling our resources and expertise, Florida will be helping TSA take the next step in its effort to implement a national credentialing program for the transportation workforce."

Brian Scott of Escot Bus Lines in Largo, Fla., said the new partnership could prove to be a "huge help" to operators in the region.

"Currently, coach operators must run their drivers through separate badging and background checks at every seaport to gain access to secure areas," said Scott. "It's a huge inconvenience and cost."

The Florida Motorcoach Association met with staff members of the Florida Senate Home Defense, Public Security and Port Committee last month to discuss the issue.

"Florida is in a unique security position with 12 active ports, and was ready to roll out its own statewide ID card for drivers on

July 1," said Scott. "Apparently TSA was impressed that Florida was 'ahead of the curve,' as they put it, with implementing security procedures.

"As with all new programs, this

will surely have some issues getting going but we are expecting it to be much better than the current situation," Scott added.

TSA concurs.

It says that by having one uni-

versally recognized credential, workers will no longer have to carry numerous cards or go through redundant background investigations to enter secure areas at multiple facilities.

TSA's uniform credential is designed to help keep terrorists out of secure areas of the transportation system, including seaports, airports and other critical areas.

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THE DOCKET

EPA predicts engine makers will meet '07 regulations

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says diesel engine manufacturers are on target to introduce engines that will meet the tough 2007 emissions standards.

In a report, the EPA says it met

with 30 companies to compile its review of the industry's progress toward implementing 2007 clean-diesel technologies.

"We're pleased with the progress made in developing new engines," said Jeffrey Holmstead,

EPA's assistant administrator for air and radiation, in a statement accompanying the report.

The EPA review says engine manufacturers will use filters to reduce particulate matter emissions by more than 90 percent.

By using ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel, the new engines will reduce nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions by 50 percent. However, what additional methods needed by engine manufacturers to reach the EPA standard for NOx emissions

were not yet definite.

EPA has said it is neutral on what technology engine makers use to meet its emissions rules. EPA's allowable emissions level in 2007 drops to 1.2 grams per brake-horsepower hour of NOx

GAO urges EPA to consider engine incentives

WASHINGTON — The General Accounting Office has recommended the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency explore government financial incentives for diesel engine makers, as well as bus and truck buyers, to help fleets purchase 2007

vehicles that meet tougher air quality rules.

The GAO warned that engine builders and the truck and bus industries could face an even greater "pre-buy" of older models than took place in advance of the 2002-04 EPA rules.

That round of toughened EPA standards on diesel bus and truck emissions severely disrupted the heavy-duty commercial vehicle market, and stricter rules scheduled for 2007 could cause even more problems, said the GAO, the investigative arm of

Congress.

The GAO report said it was in the nation's interest to be sure motor carriers buy lower-emission engines in 2007, and financial incentives might be needed and EPA should drive the issue by making an initial proposal.

Even tougher rules coming

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. — Federal environmental regulators say they are developing tougher air-quality regulations for implementation after 2010.

The stricter regimens could possibly extend to controls for such things as "nanoparticulates," which are much smaller than the soot particles that current standards require be taken out of exhaust emissions.

"There will be more stringent regulations in the future," confirmed EPA's Charles Gray.

Detroit Diesel to use EGR for 2007 engines

DETROIT — Detroit Diesel Corp. has announced it intends to use exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) and diesel particulate filters on its heavy-duty engines to meet the federal government's 2007 emissions standards.

In a statement, Detroit Diesel President Carsten Reinhardt said the 2007 engines are fully under development, and the company plans to have them in test vehicles by the end of this year.

"EGR is a technology that is

very well known to us and increasingly familiar to our North American heavy- and medium-duty customers," said Reinhardt.

The company said EGR will be used on both Detroit Diesel

Series 60 and Mercedes-Benz engines.

Detroit Diesel has built more than 40,000 Series 60 engines with EGR to meet the EPA emissions standards that went into effect in October 2002.

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OPINION

It's crunch time

By the time this copy of *Bus & Motorcoach News* lands on your doorstep, key committees in the U.S. House of Representatives will likely be enmeshed in debate over reauthorization of the six-year highway and public transportation bill.

Deep in that massive legislation are amendments that could result in a slow painful death for hundreds of motorcoach operators across the U.S. That's because the bill would allow public transit agencies largely unfettered authority to provide local charter bus service, competing directly with private operators.

State and national bus associations have issued urgent appeals to their members, urging them to write to their congressmen and women, as well as members of the key House committees, asking them to revamp the language in the highway bill (H.R. 3550).

At the same time, lobbyists for the industry have been meeting with House members in hopes of soliciting their support for revised language that would clean up the amendments, making them at least tolerable to the industry.

While these meetings have been encouraging, they are not enough. There are far too many members of the House (465) and the House Transportation Committee (almost 60) for the associations to reach effectively.

Which is why they are appealing to their members to help carry the ball.

Congress is clearly uneasy about the fight between private and public bus operators over charter service. Consequently, there has been talk Congress might opt for a solution that on its face would seem appealing to many members. The idea is that the mess be turned over to the Federal Transit Administration, which would be directed to gin up a new federal rule regarding charter bus service by public transits. That is a recipe for disaster.

The FTA has shown neither fairness nor backbone in the bulk of its rulings regarding the current federal charter bus rules.

