

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Highway bill battle moves on to Senate

WASHINGTON — When the U.S. Senate returns from its spring recess April 4, at the top of its work agenda will be the six-year highway and public transportation funding and reauthorization bill.

Last month, the House passed its version of the legislation.

In mid-March, separate Senate committees approved two halves of the bill and sent them to the Senate floor where they are being merged into one all-encompassing bill.

Although there are substantive differences between the House and Senate versions, both pieces of legislation call for spending the same amount — \$283.9 billion — during the next six years on highway and transit projects. That's up from the \$218 billion spent from fiscal 1998 through 2003.

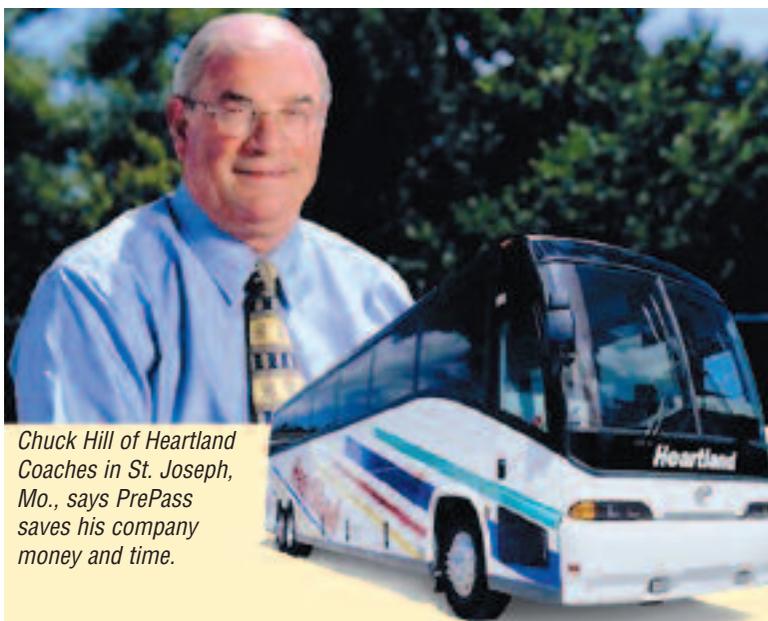
Charter bus rules

The version of the bill that emerged from the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs last month had one very good piece of news for the motorcoach industry. Deleted from the legislation was the so-called charter bus provision.

The bill, as originally considered by the banking committee, contained a proviso that would have allowed public transit agencies to conduct a broad range of local charter services without fear of violating the charter prohibitions currently in federal law.

Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., chairman of the Senate banking committee, "kept his word and removed the poison charter provision from the bill, but left all of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►



Chuck Hill of Heartland Coaches in St. Joseph, Mo., says PrePass saves his company money and time.

Weigh station bypass system gains advocate

It happens often on highways across the nation.

A truck barrels past a state weigh station, ignoring a sign directing all commercial traffic to stop. Just behind it, a motorcoach slows, pulls onto the exit ramp leading to the scales and stops.

What gives?

It's called PrePass. The truck has it, the coach doesn't.

With a PrePass transponder mounted on the dash, the truck can legally bypass weigh stations in two dozen states. The device has become big stuff in commercial trucking but gets very little play in the motorcoach industry.

More than 250,000 trucks now use the electronic equipment and they're bypassing weigh stations at the rate of nearly 2.4 million times a month.

While specifically designed for the thousands of big rigs that crisscross the United States daily, the system could be just as attractive to tour and charter buses trying to keep to a tight schedule.

"I wouldn't operate without

it," says Charles Hill, owner of Heartland Motorcoach Co. in St. Joseph, Mo.

Hill installed the system on his buses two years ago to become the first — and one of the few motorcoach operators — in the country to use the pre-clearance system.

He says the system has saved his company money and time and has helped make things safer and less stressful for his passengers.

Here's how PrePass, a product from Phoenix-based HELP Inc., a non-profit partnership between motor carriers and state government agencies, works:

A windshield-mounted transponder electronically alerts the weigh station of an approaching truck, transmitting the name of the trucking company and the identification number of the vehicle. Weigh station personnel quickly run a computer check on the truck to determine if it is in compliance with state weight, safety, licensing and registration requirements. If it is, the driver receives a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►

ABA-UMA leaders agree to policy plan

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Although the possible unification of the United Motorcoach Association and American Bus Association is months away, leaders of the two often competing organizations have forged a tighter working relationship that could bolster the industry's standing among lawmakers and regulators.

The new collegiality was evidenced at a meeting last month of the fledgling ABA-UMA Public Policy Committee where members unanimously agreed to begin speaking as a single voice on key industry issues, and to continue doing so regardless of the outcome of the upcoming vote on whether to consolidate the two associations.

The committee said it would begin at once developing joint positions to present to Congress and others on such matters as federal

transportation and highway legislation and the growing infringement on charter work by public transit agencies.

The March meeting — where the milestone agreement was reached — was only the second for the joint Public Policy Committee, which was created by the associations in an effort to put them on the same track as they move toward possible unification. Many past conflicts between the two organizations have been over policy issues.

"Our plan is to have as many joint resolutions as possible, starting immediately," UMA Chairman David Brown said after the meeting, which was held in Alexandria.

Such an approach, added ABA Chairman Ron Eyre, is certain to have positive results for everyone involved in the industry. "With this

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 ►

Ballots in mail for voting on ABA-UMA unification

Members of the American Bus Association and the United Motorcoach Association will be asked during the next two weeks to decide whether the rival groups should be combined into a new association.

Both organizations are sending their members a sheaf of documents that explain the proposed consolidation and a ballot to vote on the issue.

The boards of both associations have approved resolutions calling for the consolidation, but neither board is actually recommending that their members okay the deal.

That has not stopped the four top officers of the two associations, however, from going on record as

being strongly in favor of the idea. (See the March 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News* for comprehensive details about the plan, plus an interview with the associations' top elected officials.)

During the third week of March, ABA's executive committee approved the final consolidation documents, and the full ABA board formally approved the plan in a conference call vote March 29.

ABA anticipated mailing its ballot and documents explaining the proposal to members on March 30, meeting the self-imposed deadline the two associations agreed to in December.

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FMCSA investigates bus fire involving Chinatown operator

BOSTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is investigating a bus fire where the passengers say the driver ignored warnings, was told by his supervisors to keep driving, and attempted to run away when the fire intensified as the police were questioning him.

The bus that burned was owned by the same Chinatown operator, Kristine Travel and Tour Inc., that owned a coach that crashed in Canada about four years ago, killing four middle school students from Massachusetts.

The latest incident occurred last

month on the Massachusetts Turnpike when a bus operating under the name Luck Star Travel Pack, which is owned by Kristine Travel, burst into flames. The passengers narrowly escape the inferno.

One passenger, identified as University of Massachusetts student Jonathan Jones, told a Boston television station that the driver drove for several miles knowing there was a fire, but was told to continue driving by his superiors.

Another passenger, Silvia Illia, said a bizarre sequence of events began when one of the tires appeared to blow out. Illia said the

bus stopped and she and others got out and saw white smoke coming from the rear.

A turnpike employee, she said, came over to check on the situation before the driver, Shitong Ou, examined the bus and ordered everyone to get back on board.

Back on the road, with smoke entering the bus, Illia said Ou was driving slowly while speaking in Chinese on a walkie-talkie. The bus stopped again, Illia said.

Ou got out, inspected the bus, reboarded, and started driving again, this time at a higher speed.

"It was really uncomfortable to

be there," Illia said. "We had a flat and he kept going."

Approaching a toll plaza, Ou again stopped and screamed, "Everybody out! Everybody out!" Illia said. "The whole thing went up in flames."

An executive with the company disputed that Ou continued driving after he knew the vehicle had a problem.

According to Illia, Ou initially was calm while being interviewed by police. But as the fire intensified, she said, he tried to run away by jumping over a steel barrier between the traffic lanes. Police managed to

calm him down, she said.

The FMCSA confirmed it is actively investigating the matter.

