

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

THE NEWS RESOURCE FOR THE BUS AND MOTORCOACH INDUSTRY

Highway bill is threatened by gridlock

WASHINGTON — Even though both Houses of Congress have passed separate highway and public transportation reauthorization bills, analysts are speculating a final bill may not reach President Bush's desk this year.

Congressional and White House battle lines over the massive legislation hardened last month after the House passed its version of the massive bill.

The House legislation, like that of the Senate, was adopted after months and months of negotiations, but the bill came in with a \$275 billion price tag that is \$19 billion more than President Bush has said he's willing to sign.

The Senate bill proposes spending \$62 billion more than the White House says is acceptable.

Undeterred by the threat of a presidential veto, some Republican senators have dug in their heels, insisting the Senate funding levels "are the minimum that should be included" when the House and Senate work out their differences.

The situation is particularly sticky for the Republican leadership in Congress. While they want to retain the funding levels their houses have adopted, they also do not want to vote against their leader, particularly in an election year. So far, the presidential veto threat has them stymied.

Many observers are speculating that the longer the gridlock continues the less likely a bill will make it through Congress this year. Looming on the horizon are war-related supplemental appropriations. There is fear that unless Congress gets the highway spending bill adopted, lawmakers might vote to send money to Iraq that otherwise could have gone to highways and public transportation.



CVSA gives up push for lift-door handles

WASHINGTON — The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance has abandoned efforts to get regulators in the U.S. and Canada to mandate inside releases for wheelchair-lift doors on motorcoaches and other passenger vehicles.

Tim Davis, chairman of CVSA's passenger carrier committee, said the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration turned down a recommendation from the CVSA calling for federal rules requiring inside door handles.

Transport Canada never responded to the request, he added.

"I guess that closes it out for us," said Davis, an administrator with the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Energy.

CVSA sent letters late last year to both federal agencies urging them to consider making inside releases mandatory as a

means of helping with the emergency evacuation of passengers with disabilities.

The decision by CVSA not to push the issue further is expected to please many in the motorcoach industry. Coach operators worried that such a mandate could significantly boost the price of a new coach, and be even more costly if it required retrofitting existing coaches with inside door handles.

Davis said the NHTSA indicated it would write standards for inside releases if wheelchair-lift doors were considered emergency exits. "But because they are not, there is no need to have the standards," he added.

Instead of pursuing its recommendation, he said, the committee decided it would be best to suggest to motorcoach operators that if they are interested in an inside door release they work with their bus manufacturer when they order new coaches. "Let the market decide," he said.

FMCSA chief wants compliance review program revamped

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — The head of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration says the agency's compliance review program needs a major overhaul.

The administrator of the FMCSA, Annette Sandberg, told a conference of safety officials here last month she has launched a "top-to-bottom rethinking" of the compliance review process. The goal, she said, is to find ways "to look at more carriers, more efficiently and produce a larger safety benefit."

Sandberg's remarks came at the annual meeting of the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance. CVSA's

membership is composed of federal, state and provincial highway safety officials and agencies, and representatives from private industry in the U.S., Canada and Mexico whose work involves commercial vehicle safety.

Compliance reviews are the No. 1 enforcement tool used by the FMCSA and the state agencies it contracts with to determine the



Annette Sandberg

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ▶

City deals savage blow to private NY operators

NEW YORK CITY — The seven private bus companies that provide daily commuter service to the distant corners of New York City were hit by a 60-foot artic late last month.

The blow, though not totally unexpected, came when it was announced that the New York City Metropolitan Transportation Authority is taking over management of the services delivered by the seven companies.

Executives from several of the companies complained to news outlets that they had been given no notice of the takeover and indicated the road leading to the transfer on July 1, may be littered with potholes and roadblocks.

The city has been trying for nearly 20 years to sever its relationship with the private bus oper-

ators that provide service to 400,000 riders daily in Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx.

During most of the past year, the city has been trying to convince the MTA to takeover the operation but the MTA balked over money and other issues.

The administration of Mayor Michael Bloomberg wanted the MTA to assume the service at no cost to the city. That would have saved the city almost \$150 million in annual subsidies. The MTA rejected that idea.