So, no thanks to that idea. When you write your congressman or woman, push for the language being advocated by the industry associations (see Page 12). It's the only acceptable solution.

Terminating employees fairly



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

You're fired! Except perhaps for Donald Trump, those words seldom are easy to utter. They're even harder on the employee.

All terminations should be well thought out in advance and reviewed by a senior manager, human resources person and legal counsel — if warranted. You should strive to be:

- Fair. This is the best preventive measure. Most fired employees sue because they feel they have been treated unfairly.
- Candid. Do not depart from the truth. For example, do not give "job

elimination" as a reason if you merely intend to shift job titles. Further, do not give poor performance as a reason if there are no unsatisfactory job evaluations to support it and the real reason involves something else. You should have clear, concise reasons for termination. If you do not, this should serve as a check on whether the decision is a sound one. Treat the employee with respect, emphasizing what he or she has done for the company in the past without being sympathetic or giving false hope about future opportunities. Also, do not be defensive about the decision.

- Consistent. Inconsistency damages credibility, and consistency and consistency are necessary for a legally defensible position.
- Definite. A business decision has been made, and that decision should be clearly communicated to the employee at a time and place to avoid unneces-

sary embarrassment.

• Informative and compassionate. Have all the information you need to assist the employee in making this change, such as final wage information, vacation pay, commissions, retirement benefits, severance pay, group insurance benefits and assistance programs. If you are helpful in this regard, it will add to the employee's feeling of being treated fairly. If you give no guidance, the employee may feel lost and turn to an attorney for assistance.

You must always remember that you are subjecting the person and their family to a dramatic change in their lifestyle so try to follow the above principles to ease the impact of the termination.

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

To the Editor:

I was disturbed to learn so few of the many companies in our industry are concerned about security, and that they would not be taking every opportunity to advance their training programs in that area. ("It's free, it's painless" editorial, *Bus & Motorcoach News*, March 1). I'm afraid that the lack of interest may be part of the prevailing overall indifferent attitude within our industry.

In Ohio, we have witnessed this to the detriment of all. The lack of interest resulted in the end of our state (motorcoach) organization. As a result, our state has taken every opportunity to pass legislation targeted at the charter industry, from excluding us

from sales tax exemption, to the attempt to double our inspection fees.

When the sales tax proposal was announced, we sent letters to all of our customers to inform them and ask that they write their representatives with their opinions. We actually had competitors call, asking about it because they were unaware of the proposal. The proposal was passed into law last year and took effect in August.

Ohio is not the only place using the charter industry to bank roll their spending in a vain attempt to balance their budgets. Atlantic City's idling fees are ridiculous. With any research they would have found that buses actually decrease air pollution and traffic bottlenecks as an alternative to 50 cars and SUVs running around. And \$10,000

for the first offense, \$25,000 for the second offense, and \$50,000 for the third and each subsequent offense is simply legalized rape. If cleaner air, fewer bottlenecks and public safety are really the goal, then they should be promoting our industry, not penalizing it.

Our industry needs to wake up, be proactive and take advantage of the changes taking place in our country. We are in a position to offer a service that will provide a solution to the problems our legislators claim to be trying to solve. If our industry continues to be reactive we will all fall victim to our own indifference.

Stephanie Swigart
S&S Coach Company
Lexington, Ohio

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Income tax time: Last-minute tips

This is the April 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*, and that means April 15 is looming large.

Clearly, if you haven't already filed your taxes, it's time to get moving.

Here, for the procrastinators and those busy looking for last-minute deductions, are a few tax tips:

The biggest item that no operator can afford to overlook this year is the potential impact of the tax-cut law that went into effect last year. It included provisions to spur equipment spending by small companies, including motorcoach operators.

Although the overall tax cut was not specifically targeted to help small bus companies, they can use some provisions to have the government underwrite part of their costs for coaches — new or used — they purchased during the year.

The law temporarily quadruples the annual amount that small companies can write off against their taxes for spending on capital goods.

The amount of equipment purchases that firms can immediately expense — rather than depreciate over time — is boosted to \$100,000 from \$25,000 until the end of next year. After 2005, it reverts to \$25,000 again.

Most tangible personal property used in your business qualifies for this tax break, not just coaches. Land, buildings and certain other kinds of property aren't eligible, however.

Other provisions in the law:

- The law doubles the amount of money that qualifies for such expensing to \$400,000 from \$200,000.

- The additional first-year bonus depreciation deduction, first approved in the 2001 tax cut, increased to 50 percent from 30 percent for investments acquired and placed in service after May 6, 2003. The 50 percent bonus is on top of the regular first-year depreciation allowance.

Between them, these two provisions offer significant tax incentives for spending on business equipment. Both rules have some

complex requirements and exceptions. A tax adviser can help determine if you meet the requirements and the extent of the benefits in your particular situation.

One business law firm figures that small business owners will tend to achieve the maximum benefit by expensing purchases of used assets, while saving bonus depreciation for purchases of new assets.

The 2003 law also cut the top tax rate to 35 percent from 38.6 percent.

Overlooked deductions

Many deductions are commonly overlooked because taxpayers don't think they're big enough to matter. When it comes to taxes, every little bit helps and small things can add up fast. Don't overlook the following:

- Business-related subscriptions
- Association dues
- Internet fees, including AOL/Earthlink/Net Zero
- Office supplies of every description

- Annual credit card fees and interest (business only credit cards)

- Administrative fees: Bank account charges, ATM fees, check reorder fees

- Computer software/software support

- Business cleaning/cleaning supplies

- Security fees

IRA time

April 15 is the last day to make an IRA contribution for the 2003 tax year. Filing a tax extension doesn't change that deadline. This applies to regular and Roth IRAs. Remember, regular IRAs are tax deductible and Roth IRAs are not.