Ou had his CDL suspended for 60 days last year after he was ticketed for going at least 15 miles over the speed limit in Connecticut, one of five traffic citations he received while driving buses in 2004, according to Registry of Motor Vehicle records. Two were for speeding.

In April 2001, a bus operated by Kristine Travel crashed on a hairpin turn on an exit ramp in New Brunswick. Four members of a school band were killed.

Low clearance for NYC underpass

NEW YORK CITY — For the next six months, the vertical clearance for the Battery Park Underpass in lower Manhattan has been reduced to 11 feet 2 inches.

The Battery Park Underpass connects FDR Drive/South Street and Route 9A/West Street through Manhattan.

The height reduction is necessary for the protection of traffic during the demolition and replacement of the Battery Park Underpass roof structure.

The reduced vertical clearance

affects both the southbound FDR Drive/South Street and the southbound Route 9A/West Street approaches of the underpass.

The restricted clearance will be in effect through Sept. 30.

Buses are not being permitted to use the Battery Park Underpass without a special permit issued by the New York City Department of Transportation. For information on obtaining a permit call (718) 433-3314.

More information can be obtained by e-mailing route9a@dot.state.ny.us.

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THE DOCKET

D.C. unveils big fee hike

WASHINGTON — The District of Columbia has announced hefty increases in annual registration fees for passenger-carrying and other commercial vehicles.

The D.C. Department of Motor Vehicles said that effective April 11, a registration fee of \$575 will be charged for a vehicle weighing 10,000 pounds gross weight, plus \$25 for each 1,000 pounds over the base amount.

That means that a 40,000-pound coach will have a fee of \$1,325. Previously, commercial vehicles weighing more than 16,000 pounds paid a flat fee of \$479 annually.

The district is a member of the International Registration Plan, which requires 120 days warning before a new fee goes into effect. So, apart from those bus and motorcoach operators that are based in the district, the new fees will presumably be effective sometime in July.

Transit seeks 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 appropriate operators to take the time to respond to these notices:

Gulfport, Miss. Deadline: April 4, 2005. Write to: Executive Director, Coast Transit Authority, 333 Debuys Rd., Gulfport, MS 39507. Phone: (228) 896-8080.

Janesville, Wis. Deadline: April 18, 2005. Write to: David J. Mumma, Transit Director, Janesville Transit System, 900 N. Parker Dr., Janesville, WI 53545.

Ukiah and Mendocino County, Calif. Deadline: April 21, 2005. Write to: Bruce Richard, General Manager, Mendocino Transit Authority, 241 Plant Rd., Ukiah, CA 95482. Phone: (707) 462-5765.

Androscoggin, Franklin and Oxford counties, Maine. Deadline: April 25, 2005. Write to: Glenn Gordon, Director of Community Relations, Western Maine Transportation Services, 65 Washington St., Auburn, Maine 04210. Phone: (207) 784-9335.



Washington Monument opens, more D.C. changes in works

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The National Park Service reopened the Washington Monument on April 1, and announced changes that could impact motorcoach visitors to Washington.

The monument has been closed since last fall so a barrier system, costing nearly \$15 million, could be installed. The system is designed to discourage car-bomb attacks.

Bill Line, spokesman for the National Park Service Capital Region, described the 30-inch-high barriers as “decoratively, tastefully done,” with brick facades on walls reinforced with concrete.

Most of the 55-acre grounds surrounding the monument will be closed until the end of June. However, a walkway is being kept open to provide access, and there is a temporary ticket kiosk on the 15th Street side.

Here are other changes announced by the park service:

Pedestrian and traffic safety improvements are underway at the Lincoln Memorial, including installation of a vehicle barrier system around the memorial.

Two visitor services facilities are being built near the Lincoln monument by Guest Services, the Park Service concessionaire for the

memorial. The facilities will provide food and retail services.

Tourmobile, Washington’s long-time visitor trolley system, is resuming routes between the National Mall and memorial parks and the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site and Mount Vernon, George Washington’s home.

In addition, the Park Police and the Park Service are instituting new traffic signs to improve vehicular flow in the vicinity of the Tidal Basin. The signs also will help visitors wanting to see Washington’s famed cherry blossoms as part of the National Cherry Blossom Festival that began late last month.

Tickets to the Washington Monument are available by calling (800) 967-2283. While tickets to the monument are free, callers will incur a \$1.50 service charge and a 50-cent shipping and handling fee.

Visitors also may obtain free, same-day, timed tickets to the monument at the kiosk on 15th St. Tickets are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis beginning at 8:30 a.m. until all tickets for the day are gone.

A trailer with information about the Cherry Blossom Festival is now open on the grounds of the Washington Monument, adjacent to westbound Independence Ave.

Nevada assembly considers bills to undo regulations

CARSON CITY, Nev. — Three bills have been introduced in the Nevada legislature that would bring state regulation of buses and motorcoaches into the 21st century.

Nevada is one of a handful of states that continues to regulate interstate operators despite federal laws that preempt state authority. Additionally, it has a Transportation Services Authority run by commissioners and bureaucrats who have been recalcitrant about giving up their authority to run roughshod over coach operators, as well as taxis, shuttles, tow truck operators and others.

Among other things, Nevada requires operators to have a state certificate of public necessity and convenience, which directly contradicts federal law.

An organization called the Nevada Transportation Coalition, led by a take-no-prisoners operator by the name of Bob Fairman, owner of No Stress Express in Carson City, convinced a group of state legislators to introduce bills

that would overhaul state regulations, revamp the TSA, and generally bring Nevada rules up to contemporary standards.

Oh, it also would stop the practice of TSA inspectors, sporting their casual Friday garb but packing guns on their hips, from pulling into bus yards in unmarked cars and conducting surprise records inspections. And, it would cease unwarranted roadside inspections.

Here specifically is what the legislature is considering:

Assembly Bill 240 would clarify the jurisdiction of the TSA, making it consistent with federal law, and specifically exempting charter bus services from regulation by the authority. It would eliminate the certificate of public necessity and convenience requirement except for carriers that can be regulated by the state and certain operators of tow trucks.

Assembly Bill 270 would require TSA employees to wear uniforms that readily identify them

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 ▶

'05 out-of-service criteria goes into effect this month

WASHINGTON — On April 1, the 2005 version of the North American Standard Out-of-Service Criteria was put into effect by commercial vehicle inspectors in the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

The criteria, which are developed and published by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance, detail the standards used by federal and state safety inspectors when placing vehicles and their operators out of service.

All CVSA-certified commercial vehicle law enforcement agencies in North America use the criteria. It also is a valuable resource for motorcoach safety managers, fleet supervisors, drivers and maintenance personnel.

One of the major changes this year concerns a language requirement.

The new criteria states that “in recognition of the (U.S., Canadian and Mexican) language differ-

ences, it is the responsibility of the driver and the motor carrier to be able to communicate in the country in which the driver/carrier is operating so that safety is not compromised.”

The rule goes on to say that if a “driver is unable to communicate sufficiently to understand and respond to official inquiries and directions ... (then the inspector must) place the driver out of service.”

The handbook containing the criteria also provides descriptions of the CVSA North American Standard Levels of Inspection, inspection procedure schematics, Mexican CDL information, and an explanation of the CVSA Decal Program.

To order copies of the 2005 criteria, go to www.cvsa.org, or contact CVSA headquarters in Washington by calling (202) 775-1623.

Legislation would compel fuel surcharge for truckers

WASHINGTON — Warning: This story may make some motorcoach operators drool with envy. Here's why:

Independent truckers have convinced the U.S. House of Representatives that shippers should be *mandated* to pay fuel surcharges. Yes, their customers would be required by federal law to pay surcharges to cover rising fuel costs.

It's one of the sweetest pieces of special-interest legislation adopted by the House so far this year.

The Owner Operator Independent Drivers Association, an organization composed largely of smaller carriers and truckers who own their own rigs, pushed for the provision in the federal highway and transit reauthorization bill, saying it would allow them to more easily recoup fuel expenses, as well as level the playing field with their larger competitors.