Under the deal announced by Bloomberg and New York Gov. George Pataki, the city will pay the MTA \$150 million to keep the buses operating.

The seven companies impacted by the deal are: Command Bus

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Van Galder Bus acquires business of long-time rival, Rockford Coach Lines

ROCKFORD, Ill. — Van Galder Bus Co. of Janesville, Wis., a Coach USA company, has purchased the business of its long-time regional rival, Rockford Coach Lines, from Greyhound Lines.

Terms of the “limited-asset” purchase were not disclosed.

Rockford Coach Lines, which was founded 70 years ago and operated for most of its history as Peoria Rockford Bus Co., is being shutdown effective May 3, and its business transferred to Van Galder.

The operational backbone of both Van Galder Bus and Rockford Coach Lines has been daily shuttle runs to Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport. Rockford offered 15 daily runs to O’Hare from Rockford, Ill., which is 65 miles north/northwest of Chicago via Interstate 90.

In the late 1990s, Rockford Coach pioneered intermodal bus service with United Airlines. A traveler on United, the largest airline serving O’Hare, could purchase a ticket that included the Rockford bus fare. That program ended.

Van Galder, whose base in Janesville is 35 miles north of Rockford, offers daily shuttle service to O’Hare from seven communities in south-central Wisconsin and north-central Illinois. It began offering shuttles to O’Hare 25 years ago and opened its own terminal in Rockford 8 years ago. Its Rockford facility includes a 550-car parking lot.

For the past 18 months, Van Galder also has offered daily shuttle service to Midway Airport on Chicago’s south side, and its provides service to Amtrak in Chicago.

Similar to Rockford Coach, Van Galder also had its own intermodal link for a time. When American Eagle discontinued air service between Rockford, Ill., and Chicago, the service was assumed by Van Galder Bus.

Upwards of 50 full- and part-time Rockford Coach Lines’ employees are being impacted by the deal. Van Galder is interviewing Rockford drivers and mechanics and is expected to hire a half-dozen or more.

One of those whose future is up in the air is Trip Bellows, the personable general manager of Rockford Coach. He has managed



the operation for the past three years and has 25 years experience in the travel, transportation and hospitality industry.

Van Galder’s purchase of Rockford includes the line-run, sightseeing, tour, airport transfer, and charter business. None of Rockford’s 19 motorcoaches was included in the deal; all of the buses remain with Greyhound. The Rockford Coach facilities in Rockford are being sold.

In a statement, Greyhound said the sale was made necessary by the post-Sept. 11 decline in passengers and revenues. “The

entire travel industry is suffering and Greyhound is no exception,” said Timothy Moline, vice president of Greyhound Travel Services, a unit of Greyhound Lines. “The company has moved aggressively to improve its performance, and is continually looking at all of its businesses to increase the potential for long-term profit growth.”

Van Galder also saw a steep drop in travel after 9/11 but was aggressive in going after new business and able to rebuild. The company operates more than 100 vehicles. Steve Van Galder is company president.

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THE DOCKET

Support grows in Congress to hike fuel tax

WASHINGTON — Despite President Bush's strong opposition, there's support among Republicans and Democrats in Congress for an increase in the federal fuel tax, the *Washington Post* reports.

Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska), who chairs the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, wants an immediate nickel increase in the tax, followed by annual increases of half a cent. He's supported by top Democrats on the committee, and also by Republican Rep. Thomas E. Petri (Wis.), who chairs the committee's panel on surface transportation.

The congressmen would direct extra revenue raised from highway users to the Highway Trust Fund, which finances road, mass transit and safety programs. The last federal fuel-tax hike was in 1993.

The \$275 billion surface transportation bill overwhelmingly approved by the House early last month did not include a fuel-tax increase.

Taxes up in 8 states

Fuel taxes rose in eight states during the final quarter of last year, with most of the increases resulting from inflation mechanisms built into fuel tax rates.

The biggest increase was in New York, which raised its tax on diesel fuel by just over a penny a gallon. Other, smaller diesel fuel tax increases were

State & Provincial Fuel Tax Rates

A handful of states boosted fuel tax rates during the fourth quarter of 2004. Here are the updated rates for all states and provinces, plus the federal tax rate in the U.S.