Proof of mailing

Many tax advisers say it's smart to send tax returns by certified mail, return receipt requested, or get a receipt from an IRS-approved express delivery service. This is the only proof you can count on to prove you mailed your tax return on time.

N.J. taxes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

pay the corporate business tax.

Drew's bill, if it becomes law, would eliminate that requirement. A lobbyist involved in the effort to get the bill introduced said Drew is very committed to winning passage. Interestingly, Drew's bill would be retroactive to Jan. 1, 2001. Hearings on the proposed legislation could occur next month or in June.

The coalition that has been pushing for a bill includes the Greater New Jersey Motorcoach Association (formerly the Atlantic City Bus Operators Association), the United Motorcoach Association, the Pennsylvania Bus Association, the National Tour Association, the American Bus Association, Atlantic City casinos, CPA Joe Fernandez and others.

The group hired a lobbyist in the fall of 2002 to begin the drive to gain legislative relief for the industry. The New Jersey effort could serve as a stalking horse for other states that require out-of-state operators to pay corporate franchise taxes. Two states in particular would be targeted next: Pennsylvania and Minnesota.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Easton Coach wins contract for Hunterdon County, N.J.

EASTON, Pa. — Easton Coach Co. has taken over operation of The LINK public transportation system for Hunterdon County in west-central New Jersey. Easton won a contract to manage the service.

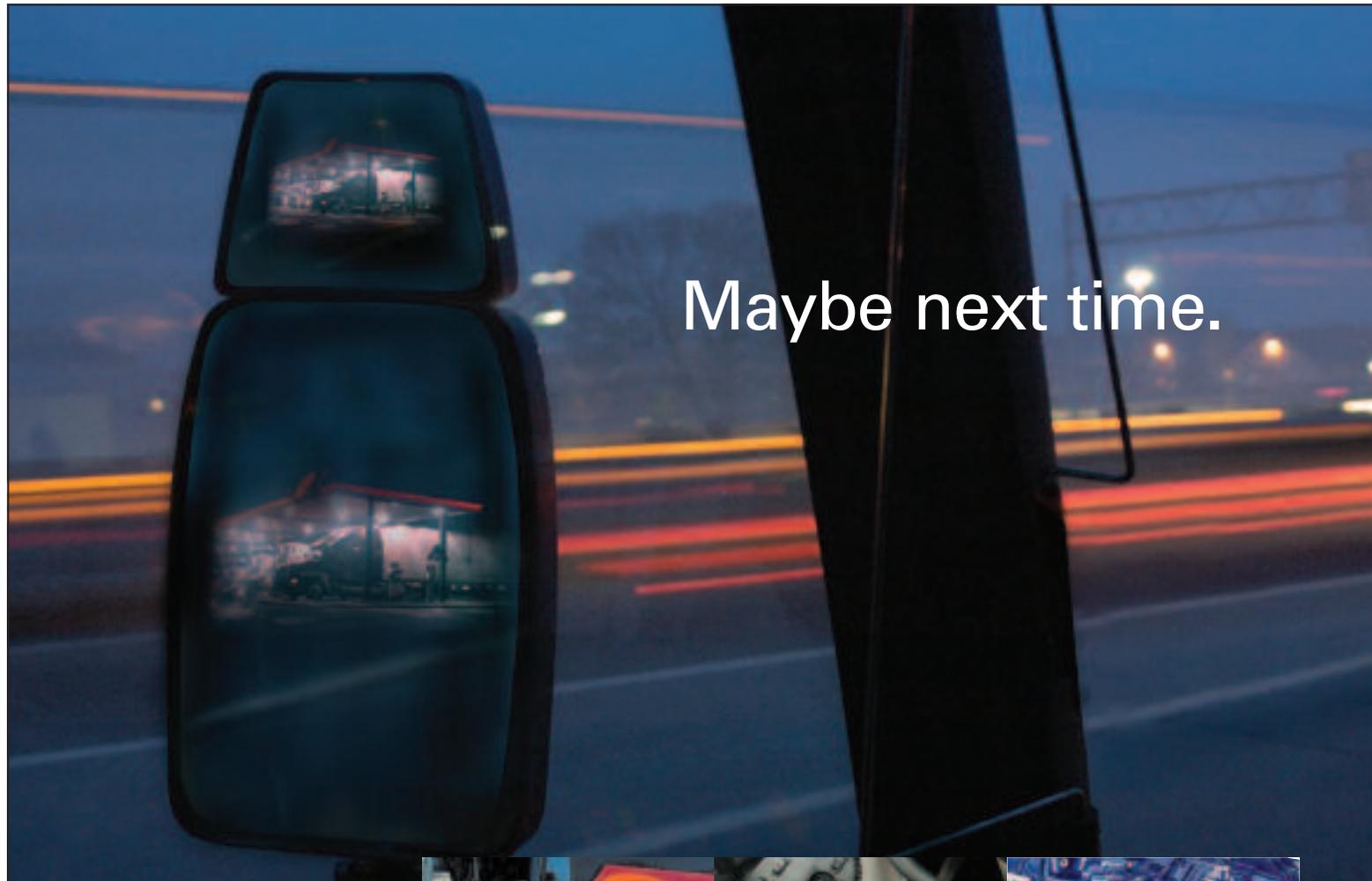
The LINK transports about 170,000 people each year using 30 vehicles. It operates Monday - Friday, under the aegis of the county department of human services, providing a combination of scheduled and on-demand service.