No less than Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, the chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, submitted the surcharge amendment to the highway bill.

While carriers pushing the provision say it will ease their surcharge collection problems, other truckers contend the amendment would set a bad precedent.

Groups representing shippers say the amendment sets the baseline for fuel surcharges too low, and the difference between the actual price per gallon and the baseline would result in much higher costs for them.

And the Truckload Carriers Association maintains that the

amendment is too vague and could force truckload carriers to pay fuel surcharges to owner-operators even if they aren't able to collect them from shippers.

As adopted by the House, the amendment would require shippers to pay a fuel surcharge to cover the

increased cost of fuel when it goes 5 cents above a benchmark price of \$1.10 per gallon, based on the weekly fuel price published by the U.S. Department of Energy.

The baseline would be adjusted annually using an inflation index.

Fuel usage would be deter-

mined by a Department of Defense table of distances and assumes trucks burn a gallon of diesel fuel for each five miles driven.

The basic calculation to determine the increased cost of fuel is done by subtracting the benchmark price from the current

Department of Energy-reported price, and then multiplying the difference by the number of gallons of fuel used in the transportation or service provided.

Shippers would be required to pay the surcharge resulting from the calculation. Sweet.

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Michigan court denies interest

LANSING, Mich. — The Michigan Court of Appeals has held that a taxpayer was not owed interest on a tax refund it received from the state because, although the tax had been paid in error and the state was not entitled to it, the sum had not been paid under protest.

The Michigan Tax Tribunal had ruled that the refund of an unlawful tax should bear interest, but a tax paid voluntarily is not unlawful. The tax at issue was a property tax.

It is under reasoning like this that most states deny motor carriers any interest on refunds due under the International Fuel Tax Agreement.

INDUSTRY NEWS



This 1940 White model 782-1 was one of 430 built from 1940-46 by White Motor Co.

Museum switches exhibits

HERSHEY, Pa. — There will be a special Trailways Day at the Museum of Bus Transportation here Saturday, April 9, highlight the dedication of a new exhibit featuring a 1971 Golden Eagle Model '05 in Trailways livery.

The event coincides with a change in exhibits at the museum, with 11 different vehicles, ranging from a 1912 bus to the pristine Golden Eagle, now on display.

The Trailways activity, which is being called a 5-Star Celebration, is open to all past and present employees of Trailways companies, their families, and "friends of Trailways."

More information about the Trailways event can be obtained by calling (877) 467-3346.

Included among the newest museum displays are three buses produced by the White Motor Co. of Cleveland. White turned out

more than 19,000 buses during a 40-year period.

One of the more popular Whites on display is a 1940 model 782-1. Resplendent in its Red and Tan Lines livery, the bus is a popular subject for photographers.

The Museum of Bus Transportation is in Hershey on state route 39. The phone is (717) 566-7100, and the museum Web site is at www.busmuseum.org. The museum will keep regular hours during the Trailways event and be open to the public.

The museum is always seeking donations of cash, vehicles and archives. Annual membership, which includes a quarterly newsletter, is \$25. It and the adjoining Antique Automobile Club of America, make an excellent stop for motorcoach tours that are visiting other popular destinations in Hershey.

Trailways achievement awards presented to members at event

BAY ST. LOUIS, Miss. — More than 15 operator members of the Trailways Transportation System were honored here last month at the conclusion of the 69th annual Trailways Conference and Meeting.

The operators, plus drivers from three Trailways companies, were presented awards at the organization's Safety Awards Gala.

Trailways' annual meeting and conference was conducted at the Casino Magic Golf Resort in Bay St. Louis, which is about 40 miles east of New Orleans on the Gulf of Mexico. Trailways' operators from across the U.S., plus industry suppliers, attended the four-day event.

Here are the winners of the Trailways safety and achievement awards:

Fleet Safety Award (scheduled route, less than two million passenger miles): **Arrow Trailways of Texas in Killeen** and **Susquehanna Trailways of Avis, Pa.**

Fleet Safety Award (scheduled route, more than two million passenger miles): **Capitol Trailways of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg.**

Fleet Safety Award (tour and charter, less than two million passenger miles): **Atlantic Coast Trailways in Hagerstown, Md.; Central States Trailways of St. Louis; Dixon Meyers Trailways of Rochelle, Ill.; Lancaster Trailways of the Carolinas in Lancaster, S.C., and Travel Mates Trailways of Harrisonburg, Va.**

Fleet Safety Award (tour and charter, more than two million passenger miles): **Abbott Trailways of Roanoke, Va.**

Most Improved Fleet Safety Award (scheduled-route division): **New York Trailways in Pine Hill.**

Full-time Driver of the Year Award (scheduled-route division): **Manjit Singh Mahil of Western Trailways of Canada in Delta, B.C.**

Part-time Driver of the Year Award (charter and tour division): **Warren Holmes of First Priority Trailways in District Heights, Md.**

Full-time Driver of the Years Award (charter and tour division): **Ron Pratt of Dixon Meyers Trailways.**

Most Team Spirit Award (charter and tour division): **Capital City Trailways of Georgia in Atlanta.**

Most Team Spirit Award (scheduled-route division): **Arrow Trailways of Texas.**

Outstanding Operational Achievement Award: **Thrasher Brothers Trailways in Birmingham, Ala.**

Leadership by Example Award: **Burlington Trailways of West Burlington, Iowa.**

Four Generations of Outstanding Motorcoach Service Award: **Adirondack Trailways in Hurley, N.Y.**

Outstanding Employment Achievements Award: **Dean Trailways of Michigan in Lansing.**

Outstanding Volunteer Award: **Ken Presley of Service Insurance Agency.**

Industry Vanguard Award: **Frank Henry of Martz Trailways in Wilkes-Barre, Pa.**

Military Traffic Management Command — Superior Transportation Service and Support to the Department of Defense: **Paradise Trailways of West Hempstead, N.Y., and Slater Trailways of Jonesboro, La.**

Trailways is the nation's oldest motorcoach marketing network. Its 68 members offer a wide variety of transportation and travel-related services.

People

Dean Wm. Carson, president of *Transit Sales International Inc.* of Riverside, Calif., has been named 2005 Regional Exporter of the Year by the U. S. Small Business Administration. The region includes California, Hawaii, Arizona, Nevada and Guam.

"Transit Sales International is an excellent example of how a small business can grow through international sales and thus have a bigger impact on our nation's economy," said SBA District Director Sandy Sutton in announcing the award.

Carson was nominated by the U.S. Department of Commerce Inland Empire Export Assistance Center for his leadership and creativity in increasing export sales and entering new foreign markets. TSI is now exporting to Mexico and Africa, while continuing exports to Canada and other countries.

Four years ago, TSI was recognized by the U.S. Commercial Service in Ontario, Calif., and the Inland Empire International Business Association as Exporter of the Year.

Carson was appointed by then-Secretary of Commerce Donald Evans as a member of the Inland Empire District Export Council.

TSI specializes in supplying used transit buses. Its inventory of 1,000 buses is believed to be one of the world's largest selections of transit vehicles. The family-owned company has been serving the bus industry for more than 50 years.

Carson will be honored at an awards luncheon next month. For more information, call the Inland Empire Small Business Development Center at (951) 781-2345.

The *National Transportation Safety Board* has made key executive appointments, including a new executive director and managing director. **Dan Campbell**, who has served as the agency's managing director for five years has been named executive director, with responsibilities involving planning, policy and transition issues. **Joseph Osterman**, director of the board's Office of Highway Safety, has been promoted to managing director.

Osterman, as head of the highway safety office, became widely known in the bus industry. He has been with the NTSB for 19 years. He began his agency career as a field highway accident investigator and also has served as investigator-in-charge, major investigation branch chief and highway division chief.

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OPINION

Call to action

The English language is full of colorful words and phrases that describe what politicians often-times do to certain segments of society when they vote one way or another. You know the terms: "getting shafted, royally screwed, nailed to the wall, hung out to dry, slammed, hammered" and so on.