State	Gasoline	Diesel	State	Gasoline	Diesel
Alabama	18	19	North Carolina	24.3	24.3
Alaska	8	8	North Dakota	21	21
Arizona	18	26	Ohio	27	27
Arkansas	21.5	22.5	Oklahoma	16	13
California	30.1	27.8	Oregon	24	0
Colorado	22	20.5	Pennsylvania	26.2	31.2
Connecticut	29	30	Rhode Island	30	30
Delaware	23	22	South Carolina	16	16
D.C.	20	20	South Dakota	22	22
Florida	19.37	29.07	Tennessee	21	18
Georgia	11.3	11.31	Texas	20	20
Hawaii	16	16	Utah	24.5	24.5
Idaho	25	25	Vermont	20	26
Illinois	26.8	29.6	Virginia	19.5	19.5
Indiana	29	27	Washington	28	28
Iowa	20.3	22.5	West Virginia	25.35	25.35
Kansas	24	26	Wisconsin	31.5	31.5
Kentucky	18.6	18.6	Wyoming	14	14
Louisiana	20	20	U. S.	18.4	24.4
Maine	24.6	25.7	<i>Tax Rate in cents per gallon</i>		
Maryland	23.5	24.25	Province	Gasoline	Diesel
Massachusetts	21	21	Alberta	9	9
Michigan	25	22.8	British Columbia	14.5	15
Minnesota	20	20	Manitoba	11.5	10.9
Mississippi	18	18	New Brunswick	14.5	16.9
Missouri	17	17	Newfoundland	16.5	16.5
Montana	27	27.75	Nova Scotia	15.5	15.4
Nebraska	24.8	24.8	Ontario	14.7	14.3
Nevada	23.81	27.75	P.E. Island	14	13.5
New Hampshire	18	18	Quebec	15.2	16.2
New Jersey	14.5	17.5	Saskatchewan	15	15
New Mexico	17	18	<i>Tax Rate in Canada = cents per liter</i>		
New York	33.1	31.5			

posted by California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina and Pennsylvania.

(See chart above for all state and provincial fuel tax rates.)

Wisconsin tax rises

Wisconsin's fuel tax, already the highest in the U.S., went up another

0.6 cents a gallon last month, to 32.1 cents. The increase resulted from a periodic adjustment based on the U.S. Consumer Price Index. The *State Laws Newsletter* points out the irony of the increase: The Consumer Price Index has been going up this year because fuel prices have been rising.

Court considers Mexican bus/truck case

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments last month that could clear the way for Mexican buses and trucks to travel on U.S. highways.

During oral arguments, several justices signaled support for the Bush Administration position that a full environmental study of the impact of the Mexican vehicles is not required. A ruling by the court is expected by July.

President Bush decided three years ago to open the border to

Mexican vehicles under the North American Free Trade Agreement.

As many as 30,000 Mexican trucks and buses a year could travel on U.S. highways if the border is opened, says Public Citizen, a consumer and environmental group that is opposing the move.

The case before the court was whether the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration had to issue an environmental impact statement when it released the safety rules that Congress

required before the border could be opened.

Some justices questioned why an agency charged with ensuring safety should have to focus on environmental consequences.

The San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled last year that the safety rules would affect the environment and therefore studies of those possible effects were required under the National Environmental Policy Act and the Clean Air Act.

Associations seek support to repeal tax in New Jersey

WASHINGTON — The United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association have issued urgent calls for operators to support the effort to win an exemption for motorcoaches from New Jersey taxes on nonresident corporations.

Initial legislative action is scheduled early this month on a bill introduced in the General Assembly to exempt out-of-state coach operators from New Jersey nexus taxes. (See April 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The ABA and UMA are seeking evidence the New Jersey tax has harmed that state's economy. Specifically, they want to hear from operators that have stopped going to Atlantic City or cut back on trips to Atlantic City and are taking customers to other casinos or destinations because of the New Jersey tax.

Operators can help in two ways. First, they can write a letter

detailing how they have redirected their business to other states because of New Jersey tax policies. Letters should be sent to the associations as soon as possible.