It operates 19 routes and connects county residents with New York City-bound commuter coaches and New Jersey Transit buses.

"The operation fits nicely for us — both operationally and geographically — given we operate

other large public transit contracts and have historically run a significant amount of charter bus business in New Jersey's western counties, including Hunterdon County," said Joe Scott, president of Easton Coach.

In addition to the contract with Hunterdon County, Easton Coach also operates public paratransit contracts in Northampton, Lehigh and Carbon counties in Pennsylvania, and has a fleet of 26 coaches and 15 other vehicles.



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N.Y. buses

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

given by representatives of the two sides at last month's transportation committee hearing, an agreement seems nowhere in sight.

Weinshall said the new buses, which will cost about \$350,000 each, or a total of more than \$156 million, will have the same specifications used by the MTA. That would mean that if the MTA does eventually take over from the private lines the new buses "can easily go into the fleet of the MTA," she said.

The seven private carriers operate 1,251 buses, many of them 18 to 20 years old and in terrible disrepair. The operators have complained for years about both the size of the city subsidy and the absence of money to maintain the buses they operator for the city.

The normal procurement process for new buses in New York can take months — sometimes years. But procurement officials plan to ask transit bus builders to let the city "cut in front of the line a bit" and get the buses more quickly, Weinshall said.

"The plain truth is that these buses should have been ordered two years ago," said John Liu, a member of the City Council and chairman of the transportation committee. "Since then, service has gone down the tubes and hundreds of buses are out of commission."

Still, Liu said Weinshall's bus-purchase announcement is good news. He pressed the city and MTA to "get serious" with their takeover negotiations.

Weinshall assured Liu that the Bloomberg Administration would not turn its back on bus riders or cut off its subsidy to the private operators if the takeover doesn't happen by July 1.

Bloomberg's preliminary budget plan envisioned saving \$150 million a year from the MTA takeover. But the MTA wants the city subsidy to continue and possibly increase.

Weinshall also announced the city is negotiating to buy 25 older buses the MTA is retiring.

American Seating moves headquarters to historic manufacturing facility

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH. — American Seating has relocated its world headquarters to a renovated old manufacturing plant on its campus, which has been renamed American Seating Park.

The move signals the company's intention to remain in Grand Rapids.

The new home for American

Seating is in one of the company's historic manufacturing facilities that was partially vacated and is over a century old. The building was both a relic of the company's manufacturing heritage and part of its roots in Grand Rapids.

During the 1990s, American Seating's owner and COO, Edward Clark, began working

with a local construction firm to develop a plan to preserve the company's historic buildings, as well as create a broader commercial and residential complex.

The planning resulted in American Seating Park, which encompasses 12 acres, containing American Seating's 55,000-square-foot headquarters on the

first floor, housing 140 employees and executive offices.

Other floors contain commercial space available for lease by other companies, as well as apartments and condominiums for loft-like living. There's also a restaurant and 150-seat amphitheatre.

The new headquarters means

that for the first time all American Seating employees are located on one floor in one building. Previously, employees were spread in two different buildings on four floors.

American Seating is a leading manufacturer of seating for the bus industry, plus stadiums, arenas, and educational facilities.

Eyre Bus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

the vehicle, the name of the street it is traveling (or stopped on) and a cross street reference.

When activated, the emergency signal creates an audible and visual alert on the monitoring screen at the operations center, identifying the vehicle in question and pinpointing its location.

Parker said the system can be calibrated to transmit location coordinates on a vehicle as frequently as every minute. The system also permits Parker to set up a geographic security network, notifying him automatically when a coach has entered, for example, a parking facility or arrived at a specific hotel or other destination.

That same security network can be set to send an alert if a coach goes beyond a specified perimeter. For example, a limit programmed into the system might set a 150-mile radius perimeter from a departure point for a coach embarking on a 130-mile trip. Should the coach go beyond the 150-mile zone, the vehicle tracking system automatically transmits an alarm to the operations center.

The FleetTrack system hardware consists of a small, on-board mounted panel box, including the emergency key; a GPS transmitting unit; wiring harness, and antenna. Typical installation time on an Eyre coach was an hour, done by ISR technicians based in Baltimore. The average cost to equip each of the 57 Eyre coaches was approximately \$1,200. Eyre then contracts for a monthly package of wireless reports.

Parker said Eyre investigated 15-16 possible vendors and evaluated demonstrations from three finalists before selecting FleetTrack. He said the mapping software of ISR Corp., plus its Baltimore-based tech support and product quality were important factors in the selection.

Information about ISR Corp. can be found at www.isrfleettrack.com. Eyre Bus has a Web address of www.eyre.com.

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CP0005

INDUSTRY NEWS

Improving the sales process, and understanding customers

ATLANTA — Honing sales skills and identifying the process customers go through when making purchasing decisions are critical factors in improving bottom-line results, according to a leading sales expert.