Well, you can pick your favorite and that's what seems likely to happen to the motorcoach industry as Congress tries to pass the highway and transportation reauthorization bill. (See story on Page 1.)

The bashing would result from a provision in the bill that would require the Federal Transit Administration to initiate a rulemaking regarding public transit agencies providing charter bus service.

The huge transit lobby is working overtime to keep the provision in the proposed legislation, while the much smaller but no less dedicated private bus industry lobby is trying desperately to get it modified or removed from the bill. The transits clearly have the upper hand.

The private sector was able to get the provision lifted from the Senate version of the highway bill, but the House is a whole different ball game. The transit lobby has convinced House members, and especially their staffs, that the rulemaking is necessary. And the private sector lobby is having a dickens of a time changing minds.

The story the transit lobby is telling Congress is compelling. The problem is it's so far from the truth that it makes your stomach ache.

Here's what the American Public Transportation Association and its minions want, and what they're telling Congress.

1. "APTA believes that the existing charter regulations do not allow community transit needs to be met." Ding, ding, ding. That's flat wrong. Why do we say it's

wrong? Because no less an authority than the FTA says it's not true, and the FTA set out a few years ago to prove that it was true and surprise, surprise found that it isn't. Yet, APTA keeps saying there are unmet community transit needs.

2. APTA wants to amend federal law to permit transit agencies to provide charter services directly to local governments and private, nonprofit agencies that would not be served "in a cost effective and efficient manner by private operators." And who do you suppose APTA would have decide who isn't being "served in a cost effective and efficient manner by private operators?" Why your friendly local transit agency, of course. This is pure and simple a play by APTA and its members to build their stakeholder base by providing low- or no-cost services to local politicians and nonprofit groups.

3. APTA wants to "amend the definition of 'willing and able' to exclude private operators who do not have the desire or capability to provide certain trips." Wanna guess who would make the determination that a private operator doesn't have the desire or capacity?

We could go on.

What APTA and its cronies really want to do is put private operators out of business, and use the operators' tax dollars to do it. It's outrageous and it's shameful. If you contact your congressional representatives about only one issue this year, make it the charter service provision in the House version of the highway reauthorization bill. The rulemaking provision could throw the door wide open for transit agencies to scoop up as much charter business as they want. It's a threat to the motorcoach industry of mammoth proportions.

Write, phone or e-mail your Congressional representative today. It's that important and that urgent.

Wisconsin operator says good-bye to senior market, has zero regrets

ELKHORN, Wis. — While some motorcoach operators continue to try to light a fire under the fading senior market that once dominated the industry customer base, at least one company has decided the market is gone and moved on to other things.

Jones Travel and Tour of Elkhorn has completely abandoned tours for seniors that until fairly recently made up 80 to 90 percent of its business.

"The best years for senior tours have long since passed," says Scott Jones, who, with his brother, Eric, bought the company from their father, Phillip, 11 years ago.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the company's senior business flourished, with its senior-tour division booking hundreds of multiple-day trips to top attractions throughout the country. Its aggressive marketing program included publishing a colorful catalog that detailed every aspect of the tours it offered.

"It was a very good market in those days," says Jones.

Other Directions

When the senior market began showing signs of slowing in the late '90s, the company started looking in other directions for growth. It drastically expanded its school bus business. It put more emphasis on its charter operation. It added airport, resort and hotel-shuttle services. And, it diversified its fleet with the addition of midsize buses, limousines and trolleys.

Finally, last year, the company tossed in the towel completely on the senior market, and took the unusual step of announcing its decision on its Web site:

"After carefully evaluating the senior travel market during the last three years, we have made the conclusion that there is truly a 'changing of the tide' in the senior tour market. The World War II generation has aged and become less able to participate in the type

*Jones Travel
and Tour took
the unusual step
of announcing
its decision on
its Web site.*

of tour offerings we have historically provided.

"Jones Travel and Tour has made the difficult decision to withdraw from the senior tour market for the 2004 season to further research the viability of the future needs of the new retirees."

Jones says the decision generated very little negative reaction, which eased any concerns he and

others in the company might have had that they made a mistake with their bold decision and even bolder announcement.

Understanding

Even the many tour organizations the company works with on a regular basis understood. "They were having their own problems," says Jones. "We would sell a tour package to a group leader and then could not get enough people from the group to fill a bus."

Jones maintains that today's retirees — many of them in their '50s — are simply not interested in the same 5- or 10-day tours their parents once enjoyed. Instead, they use motorcoaches for charters or they fly to a destination and then take a one-day tour on a bus. Many others own their own coaches.

"The motorhome industry is having the best years of its existence and many of the new retirees are driving their own \$200,000 motorhomes around the country now," he adds. "When they drive their own coaches, that kind of defeats the purpose of offering motorcoach tours to them."

Jones is convinced the decision to leave the senior market was the right one, noting that business has been on the upswing ever since.

"We are really doing quite well," he stresses. "We have absolutely no interest what so ever in going back, and I feel very comfortable telling you that."

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Leadership, management keys to organizational success

By Fred Spears and Terry Herring
Leadership Systems

Leaders and managers are only successful when the value of their results is greater than the cost of accomplishing it.

At the same time, organizational success depends on getting high levels of performance from other people — frequently the lowest paid and the least dependable or motivated members of the organization.

Leadership and management are two distinct but complementary functions critical to organizational success. Prof. John P. Kotter of the Harvard University School of Business offers these definitions of leadership and management:

Leadership: The art of moving individuals and groups toward a common *vision* so each individual and the organization will achieve mutually fulfilling goals.

Management: The *velocity* provided to achieve the personal and organizational goals supporting the vision to accomplish the mission.

Here's a simple test for leaders and managers:

- Do you have a vision, a set of crystal-clear goals, of where you want the organization to go?
- Have you clearly communicated that vision to the members of your organization so they unquestionably understand it and can effectively communicate it to others?
- Have you developed and implemented specific plans to enable the organization to reach the vision and goals?

All leaders and managers have the same tasks: Do, Manage, Communicate and Plan. The difference between effective leaders and managers and those who are not effective is the order in which they address these tasks.

Too often, leaders and managers get trapped by "crisis management," failing the simple leadership test. The crisis management loop can be illustrated as follows:

Do: Where leaders and managers react to perceived important tasks that demand immediate attention instead of focusing on the goals of the organization.

Manage: Where leaders and managers struggle to keep competing priorities in balance and to correctly utilize the resources available, and to further develop staff capabilities.

Communicate: Reactively issue commands to get the process moving forward. Rarely is time avail-

able for explaining the problem, soliciting solutions from members of the organization or gaining their understanding, and sharing your commitment to the goals.

Plan: Planning is a luxury, rather than as a necessity. Typically left to last in the crisis management mode, planning only happens when you are in the midst of a crisis.

When Lord Cornwallis surrendered to Gen. George Washington at Yorktown at the end of the Revolutionary War, the British Fifth and Drum Corps trooped the line playing a tune called *The World Turned Upside Down*. Taking a page from the 18th century British, let's turn crisis management upside down and switch to "proactive management" and pass the leadership test:

Plan: Have you ever packed the family station wagon, loaded up the family, put the key in the ignition, and then asked everyone on board where they wanted go on their vacation? Probably not. How much more critical is it to the success of the organization to make time to plan for the future and its direction, and develop plans to get there?

Communicate: It's very difficult, if not impossible, to expect the members of the organization to do the things needed to move the organization toward the vision or the goal if they don't know where they're supposed to go. Make time to communicate your goals to your staff, and what must be done to reach those goals.

Manage: Management is the allocation of resources, money, materials and manpower where they are needed to move the organization forward. This juggling of frequently competing priorities is a key component of every leader and manager's responsibilities. Managing requires following the plan and communicating with all levels in the organization to assess progress, identify obstacles to goal achievement, and taking actions necessary to stay on course.

Do: Do those things only you can do. Follow this simple rule: If someone else can do it, let them. By delegating and developing the staff you can delegate to, ample time will become available to do the things that only you can do — and the organization will move toward the vision and goals.