Second, operators can agree to appear before state legislators to testify they have changed their business to exclude New Jersey.

Operators interested in helping should write, call or e-mail Vic Parra, president and CEO of UMA, and/or Peter Pantuso, president and CEO of ABA.

To contact Parra: Write to Victor Parra, President & CEO, United Motorcoach Association, 113 South West St., 4th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314. E-mail: vparra@uma.org. Phone: (800) 424-8262; fax: (703) 838-2950.

To contact Pantuso: Write to Peter Pantuso, President & CEO, American Bus Association, 700 13th St. NW, Ste. 575, Washington, DC 20005. E-mail: ppantuso@buses.org. Phone: (800) 283-2877; fax (202) 842-0850.

U.S. House votes to restrict tolling on super highways; toll bills die in Missouri

Finally! Some good news on highway tolls.

After months of reporting on a wave of highway and bridge toll hikes and proposed increases, we can report on two rays of sunshine.

Buried in the \$275 million highway and public transportation bill passed by the House of Representatives last month is language that would severely restrict attempts to impose tolls on interstate highways.

The amended House bill would allow for toll lanes to be built only as additions to current capacity on the same highways and where drivers would have a choice of which lanes to use.

It also would require that the

tolls end once construction and maintenance costs are recovered.

The changes negated language the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee had included when it approved the bill and sent it to the full House. That version allowed for several pilot projects of tolling complete interstate routes.

The changes were the handiwork of Rep. Mark Kennedy (R-Minn.).

Meanwhile in Missouri, the many proposals introduced in the state legislature this session that would have resulted in tolling interstates in that state are dead — for this year.

(See March 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Cleanup of diesel engines accelerated in California

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California motorcoach operators and truckers are being urged to participate in a new plan designed to speed the cleanup of diesel engines in that state.

The California Air Resources Board developed the voluntary plan to accelerate the upgrade of engine emissions reduction software at no cost to bus and truck operators.

Under the plan, the emissions cleanup schedule that was part of a 1998 legal settlement between diesel engine makers and the federal government is moved forward. The '98 agreement settled government allegations the engine companies installed so-called "smog defeat" devices on their engines to improve over-the-road performance at the expense of higher emissions of nitrogen oxides.

The settlement, which cost the engine makers \$1 billion in penalties, required them to upgrade the emissions software on all of the "illegal" engines they had sold. It also stipulated that the software upgrades were to be made when the engines required major overhaul, something regulators thought would happen fairly quickly. As it turned out, diesel engines built in the 1990s were extremely durable and only about 10 percent have been reprogrammed.

To accelerate the reprogramming, the Air Resources Board threatened to impose new regulations that would have forced the engine companies to upgrade the engine software in all buses and trucks operating in the state right away.

The engine companies threatened to sue to block such a mandatory program. Finally, CARB developed the voluntary plan that requires the engine manufacturers to increase the number of California buses and trucks having the low-emission software to 35 percent by November, 60 percent by June 2005, 80 percent by February 2006 and 100 percent by 2008.

If the manufacturers fail to meet the quotas, the Air Resources Board could order the immediate recall of all diesel-powered vehicles covered by the 1998 agreement.

With the prospect of a mandatory recall hanging over their heads, engine makers and

industry groups are urging bus and truck operators to take their vehicles in to have their electronic control modules reprogrammed at no charge to the operators.

In part, the engine companies and others want to keep the plan voluntary because of the inconvenience for operators if the state mandates that the software reprogram-

ming be done on very short notice.

The engine makers are paying for the software and its installation when a bus or truck

visits a dealership.

The Air Resources Board plan only applies to motorcoaches and heavy-duty trucks registered in California.

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THE DOCKET

Feds want rule to close multi-licensing loophole

WASHINGTON — The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration wants to close a loophole it says allows some high-risk CDL drivers to obtain multiple driver licenses.

A proposed rule dealing with the issue was published by NHTSA in the Federal Register.

According to the agency, the problem exists because as many as 25 states are checking just one of two Department of Transportation databases during the issuance of non-CDL licenses.