Rob Jolles encourages business managers, sales professionals and customer service representatives to become better listeners and to ask more questions of customers.

"Teach your people to ask questions and to listen. Get your customers on the phone and get them to talk. Do not let your sales force regurgitate product offerings," asserts Jolles.

Many sales people say they've had a lot of sales training but really what they learned was a lot about certain products, Jolles continues. "That's not sales training."

Jolles made his points during a session called "New Business Development: Learning from a Different Perspective" at this year's Motorcoach Expo 2004 in Atlanta.

The sales guru told attendees it takes practice to be smooth at selling. Sales techniques may be "robotic" at first, but after experience they will become much more natural, he contends.

Jolles said it takes practice to be smooth at selling. Sales techniques may be a little 'robotic' at first but after experience it will become much more natural.

During his session, Jolles cited a study by Technical Assistance Research Programs Inc. that showed an average business hears from 4 percent of its unhappy customers. Of those who do not bother to complain, 25 percent have "serious" problems.

A customer with a problem will tell 11 to 20 people about it, but a customer who has had a problem resolved by a company only will tell 3 to 5 people. "That is proof that bad news spreads fast," Jolles said.

And that's why "customer-centered selling" is critical, he contends. This process involves the sales representative asking questions to gather information. The questions should be both open and closed-ended.

Open questions are used to get the customer talking, gather information, expand on the information provided, and open up a conversation. These questions usually begin with who, what, when,



Sales expert Rob Jolles

where, why and how.

Closed questions are used to test, qualify, clarify and control the flow of information, said Jolles. These questions generally require a 'yes' or 'no' answer, and often begin with can, do, is, will, could or have.

Jolles also conducted a session called "Getting Off the Price Issue: Breaking Away from an Order-Taking Mentality." This workshop focused on the customer process when making a purchasing decision.

"Make price a non-issue before it comes up. Break away from your order-taking mentality," Jolles urged listeners. "Understanding how people buy is key to being an effective salesperson. Research has shown that buying involves a process on the part of the customer. That process is repeatable and predictable, and is essentially the same in every industry."

He said there are eight stages that a customer goes through: satisfied, acknowledge, decision, criteria, measure, investigate, selection and reconsider.

Only 4.5 percent of people are in the satisfied stage, Jolles said. They are totally content and perceive no problems with their current situation.

During the acknowledge stage, the customer is aware a problem exists but feels no sense of urgency to do anything about it. "This customer will whine to you about this and that but that doesn't mean they want to change," he explained.

Less than .5 percent of people fall into the decision stage where they are "fed up" and resolve to fix the existing problem.

During the criteria stage, "the problem shapes the need," Jolles said. The customer shifts focus away from the problems and attempts to determine what the buying criteria will be. "People don't fix little problems. They fix big ones," Jolles added.

During the measure stage, the customer better defines the list of criteria. In the investigate stage, the customer begins to compare various solutions to address the criteria.

Next, the customer chooses the solutions that best fit the criteria in the selection stage. The final stage, the reconsider stage, the customer reevaluates the decision made.

"Sales success is not solely determined by the salesperson's ability to convince the customer but rather relies on the salesperson's facilitation of this decision process," Jolles said.

The salesperson has to adopt certain steps to help make the sale. The research stage is a critical element necessary to build trust. By using background probes, a sales person can uncover information about the customer's current situation, qualify the customer and put the customer at ease.

During this stage, keep questions open, avoid problems and play up your company's strengths, Jolles said. "You're selling the relationship. Begin with the end in mind."

During the analysis stage, you will probe for more information from the customer by using identifying, developing and impact probes. Identifying probes allow you to find the problem without using the word problem.

For example, ask "what are your concerns about this trip?" By using the developing probes you are encouraging the customer to tell you more. By asking certain types of questions you can help increase the customer's sense of urgency. "Build that problem up. If you are selling at a premium you have to open the wound." Impact probes should get them to see the consequences of that problem and get them to look down the road at the solution, Jolles said.

Finally, the salesperson will want to confirm their work through a two-step process. First, ask if there are any other concerns and then ask if their ready to buy.

"Now you're ready to get the customer to make a decision to fix their existing problems by confirming with a closed question," Jolles said. This, he said, is the time to ask: "Would you like to look at some alternatives?" or "Are you committed to making a change?"

"Be a consultant—not an order taker."



Sun Diego Charter Company San Diego

SAN DIEGO — Sun Diego Charter Company of San Diego has taken delivery of 15 Setra S417 luxury motorcoaches.

The S417s are the first Setra coaches to join the charter company's 50-vehicle fleet. Two of the coaches are being placed at Sun Diego's growing Los Angeles office that opened last year.

"We like to maintain coaches with the newest technology available," said Rich Illes, president of

Sun Diego Charter. "By operating modern coaches, we can offer our clients the best possible travel experience."

Established 17 years ago, Sun Diego Charter, has built its business on customer service. It is a member of the International Motorcoach Group and was the 2003 recipient of the United Motorcoach Association Vision Award for providing superior customer services and experiences.



Superstar Hawaii Transit Honolulu

HONOLULU — One of Hawaii's most innovative operators, Superstar Hawaii Transit Service, is expanding its MCI E4500 coach fleet to 25 next month.

"By adding six more E4500 coaches we can accommodate the demand for our Royal Star Service," says company General Manager Marc Rubenstein.