In proactive management, planning and communicating are the leadership and vision component, while managing and doing are the management and velocity component. Through the combi-

nation of providing the leadership and developing the systems to provide the velocity, your goals will be accomplished faster, with less effort on your part, and with a greater

sense of ownership by members of your organization.

Terry Herring and Fred Spears are the principals of Leadership Systems of Overland Park, Kan., a results-

improvement company that focuses on staff development, hiring and skills development and improvement. Contact them at (913) 681-0142 or by e-mail at freds@leadershipsystems.biz.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

National Tour Association members reject name change

LEXINGTON, Ky. — If the proposed ABA-UMA consolidation is approved by members of the two organizations, you can bet the committee overseeing the unification won't be making this mistake:

They won't name the combined association something like CrossSphere.

The board of the National Tour Association has already tried that, and members of the association have told the board to stuff it.

In resounding fashion, NTA

members voted 320 to 94 late last month against keeping CrossSphere — The Global Association for Package Travel, as the name of the organization. The board adopted the unusual name after it had gone through a lengthy — and not-inexpensive process — of attempting to rebrand and re-identify the association.

The board's renaming decision created enormous turmoil. (See Feb. 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Two months after the name was



changed, the association's 60-member Leadership Team supported having a membership referendum on the issue. A key element in the uproar was a petition signed by 201 tour operators opposing the new name.

The board, citing the petition and the feedback from the Leadership Team, decided to have a bylaw vote, asking members to ratify the

new name.

What they got was 77 percent of the members voting to restore the old name and reject the new.

"More than anything else, I am ready to move on and work with our members to demonstrate the continuing strength, value and leadership position of this association," said NTA Chairwoman Ann Thomas. Thomas was a strong proponent of the new name.

The best spin was offered by NTA President Hank Phillips: "This

decision speaks loudly in support of the tradition and heritage of the association, both of which came out of our initial brand examination. Although our name was in question, the core values, benefits and direction of this association have remained the same," said Phillips.

The NTA is comprised of nearly 4,000 professionals involved in the packaged travel industry. For more information, go to www.CrossSphere.com; whoops, make that www.NTAonline.com.

ABA/UMA Policy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

communication between each other and this positive attitude, we can accomplish every goal we need to," he suggested.

Brown said it also would allow the two groups to share the best of what each has to offer. "We have a lot of mutual benefits, things they can add that we don't have and things we can add that they don't have," he noted. "We are very effective at communications and grass roots efforts, and they are more effective at sitting down in front of the legislators."

The improved working relationship between the two associations, which is being fostered by UMA and ABA leaders active support for the proposed consolidation, is the product of a realization that working together is the best way to produce positive results.

"I think everyone at the meeting recognized we certainly will benefit a lot more in the future by working together and putting the competitiveness, if you will, of the two organizations to the side and realizing we are all one industry," observed Brian Scott, vice chairman of UMA.

ABA Vice Chairman Doug Anderson agreed, stressing how bringing together those who establish the policies for the two groups already has helped bring home how much

they are alike. "I think what we really came to decide at the end of the day was that it really is a small world, and UMA's needs and wants are not any different than ABA's needs and wants," he offered.

Brown stressed that the key to successfully carrying out the mission of sharing the same policies on key issues will be the work of the policy committee chairmen, Woody Blunt of the ABA and Godfrey Lebron of UMA. Lebron is looking forward to the challenge.

"Right now everyone knows we are an extremely small, fragmented industry, so a coalition will be able to bring up one sound message that will be very powerful," said Lebron.

Plus, he said, it will bring an end to trying to sway regulators and legislators with varied industry positions, which has created confusion. "Whenever you get two groups looking at an issue separately, there is a possibility that someone will come up with a different position, and this will eliminate that possibility," he said.

Blunt declined to comment.

While those who attended the joint meeting said they were excited about the new approach to dealing with policy issues, they were even more enthusiastic about the agreement to continue working together even if the consolidation vote fails.

"This is a pretty big step forward, it has never happened

before," said Eyre, adding that the move would involve not only policy committee members of each group working with each other, but the UMA and ABA staffs continuing an open dialog as well.

Scott called the pledge to continue as a single voice — even if the two groups remain separate — the "most important item taken away from the meeting," while Anderson said he was encouraged to know that everyone will be working more closely together, starting now and continuing into the future.

"That is very, very positive," added Brown.

In addition to the policy issues, there also was a great deal of discussion at the meeting about how the industry has changed over the years. Years ago, roughly 80 percent of the motorcoach traffic was in line-haul operations; today, 80 percent of the coaches on the highways are tour and charter.

Recognizing this, as everybody seemed to, Brown maintained, could help sell the case for unification.

"There is a benefit in a single organization, including line haul. The truth is that line-haul service is perceived as more of an essential service, and tour and charter is perceived as the tourist trade. Line haul may have an easier time getting time with people in D.C., but the tour-and-charter story is more glamorous. Together may be the most effective process," he said.

Ballots

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The timetable for the vote by UMA members hit a slight snag when its counsel decided last month that the broad resolution adopted by the UMA board in December was inadequate to allow the association to move forward with a membership vote.

However, a new board vote was arranged so directors could give their stamp of approval to exactly the same proposal that is being

submitted to UMA members — even though the final agreement is consistent with the framework that was approved in December. As expected, the board gave its okay to the final proposal.

UMA By-Laws inhibited the board from acting as quickly as leaders would have liked. Signed waivers had to be rounded up from all board members so the vote could be taken during the last week in March. Following the vote, the ballots and documents were being mailed to members, also meeting

the March 31 deadline.

For the ABA-UMA consolidation to materialize, two-thirds of the members of both organizations must approve the plan. If the proposal gets the required vote, a transition committee composed of four board members from each association will oversee the unification during the next eight months.

Handicapping the vote has been a favorite topic of conversation throughout the industry in recent weeks.

Two views on unification

Note: Bus & Motorcoach News asked a handful of operators to offer their views on the proposed consolidation of ABA and UMA. Not surprisingly, most didn't respond to the invitation. Here are the views of two operators with the fortitude to stick their necks out.

O'Brien and Ooten are presidents of the motorcoach associations in their respective states. However, the views they expressed are strictly their own.

The proposed consolidation of UMA and ABA is long overdue. Our company is a member of both organizations. However, I go back to the time when our industry association was NAMBO, and UBOA/UMA did not exist. We need to return to that format, utilizing the talents of both groups. Unquestionably, a single association will provide a stronger voice for the entire industry. Combining the strong aspects of both organizations can only be a benefit to all members. UMA's Expo and ABA's Marketplace are both key industry events. Our lobbying efforts need to be unified. I further believe that vendor support and participation, key elements of a successful organization, will actually increase with a single association. It is my sincere hope that this process can be brought to a successful conclusion.

Bob O'Brien
President/CEO
Time Lines
Oklahoma City

I have mixed feelings regarding the unification of UMA and ABA. On the one hand I can only imagine the benefits of a combined Marketplace and Expo, especially for a small operator like us. The time and expense of attending two functions can be overwhelming, especially if you involve your employees. On the other hand, I am concerned that the interests of smaller operators could be lost in the bureaucracy of such a large association. The leaders of both organizations are doing an outstanding job. I can only hope that a (consolidation) will recognize the leadership assets of both organizations, and let them continue to represent the members and the bus industry in the knowledgeable and professional manner they both do today.

Russell Ooten
President
Greene Coach Co. Inc
Greeneville, Tenn.

Nevada

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

while they're in the field and require the use of clearly marked vehicles.

A minimum 72-hour notice would be required before examining books, records, papers or other property of individuals and companies being examined.

TSA employees could only stop vehicles for roadside inspections if they have probable cause to believe the person operating a vehicle has violated laws within the jurisdiction of the authority.

Additionally, it mandates a code of ethics for TSA personnel.

Assembly Bill 285 would deliver the coup-de-grace. It calls for the abolishment of the TSA and the transfer of its duties and responsibilities to other state agencies.