As a result, a high-risk CDL driver is able to obtain a second, non-CDL license from a non-

home state and use the second license to “spread out” a driving record among two or more states, a NHTSA study found.

The National Driver Register database is intended to prevent issuance of motor vehicle operator (non-CDL) licenses to individuals with suspended or revoked licenses. The Commercial Driver License Information System database is designed to prevent issuance of CDLs to high-risk drivers and multiple CDLs.

The proposed rulemaking requires states to check both databases prior to issuing or renewing any driver license.

Operation Airbrake is slated for May

WASHINGTON — The first of two nationwide air brake inspection programs will take place sometime this month.

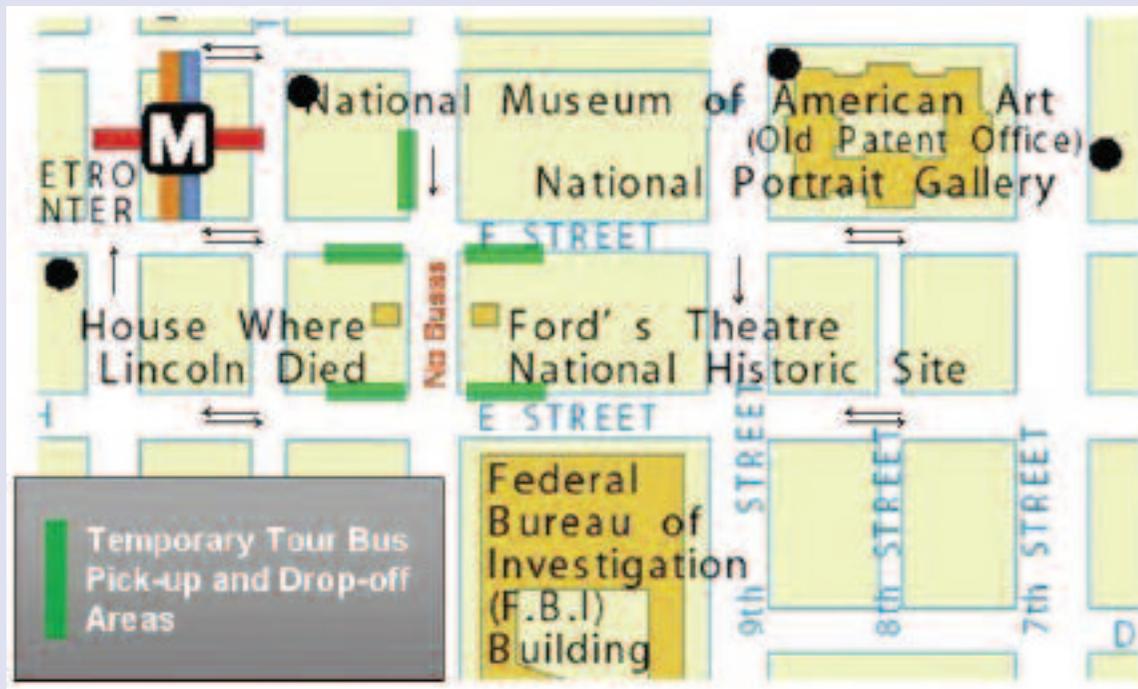
The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance’s 2004 Operation Airbrake will be run at locations throughout Canada and the United States on an “unannounced” day this month.

The annual surprise inspection is aimed at reducing brake-related crashes by encouraging drivers and motor carriers to

increase their knowledge of brake inspection and maintenance, as well as their compliance with safety regulations and vehicle brake performance.

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

For more information, contact Steve Keppler at the CVSA by e-mail at stevek@cvsa.org, or 202-775-1623 ext. 106.



Theater improvements alter loading

WASHINGTON — Tour bus drop-off and pick-up in front of the Ford's Theatre National Historic Site in Washington has been discontinued while pedestrian improvements are being made to the area.

The National Park Service, which operates the Ford's Theatre complex, expects the construction to last a matter of months.

The project includes improved pedestrian crossings and new sidewalks, street lights and bus loading and unloading areas

along 10th Street at both Ford's Theatre and the Peterson House.