Superstar's Royal Star Service was developed for VIPs and incentive groups, exclusively using E4500 coaches, plus amenities such as hand towelette and mint service. "The response is

tremendous from passengers and tour agents alike," said Rubenstein. The service "makes it possible to differentiate us in the marketplace."

The new E4500s being added to the Superstar fleet are equipped with Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines, Allison B500 Transmissions, 58 American seats and REI A/V systems. Two of the coaches are lift-equipped.

Superstar operates a total of 38 motorcoaches that are available for charter, airport transportation and tours. They all offer the company's on-time guarantee.

DriveCam Academy offers training

SAN DIEGO — DriveCam Video Systems, a developer of fleet safety technology, has created a training program, called the DriveCam Academy, to be conducted April 28, in Newark, N.J.

The course will provide advanced training on driver improvement and incident prevention using the DriveCam safety program. The course will be taught

by Del Lisk, DriveCam's vice president of fleet safety services.

Areas to be covered include reviewing and analyzing DriveCam recordings and using recordings to counsel drivers and prevent future incidents.

For enrollment information, e-mail dlisk@drivecam.com or call (866) 419-5861. Information also is available at www.drivecam.com.



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Text proposed to amend Senate highway bill

Following is the latest version of language proposed by the motorcoach industry to amend Senate Bill 1072 regarding transit competition:

Section 5323 is amended by striking subsection (d)(2) and adding at the end of subsection (d) the following—substituting in lieu thereof the following new subsection:

“(d) Conditions on Bus Transportation Service. — Financial assistance under this chapter may be used to buy or operate a bus only if the recipient agrees to comply with the following conditions on bus transportation service.

“(12)(A)(A) Except for subparagraph (B), A recipient may provide incidental charter bus service only within its lawful service area to fulfill charter bus service needs that are beyond the capacity of private operators and only under the following procedures -

“(i) on an annual basis, the recipient shall publish by electronic and other appropriate means a notice indicating its intent to offer incidental charter bus service within its lawful service area and

soliciting notices from private bus operators that also wish to appear on a list of carriers offering charter bus service in that service area;

“(ii) a private bus operator that wants to appear on a list of carriers offering charter bus service in such service area must notify the recipient in that area on an annual basis;

“(iii) when a recipient receives a request for charter bus service, as soon as practicable the recipient must notify in an electronic format the private bus operators listed as offering charter service in that service area with the name and contact information of the requestor and the nature of the charter service request; and

“(iv) if no private bus operator indicates it is willing and able to provide the service within a 72-hour period from the receipt of such notice, then the recipient may offer to provide the charter bus service;

“(B) A recipient that operates 2,000 or fewer vehicles in fixed-route peak hour service may provide incidental charter bus transportation directly to —

“(i) local governments; provid-

ed, that local governments shall not become the broker for charter bus service for conventions, sporting events or other large-scale charter service opportunities unless the procedures of subparagraph 2(A) above are met, nor shall this exception disrupt private operators from providing school activity services; and

“(ii) social service entities with limited resources; provided, that private bus operators shall not be displaced from existing opportunities to provide such service.

“(BC) Service by a recipient to irregularly scheduled events, where the service is conducted in whole or in part outside the service area of the recipient, regardless of whether the service is contracted for individually with passengers, is subject to a rebuttable presumption that such service is charter service; provided that this presumption shall not apply if the service is commuter service.

“(CD) If the Secretary determines that a violation relating to the provision of charter service has occurred, the Secretary shall correct the violation. The Secretary shall be authorized to

issue orders to recipients to cease and desist in such actions, and such orders shall be binding upon the parties.

If a recipient fails to correct a violation within 60 days of receipt of a notice of violation from the Secretary, the Secretary shall withhold up to five percent (5%) of the financial assistance available to the recipient under this chapter for the next fiscal year, or up to \$200,000, whichever is lesser.

“(DE) Complaints about violations of charter bus by recipients shall be considered under the following procedures:

“(i) a complaint must be submitted to the Regional Administrator of the Federal Transit Administration, who shall provide a reasonable opportunity for the recipient to respond to the complaint, and an opportunity for an informal hearing, and then shall issue a written decision within 60 days after the parties have completed their submissions;

“(ii) the decision of the Regional Administrator may be appealed to a panel comprised of the Federal Transit Administrator

and personnel in the Office of the Secretary of Transportation and/or other persons with expertise in surface passenger transportation issues, which panel shall consider the complaint de novo on all issues of fact and law;

“(iii) the appeals panel shall issue a written decision on an appeal within 60 days after the completion of submissions, and that decision shall be the final order of the agency and subject to judicial review in district court;

“(EF) Within one year from the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall complete a rule-making to amend the regulations implementing this subsection.

“(23) Within one year from date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall complete a rule-making that would impose restrictions, procedures and remedies in connection with sightseeing service by a recipient.”

“(34) The Secretary shall make all written decisions, guidance and other pertinent materials relating to the procedures in this subsection available to the public in electronic and other appropriate formats in a timely manner.”

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Charter rules

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

no trust by private operators that they will produce a rule in our favor,” said the United Motorcoach Association in a “critical legislative alert” sent to its members.

In other words, allowing the FTA to issue new federal charter rules is the equivalent to letting the fox guard the hen house.