Fairman needs all of the support he can muster to help push the legislation through the Nevada assembly. Letters and messages of support for the bills can be e-mailed to nv@nostressexpress.com or bob@nostressexpress.com. Call him at (800) 426-5644.

When you think marketing, consider fleet graphics

By Pier Veilleux
President/CEO
Turbo Images

Branding your company name on your fleet should be at the top of your marketing priorities.

The sophisticated entrepreneur knows that the image projected by his or her coaches has a direct impact on customer choice of carriers. That's because your coaches are basically a moving billboard.

The average cost of dressing up a coach with nice graphics is \$5,000.

Once it's done, however, your coach becomes an oversized business card, running day after day for five to seven years. The cost per year is under \$1,000, which is considerably less than placing a modest advertisement in most newspapers for one day. A small newspaper ad can cost \$500 or more.

Adopting graphics that can improve a company's image isn't always easy.

Some people become emotional when it comes to considering this aspect of their marketing.

Yet, with everything around us changing, it's vital that your marketing be in constant evolution. Therefore, it's important to take steps to upgrade, enhance or even completely change the image of your company. Such a move will increase your visibility and thereby increase your business.

It's also important to realize that the use of straight, color stripes or a simple black name painted on the side of a coach is not an eye catcher. It does not create an impact that attracts attention or develops an impression to use your company for future business.

Try this simple exercise as you drive down the road: Pay attention to which vehicles passing by capture your attention: Originality, color, size and presentation are what you retain.

Marketing is a science. And if you put together a budget to renew your image, it is very important to do it right or not at all. You don't want to confuse people with your image. On average, you may keep a new image for 10 years or so before you change again or improve.

When you take the step of adopting a new or changed image, you will feel your company reborn. You will create a positive reaction among your staff and your clientele. You will reawaken customers who may have forgotten about you. Your existing clientele will praise your company and become marketing tools on your behalf.

When adopting a new or revamped image, here are four points to consider:

Do not rush your choice of design. It is better to run your coach white for a while than make a wrong choice under pressure. It is important to have nice colors, and for your logo or message to stand out from the images. Remember, the average time to read your message as your coach passes by is seven seconds.

Graphic designers, such as those at Turbo Images, will use their creative talent to come up with innovative designs using the latest marketing trends but keeping the marketing guidelines of the customer in mind.

Make sure your new graphics will stand the test of time, and you will be able to replace graphic parts if that becomes necessary. Your

investment must be well looked after and maintained.

Use a premium 2 millimeter film (vinyl), such as the ones provided by Avery or 3M. There are other film manufacturers but they do not have the quality, durability and support.

Your coach image is your No. 1 marketing investment. Done properly, the return on a quality graphics' investment can be nothing but rewarding.

For more information about Turbo Images, go to www.turbo-images.com.



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Radio Engineering Industries, Inc.

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Maxon Mobility introduces compliant wheelchair lift

SANTA FE SPRINGS, Calif. — Maxon Mobility says its latest wheelchair lift, the WL7 Smart Lift, meets new wheelchair-lift regulations that went into effect April 1.

Built from the ground up to meet the complex new federal rules, the WL7 features new technology, including onboard diagnostics designed to reduce downtime and enhance safety.

The lift's "Brain Box" has fault indicators for safety functions; it monitors voltage and current draw, and warns of improper grounding. The unit's own diagnostic screen

eliminates the need for a laptop to perform diagnostics.

The WL7 lifts more than 800 pounds and will fit all bus floor heights up to 48 inches. Its "rattle-resistant technology" helps provide a quieter on-the-road environment.

Maxon Lift Corp. is a near 50-year-old company that produces the most popular style of truck lift-gates in North America. Its mobility division manufactures wheelchair lifts for buses, vans and coaches.

For more information, go to www.maxonmobility.com.

INDUSTRY NEWS

Senate

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

good provisions in," said one coach industry lobbyist. The "good" in the bill includes provisions that would require public transit agencies to involve private operators to a greater extent in providing and planning for transit services.

Shelby had been the focus of lobbying by the Coalition of Private Transportation Associations, the Alabama Motorcoach Association and others. The coalition includes the United Motorcoach Association, the American Bus Association, the National School Transportation Association and about a dozen other private national and state groups.

The American Public Transportation Association, which represents hundreds of public transit agencies and has been pushing hard for less restrictive charter-service regulations, wasn't the least bit happy about the charter bus provision being lifted from the Senate bill.

Public vs. private

The issue has become a bitter one between the public and private bus sectors. Efforts to resolve the differences outside of Congress have failed. The extent of the difficulty was underscored last month when William Millar, president of APTA, was interviewed by *BUS Ride* magazine.

In the interview, Millar was quoted as saying he thinks the private and public sectors "should get back to the bargaining table and figure something out that both the private and public interests can live with. Then we can go jointly to the Capitol and say this is what we have worked out in the best interests of both sectors."

While such conciliatory talk

comes out of one side of Millar's mouth, out of the other comes APTA public policy positions which, in effect, seek to put private bus operators out of business and use their tax dollars to do it. (See Editorial on Page 8.)

While the Senate committee "did the right thing" by removing the onerous charter service provision, the version of the bill passed by the House still includes provisions that pose a major threat to the coach industry. The House bill would throw the charter service issue to the Federal Transit Administration for a public rule-making. A report attached to the House bill specifies that the FTA make local charter exemptions part of a rulemaking.

That possibility strikes terror in the hearts of many coach industry representatives. They have no confidence whatsoever the FTA will consider the interests of the private sector given its past record of failing to enforce the existing rules. They think it impossible to expect the FTA to write fair charter service rules and then enforce them.

A separate bill?

The motorcoach industry is pushing for a separate bill to address the issue of charter service rules for transit agencies, while APTA is fighting to have a House-Senate conference committee deal with the issue as part of the highway reauthorization bill.

The coach industry, most observers believe, faces a tough, uphill battle to get the charter service provisions out of the House bill when the House-Senate conference committee begins its work.

While the charter provisions continue to loom large, other sections of the House version offer both positives and negatives for the

coach industry. One plus is an amendment that was tacked onto the House bill that would lift the burden of vicarious liability from motorcoach lending and leasing companies.

Under vicarious liability, when there is a crash, the liability is shared by the company that is leasing the bus to a motorcoach company, even though the leasing company was not directly involved in operating the vehicle. What has happened as this concept has grown is that TRAC leases for motorcoaches have all but disappeared in New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Florida and other states where vicarious liability is allowed.

One coach leasing company said that eliminating vicarious liability would be a very good thing for the finance and coach industries.

The issue of vicarious liability has gotten wrapped up in the tort reform movement that has become popular on Capital Hill.

A loss on tolls

On another important issue, the House voted down an amendment that would have limited tolling on interstates to pay for the construction of new lanes. Instead, the House kept language that allows pilot toll projects on existing interstates, as well as additional capacity. (See March 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Adding tolls to existing interstates is seen as having a deleterious impact on the already narrow profit margins of most motorcoach operators.

The battle to limit interstate tolling, which was spearheaded by Rep Mark Kennedy, R-Minn., pitted highway builders and operators against highway users, primarily the trucking industry.

Elsewhere in the House bill is a

To qualify for the pre-clearance and use PrePass, truckers and their trucks need to have clean safety records, up-to-date licensing, insurance and registration records and not have any recent weight violations.

Dick Landis, president of HELP, said the organization has not marketed the system to motorcoach companies because the 24 states now using the system do not include any in the Northeast where the largest number of buses operates.

But that could change.

"We've been focusing on the trucking industry in the past, but the motorcoach industry is something we are going to have to look into," he said. "It might work fine for them, especially the cross-country coaches."

Also, Landis said HELP has expanded its PrePass capabilities to include a product called EasyPass, which records highway and bridge tolls and then bills trucking companies for those charges on a monthly basis. The system operates on the run, which means truckers don't have to stop at the tollgates.

"This might be something that would interest the motorcoach industry as well," he added.