During the construction phase, tour bus pick-up and drop-off will not be permitted on 10th Street in front of the site. All bus loading and unloading must be done on the adjacent streets — E, F or 10th north of F street — until the project is completed.

The Park Service is working with the Downtown DC Business Improvement District and the district government to make the pedestrian environment safer and

to better accommodate visitors.

Ford's Theatre National Historic Site hosts more than one million visitors each year. The site is the location of the 1864 assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. The theater continues to operate, with a number of performances given each year.

Visit the District of Columbia Department of Transportation Web site, www.ddot.dc.gov, for tour bus loading, unloading and parking information throughout Washington. For educational information about the Ford's Theatre National Historic Site or other National Park Service sites in the Washington area visit the National Mall and Memorial Parks Web site at www.nps.gov/nacc.

Transit seeks charter firms

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

Harrisonburg, Va. Deadline: June 23, 2004. Write to: Vickie Conley, City of Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation, 475 E. Washington St., Harrisonburg, VA 22802. Phone: (540) 432-0492.

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OPINION

Forgetfulness or deceit?

The public transit lobby appears to be suffering from a bad case of forgetfulness. Or, is it amnesia, or possibly dementia? Or, it is something less benign?

How else to explain one of the principal arguments transit advocates have been making to Congress in support of efforts to weaken the federal charter service rules.

The transit lobby has been whispering to congressmen and women that the rules need to be liberalized, saying there's a vast amount of unmet need for charter bus service by government, civic, charitable and other community groups with limited resources. Of course, the transit agencies say they should be allowed to fulfill those unmet needs because private operators either can't do it or will charge too much.

Well, guess what?

Nothing could be further from the truth. And one needs to look no further than the Federal Transit Administration to prove them wrong. Dead wrong.

A dozen years ago, when Congress passed the first Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, which came to be known as ISTEA, it inserted language directing the FTA to set up a Charter Service Demonstration Program that would allow transit operators in four states to provide charter bus service to meet the needs of government agencies, civic and charitable groups, and other community organizations that otherwise would not be served

cost-effectively and efficiently.

The FTA selected transit operators in California, Oklahoma, Missouri and Michigan, including large and medium-size cities, as well as rural areas.

The experiment was to last a year. But once the program got up and running the transits began grumping that a year wasn't long enough to implement a charter policy and evaluate the impact. So, the FTA extended the program for another 14 months. The demonstration finally ended Oct. 31, 1995 — 26 months after it began.

The results of the experiment came as no surprise — to the motorcoach industry.

In the words of the FTA: "The data gathered as a result of the charter demonstration program did not support the public operators' claims of

unmet needs for the groups for which the demonstration was primarily intended: government, civic, charitable and other community activities."

"Based on these results, the demonstration did not indicate the need for FTA to significantly alter its current (charter) service regulations," the agency added.

The findings, issued in June 1997, were signed by Gordon J. Linton, FTA administrator and no friend of the private bus industry.

There you have it. The effort by the FTA to ferret out unmet charter service needs came up with nothing. Zilch. How quickly some in the transit sector forget.

'The data did not support the public operators' claims of unmet needs.'

Reducing high-tech liability



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

The importance and proliferation of computers, e-mail and the internet in the workplace can not be overlooked. Each of these tools, however, comes with significant legal liability risk for employers. Computers become a new filing system where a whole host of information is created and stored. All of which can be a gold mine for plaintiff's attorneys because it is all discoverable in a lawsuit.

E-mails tend to be written off the cuff with little significant thought or planning given to the e-mail or response. People tend to write things in e-mails they would not say in person or over the telephone. The result, e-mails create a lot of smoking guns.

While the internet is a phenomenal resource of information, the amount and type of information now running through company information systems is downright scary. The amount of time employees spend on the internet dramatically impacts productivity. Usage ranges from actual work, to weather, sports and news, to pornography. Bottom line: The creation, implementation and enforcement of a strong computer-usage policy will provide a good first line of defense.

Policy provisions

- Use of any company communication system for the purpose of making offensive or harassing statements, including disparagement of others based on race, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, religious, or political beliefs is prohibited.
- Sending threatening messages, offensive images or messages, or pornography is prohibited.