UMA and a coalition of organizations that includes the California Bus Association, the International Motorcoach Group, the Trailways Association, the American Bus Association, the Minority Bus Owners Association, the National School Transportation Association and several state associations, are urging their members to send faxes or letters to House Transportation Committee members, asking them to support

substitute legislative language (which is printed above).

Late last month, the coalition recruited New York Congresswoman Sue Kelly, a senior Republican member of the House Transportation Committee, to carry the ball for the industry during committee consideration of the bill.

Additionally, Tom Sorrells, president and CEO of MCI, met with the chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, to discuss the federal charter service rules and other coach industry issues. Young reportedly said encouraging things about the transit competition issue.

There are two specific loopholes in the current highway legislation that the public transit operators want. These would:

- 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

- Allow transit agencies the right to act as “brokers” between motorcoach operators and their customers, picking by low bid who will operate the charter service.

“At this very moment, public operators and union lobbyists are pressuring transportation committee members to accept these new public sector rights included in the Senate transportation bill,” says UMA.

When writing to congressional representatives concerning the issue, letters, faxes and e-mails should contain a copy of the substitute language.

Guidelines for letters on the issue, as well as a list of key congressmen and women, are contained in the March 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

Joe Gibson joins Muncie as VP sales

MUNCIE, Ind. - Muncie Transit Supply announced that Joe Gibson has joined the company and its management team as vice president of sales and marketing.

Gibson comes to Muncie with more than 25 years experience in the bus indus-

try. His career began with General Motors. He also has held executive positions with TMC, Nova Bus and Optima Bus Corp.

Gibson will be responsible for marketing, as well as the company's six sales regions in the U.S., plus Canada.



Joe Gibson

People

Tony Funderburg has been named national sales director of the International Motor Coach Group Inc. He will be responsible for coordinating and directing sales efforts on behalf of the coach operators that comprise the membership of IMG. He comes to the organization with 10 years of experience in tourism and travel sales with the Gatlinburg (Tenn.) Department of Tourism and the Fairfield Inn Properties of the Smokies. He lives in Sevierville, Tenn.

Setra of North America has announced the addition of **Jack Farrell** as pre-owned coach sales manager for the Southeast region. Farrell, who will be based at Setra's Sales and Service Center in Winter Garden, Fla., has more than three years experience in the coach industry managing customer care activities, including training, field service and a call

WWII Memorial

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

parking restrictions on Home Front Drive. Additional tour bus pick-up spaces are available curbside on eastbound Constitution Avenue between 17th and 18th Streets NW during non-rush hours.

Operators can visit the District of Columbia Department of Transportation Web site, www.ddot.dc.gov, for more tour bus pick-up, drop-off and parking information throughout Washington, D.C., including the National Mall and memorial parks area.

During the busy spring and summer visitor season, the Park Service is recommending tour bus operators use drop-off areas adjacent to many of the memorials for visits to more than one site. Tour groups are encouraged to walk between the WWII Memorial and close-by sites such as the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, the Korean War Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

For more information about all of the memorials, visit the National Mall and Memorial Parks Web site at www.nps.gov/nacc.

The World War II Memorial commemorates the sacrifice and celebrates the victory of the WWII generation. A "soft" opening of the memorial is tentatively planned for later this month, with the official dedication scheduled for Saturday, May 29.

center. Previously, he worked with the Southeast Pennsylvania Transportation Authority. He has a bachelor's degree in management from Rosemont College in Rosemont, Pa.

Nova Bus has announced the appointment of **Gary Titcombe** as regional sales manager for Ontario and western Canada, as well as a portion of the U.S. He is based in London, Ont. Titcombe

has more than 35 years of experience in the industry. Nova Bus also announced the appointment of **Jean-Marc Landry** as regional sales manager for eastern Canada and northeastern U.S. Landry joins Nova Bus in anticipation of the retirement of Dennis Varden, who has been with Nova Bus and its predecessor companies for 36 years. Landry will be based at Nova Bus' factory in St.Eustache,

Quebec. He has extensive customer management experience in the automotive industry, where he worked for more than 20 years.

Randy Fiveash has been appointed commissioner of travel for the state of Kentucky. Fiveash most recently was executive director of the National Tourism Foundation, an educational and research affiliate of the National Tour Association. He previously

was president and CEO of the Branson Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau in Branson, Mo.