Hill, meantime, said his coach company saves both time and fuel costs when its buses are able to bypass a weigh station. "Each time you have to idle down, then get in a line at the weigh station and stop to be weighed, it costs us time and more fuel," he said.

Although he hasn't kept records to determine the savings,

ABC arranges satellite coach tracking system

SAN LUIS OBISPO, Calif. — Fleet Management Solutions Inc. and ABC Companies have entered into an agreement under which FMS will supply ABC with satellite-based coach tracking, locating and reporting systems.

ABC will use FMS' MLT-300 satellite system to track its own coaches and those it leases, as well as offer the service to customers.

"ABC is very excited about this partnership," said Tim Wayland, president of ABC Financial Services. "FMS is providing the latest and most advanced all-satellite, Web-based tracking technology in the industry. The FMS solution fully meets ABC's asset manage-

ment, tracking and monitoring requirements, as well as those of our current and future customers," Wayland added.

"We're extremely pleased that ABC Companies has chosen FMS as the sole supplier for its coach tracking and monitoring initiatives," said Cliff Henley, CEO of San Luis Obispo-based Fleet Management Solutions. "Together, the two companies will provide cost-effective, 'state-of-the-art' all-satellite asset tracking and management solutions to ABC's customer base," Henley noted.

ABC is a major bus supplier and the U.S. distributor of Van Hool motorcoaches.

SEFAC relocates in Baltimore

BALTIMORE — SEFAC Inc., a leading supplier of mobile lifts, has changed locations in Baltimore.

SEFAC said the move coincides with a number of changes at the company, including the service department upgrading its commitment to fast and effective repair and inspection of mobile lifts. And, a new package of service, sales, finance and extended warranty

incentives are being implemented. Details are to be released soon.

"The new facility will help us improve our high level of supply and customer support for new and reconditioned SEFAC mobile lifts and parts," the company note.

The new address is 23 Fontana Lane, Ste. 110, Baltimore, MD 21237. Phone numbers are: (800) 826-3486 and (410) 539-5616.

far-reaching provision that extends federal motor carrier regulations for commercial motor vehicles to 15-passenger vans used for commercial purposes in interstate commerce.

The UMA and other private-sector groups have been pushing for such a provision for years. Limousine associations and others have opposed it, however.

"UMA has long supported full compliance with the Federal Motor

Carrier Safety Regulations in for-hire interstate operations no matter what vehicle type is used," said Norman Littler, UMA senior vice president for government and industry relations.

The NHTSA was successful in getting a provision added to the House bill that will prohibit the use of 15-passenger vans to transport children to and from school and events related to school.

Prepass

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

green light on the transponder, allowing the vehicle to continue past the weigh station without stopping. If it isn't, the driver gets a red light and has to stop for weighing and a records inspection.

HELP supplies the transponders to truckers at no charge and recovers its costs by charging them a monthly fee of \$14.99 for each vehicle equipped with the device.

When the system was introduced in California in 1995, truckers paid 99 cents each time they bypassed a weigh station, but the payment structure was changed last year at the urging of trucking companies that said they would be more comfortable with a flat fee.

surveys done with truckers indicate they save at least five minutes of time and at least one gallon of fuel each time they skip a weigh station.

The system has some added advantages, too, according to Hill.

"We always have passengers, especially seniors, who become unnerved when we are stopped at a weigh station. They see all of the lights and state police cars and want to know if something is wrong with the coach or the driver. The bypass system helps ease their concerns," he said.

Additionally, Hill said he worries when the coach driver has to leave the bus at the weigh station to take care of paper work or some other request from state personnel at the station.

"While the drivers tell their

passengers to stay on the bus, many of them get off to look for a restroom or to just look around," he noted, adding that such situations are dangerous because of the heavy truck traffic and drivers not expecting to see pedestrians in the area.

Hill likes the PrePass system so much, in fact, he believes others in the industry ought to be using it, too. "Would I recommend it others? Certainly, and I already have many times," he said.

Currently, PrePass is set up in Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Revamped internet sites blossom *MCI, ABA, UMA upgrade Web homes*

Three major coach industry players, ABA, MCI and UMA have launched new Web sites.

The United Motorcoach Association says its overhauled site — at www.uma.org — is loaded with new features, while the American Bus Association says its revamped Web site — at www.buses.org — reflects “a dynamic industry and a dynamic organization.”

The updated UMA site has a cleaner, leaner look, but contains more than a half-dozen new features. Among the additions are:

- Timely legislative and regulatory information
- Electronic versions of articles from *Bus & Motorcoach News*
- An industry calendar
- Links to federal agencies that interact with the industry
- Online health insurance quotes
- Information on process agents, and forms, including FMCSA form BOC-3

ABA says its new Web home is better-organized, more user-friendly and more comprehensive.

Visitors can gain “an enhanced appreciation of the motorcoach and group travel industry,” adds the ABA.

Among features the site has — or will have — is a section for state associations and state tourism departments, with links and contact information, and a listserv for state representatives to communicate with one another on a more regular basis.

The site also includes a security page with alerts and guidance for operator and manufacturer members-only. In addition, there is a survey component where ABA can take the “pulse” of the industry.

Peter J. Pantuso, ABA president and CEO, said the goal of the redesign was “to develop a Web site where all visitors — members, government staff, media and consumers — can gain enhanced appreciation for the motorcoach and group travel industry, and our members can use the site as a daily work tool.”

ABA says its gets an average of 18,000 hits monthly on its homepage.

Motor Coach Industries (MCI) launched a redesigned Web site intended to serve as a one-stop cyber shop for motorcoaches.

Visitors to www.MCIcoach.com will find a revamped homepage, a search engine for pre-owned inventory listings, the MCI Signature Shop for logo apparel and accessories, and an easy-to-use Parts Store.

New elements include more in-depth information, hierarchal pull-down menus, and a search engine that will allow customers to find content faster.

“The site is much more user friendly,” said Alice Lemon, MCI’s Web marketing specialist, who led the redesign project. “Everything MCI offers is available with a few easy clicks.”

MCI sees the Web site as a growth area, especially among customers seeking information on the products MCI offers, as well as for sales transactions. MCI is encouraging customers to use its site for parts orders by offering a 1 percent discount on all online

Virginia coach operator seeks industry stories

HARRISONBURG, Va. — Bob Hume, a veteran motorcoach operator and member of the board of the United Motorcoach Association, thinks there are great stories about the coach industry that are going uncollected and untold.

So, Hume has embarked on a quest to collect stories of and about the motorcoach industry and the people who built it.

“In researching the histories of some of (UMA’s) outgoing board members, I realized there are many companies with fabulous backgrounds. I want to collect those stories to save for their historical value,” said Hume.

He is asking coach operators from across the U.S. to send him their stories.

“What I’d like is a general call

for folks to send me — by mail, fax or e-mail — their story,” he said. “How their company started, how it has grown — family history and the like. I think we need to save the history of our industry and the people who make it work.”

“I’m not looking for a press release-type story, but just honest, down-to-earth recollections of where we’ve been and where we’re going,” he added.

“Once we have had an ample time to collect these stories, we’ll talk about publishing them. This is an industry of opportunity and that should be preserved.”

Contact Hume at: Travel Mates Trailways of Virginia, P.O. Box 2, Harrisonburg, VA 22803. E-mail him at tmates@tmates.com. Send faxes to (540) 434-8724. Or, phone him at (540) 434-4155.

orders. Registration is available online.

Stagecoach Group, parent company of Coach USA, has launched a Web site to provide its British passengers with clearer

travel information and easier access to bus services.

The site, www.stagecoachbus.com, has a fresh look and easier navigation to allow customers to get information quickly.

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NEW DELIVERIES

All Aboard America! Starline Mesa, Ariz. Seattle

All Aboard America!, which was honored at Motorcoach Expo, has expanded its fleet with the addition of four new H3-45 Prevost coaches.

"We've been buying Prevost vehicles for more than 10 years and they now comprise almost half of our fleet," said Jack Wigley, company president. "Their high-quality features and passenger-pleasing amenities make them the Rolls-Royce of motorcoaches."