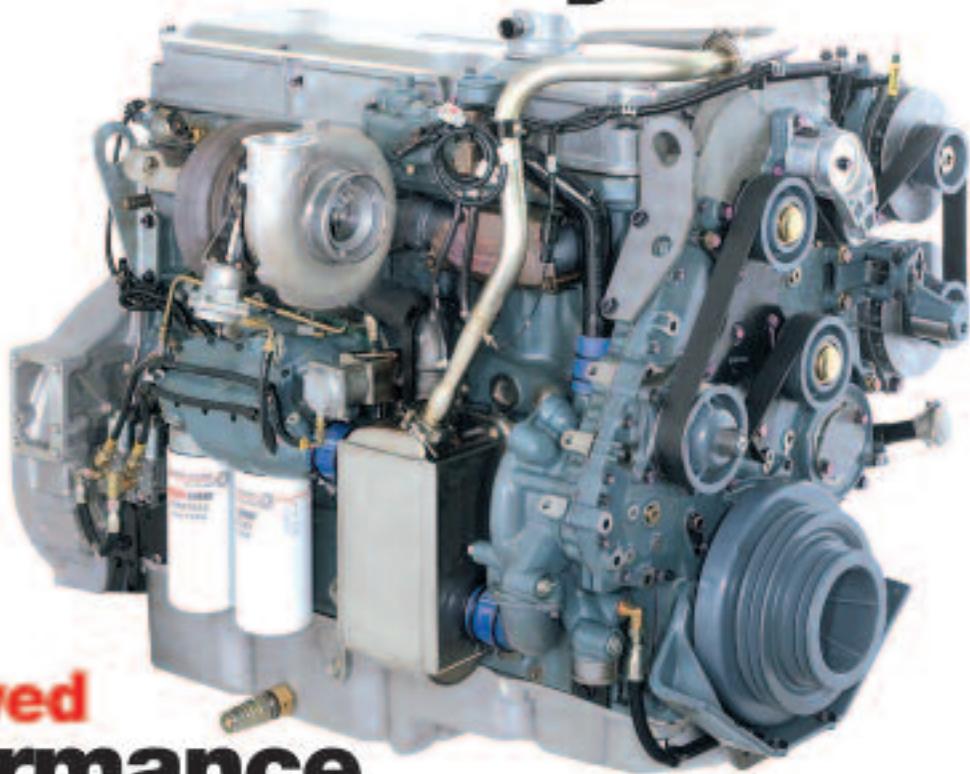
Mitch Sussman, chairman of Starr Tours in Trenton, N.J., has been appointed to the board of trustees of the National Tourism Foundation. The foundation is a nonprofit organization that supports research and education in travel and tourism.

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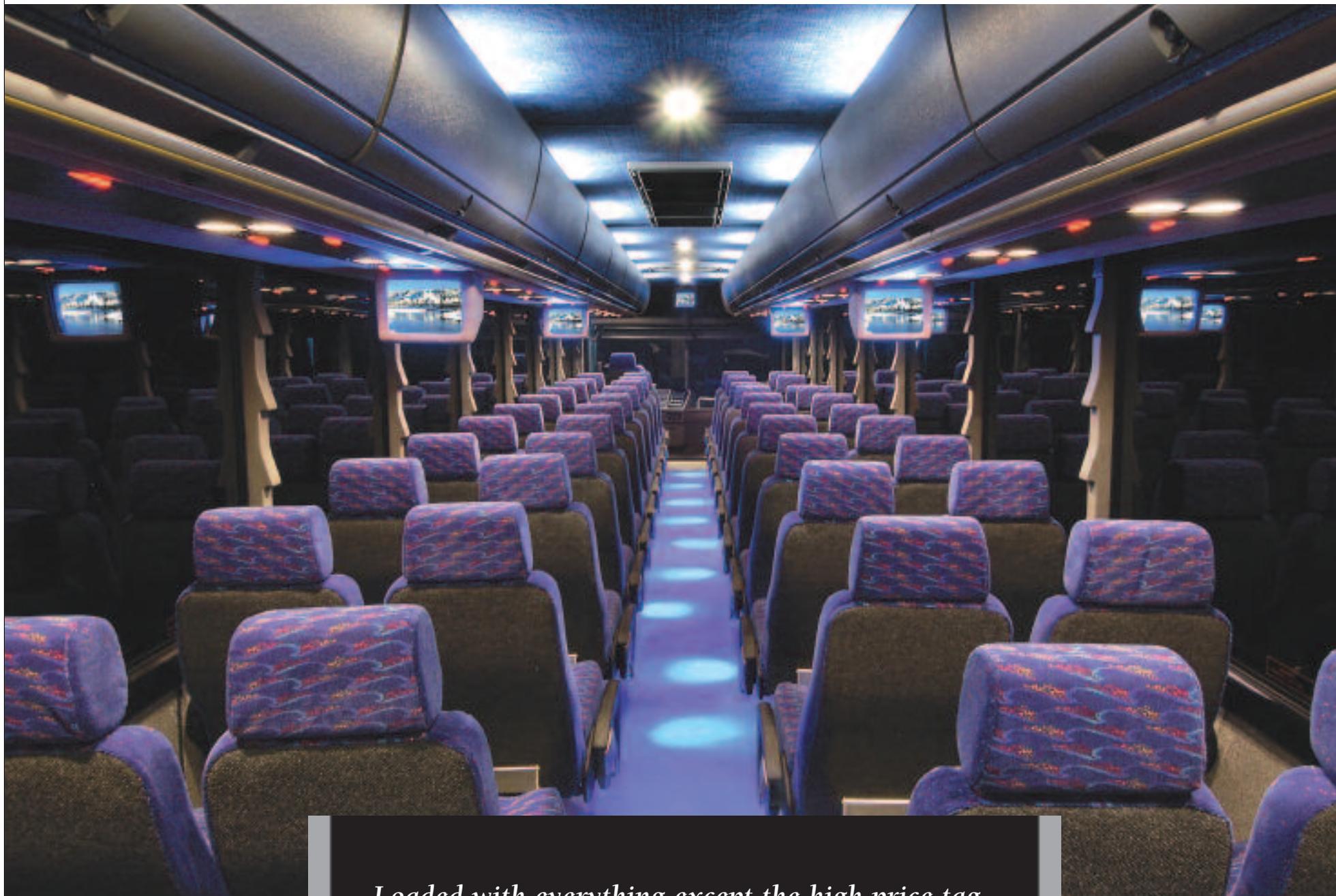
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