All Aboard America! bought its newest coaches equipped with Prevost's Swap & Plug wheelchair-lift system. The system allows Ricon wheelchair-lift cassettes to be swapped between "lift-ready" Prevost coaches.

"With the new order, we bought just two lifts for the four buses, and we'll move them from vehicle to vehicle, as required. When the lift is not required, we gain back the luggage space and do

not have to carry the unnecessary load," said Wigley.

All Aboard America! is a full-service coach company, providing tours, charters, commuter and line-run services. The third-generation family business has a 65-vehicle fleet, with offices in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. The company will mark its 70th anniversary next year.

The company's new H3-45s have Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines, with two using Allison B500 transmissions and Jake Brakes, and the other two with ZF AS-Tronic transmissions. The coaches have Gerflor Tarabus flooring, Alcoa wheels, Firestone tires, Isringhausen driver seats, and REI A/V systems with five monitors.

At Expo, All Aboard America! was named winner of the Motorcoach Achievement Award presented by *BUS Ride*.

Starline Transportation, the second-largest private coach operator in the state of Washington, has added two new MCI J4500 coaches to its fleet.

Founded seven years ago, Starline provides the Pacific Northwest with shuttle, charter and paratransit service, utilizing a fleet of midsize buses and motorcoaches. The two J4500s bring the Starline operation to 50 vehicles, with 15 coaches, including 10 MCI's.

Starline COO John Burnett attributes the company's rapid growth to providing superior customer service, excellent-running equipment, customer service training, employee programs that foster enthusiasm and hard work, and an experienced executive team.

The company's senior management group is composed of Burnett; Becky Pritchett, president and founder, and Gladys Gillis, CEO.

The company began with three midsize buses and a contract for paratransit services with Seattle's Department of Social and Health Services. As small bus group tours grew, the company began to eye new markets. Today it has three distinct profit centers: Charter, which includes long and short trips in full-size coaches or smaller buses depending upon customer needs; contract shuttle; and paratransit, which provides non-emergency medical transportation to the disabled and elderly.

"We focus on corporate charter



work and contract shuttle and we are Seattle's premier provider of corporate shuttle services," Burnett said. Starline continues to serve its first charter customer, Microsoft, as well as other corporations in the Seattle area with charters and shuttle services.

The company has a staff of 95, and its own service center. It offers employees a package of benefits, including a dollar-for-dollar matching program in the employee 401k savings plan and coverage for 75 percent of employee medical insurance costs.

Despite the challenges of operating a paratransit service, the company continues to support the operation. "This business unit is difficult to insure. However, we are committed to continuing this service because we see it as a benefit to the community," said Burnett.

Starline's new J4500 coaches feature Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines, Allison B500 transmissions, Jake Brakes, National passenger seats, Isringhausen driver seats, R.C.A. flooring, Michelin tires, Alcoa wheels, and REI A/V system with six monitors, and VHS and DVD players.

"MCI always delivers a top-of-the-line, consistent product," said company CEO Gladys Gillis. "Our purchase of these two new motorcoaches fits perfectly with our customer needs and our expansion plans."

Starline received a Holland America cruise for purchasing the coaches, one of 25 operators awarded the incentive by MCI. For Starline, however, the award is a bit ironic. That's because it's on a cruise line owned by its largest competitor, Gray Line of Seattle.

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Anderson Coach & Travel Greenville, Pa

Anderson Coach & Travel has added four Prevost H3-45s to its fleet in recent months, including one last month. The new vehicles bring the Anderson fleet to 43 coaches.

Company President Doug Anderson says he talked to several manufacturers before making his latest purchases, ultimately deciding on Prevosts as he has every year for the past seven years. He says his loyalty stems in large measure from Prevost dependability and reliability. "A good motorcoach represents a significant investment for us. Costs add up if that investment sits in a garage for unnecessary or excess repairs or maintenance issues," he says. "Prevost has always

given us excellent service, so downtime is kept to a minimum."

The company's new Prevosts are equipped with Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines, ZF AS-tronic transmissions, Jake Brakes, National passenger seats, Isringhausen driver seats, R.C.A. flooring, Michelin tires, and RAI A/V system with scenic-view camera. The coaches were outfitted with 52 seats, giving passengers extra legroom.

Anderson Coach provides a variety of charter services, group vacation packages and individual vacation tours. The 68-year-old company offers more than 750 tours to more than 150 destinations throughout North America.



In addition, Anderson operates a shuttle service, Airlink, from Erie County, Pa., and Ashtabula, Ohio, to Cleveland Hopkins International Airport.

The company is a member of the International Motor Coach Group and Doug Anderson is vice chairman of the American Bus Association.



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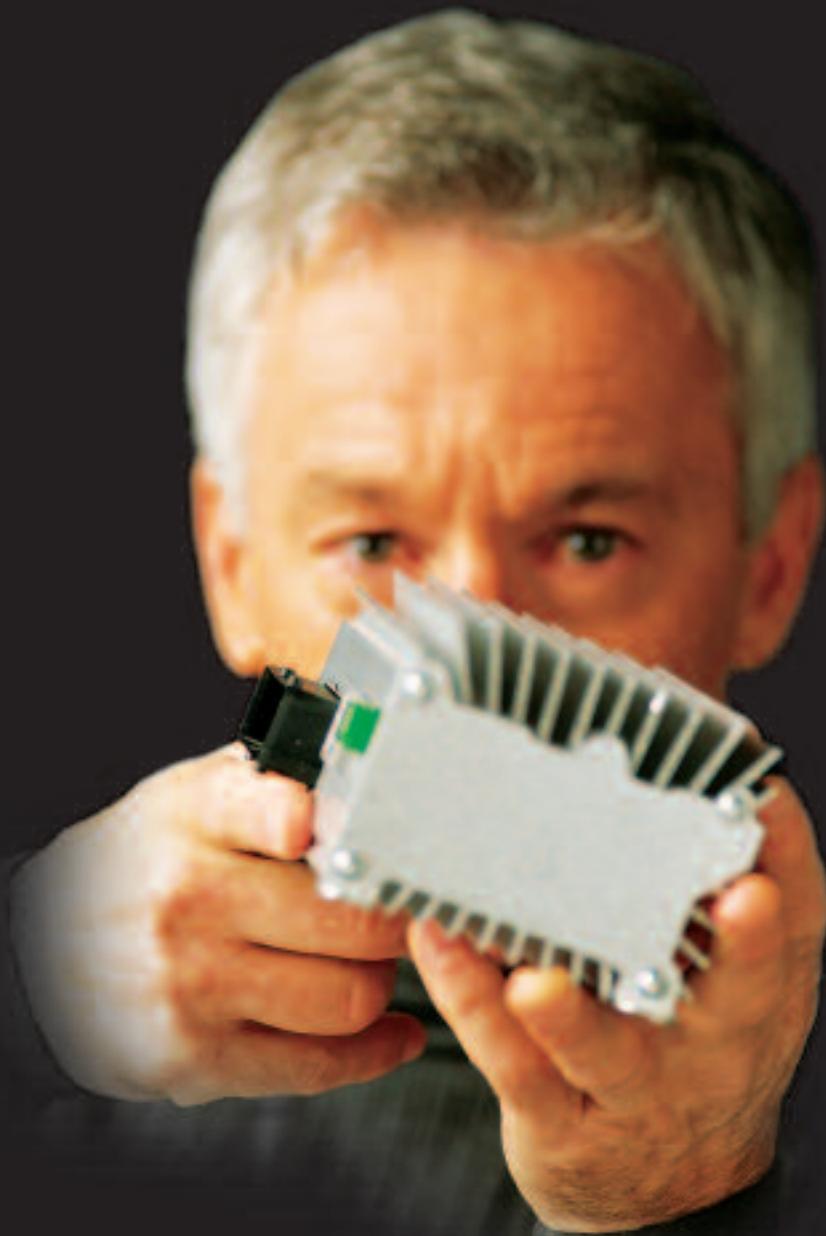


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