- Encryption of messages or other information is prohibited.
- Confidential information, including sales, marketing, accounting or operational information should not be sent over the internet without company approval.
- All employees must use e-mail, internet and other online services in accordance with the carrier's operating policies and the company's policies.
- Use of any communication system for the purpose of operating a business for personal gain or for searching for jobs outside the company is prohibited.
- Use of any communication system for the purpose of sending jokes, chain letters or soliciting money is prohibited.
- Enrollment in internet discussion sites, chat rooms, list servers, and/or e-mail groups must be approved and authorized by the company.
- No unauthorized downloading/uploading of software or files is allowed to prevent viruses from entering the corporate online systems. All software downloaded must be authorized by and registered to the company.
- Employees are expected to help the company remain virus free.
- Employee stocking of unauthorized software is illegal and is strictly prohibited.
- No message can be transmitted without the employee's identity. Transmittal of messages with anonymous or fictitious names is prohibited.

Policy parameters

- Employees should not have any expectation of privacy with respect to computer messages or files.
 - The company reserves the right to monitor, access, search, inspect and disclose any message, communication or file on a computer system owned or operated by the company at any time and for any reason.
- Once you develop a policy, monitoring and enforcement become critical. These steps are necessary, however, to help reduce your risk and create a proper work environment.

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Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

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Say it ain't so, Joe!



By Victor S. Parra
President & CEO
United Motorcoach Association

There I was, minding my own business. I had been invited to sit in on a meeting of the board of directors of the Pennsylvania Bus Association and I was waiting for the meeting to begin, musing about the blustery weather outside.

Next thing I know, the association president, Joe Wrabel of Capitol Trailways in Harrisburg, starts the meeting by lamenting about how low revenues have dropped in our industry.

He pointed out how our pricing structure keeps moving downward ... despite the fact overall travel is moving upward.

Needless to say, I snapped to attention.

A little flame deep inside began to burn hot — again. I started rubbing my palms and shifting in my seat. I was ready to go. Thankfully, right after Joe finished his remarks, he turned to me and asked if I had any comments for the board.

Wow! It was like asking Barry Bonds if he prefers to take a pitch and walk, or swing for the fences.

I think everyone in the room expected me to launch

into an update on legislative matters. But I couldn't let Joe's comments slide by. Instead, I immediately jumped all over them. To quote that noted baseball philosopher: it was déjà vu all over again.

I thanked Joe for raising the issue, even before dealing with any association business. Because, no matter what legislative battles we're engaged in (and we do have some very serious state and national issues we're fighting), we can't lose sight of the fact that our businesses must be profitable. And you can't turn a profit if you're giving away your service, in effect, because you don't know your cost structure.

Or, you can't survive if your price is being driven by the lowballer down the street, and not by sound business thinking.

It's springtime. The weather is getting better.

From my vantage point, I can tell just by the number of coaches winding their way around the streets of Washington that business is looking up.

It's clear that people are starting to travel again, whether it's to root for the home team at the nearest ballpark, or to take an overnight trip to one of our wonderful national parks.

Now's the time to establish a profitable pricing structure ... and to stick with it. It's your opportunity to start the season with a home run!

So, don't strikeout on the chance to improve your financial position. With travel picking up, this is a bases-loaded opportunity you'd be crazy to pass up.

U.S. wants states input on Amtrak routes

WASHINGTON — The Bush Administration is asking state governments how they would contract rail service to private companies if Amtrak were dismantled and its routes were open to competition.

The administration favors a multi-year plan of shifting Amtrak's overarching responsibilities as a federal corporation and transferring major oversight to the states, which could contract serv-

ice to private companies or return the business to Amtrak.

Amtrak runs 250 trains in 46 states. It has operated city-to-city routes without competition for 33 years.

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Illinois operators oppose tourism funding cutback

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — The Illinois Motorcoach Association has joined with other travel groups to oppose a huge budget cut for the Illinois Bureau of Tourism.

The budget of Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich proposes cutting state tourism funding by 50 percent. The association is working with key players to restore the money.

The association is urging all

Illinois operators to let their legislators and the governor know they oppose the tourism cuts.

On April 28, the association sponsored a "Lobby Day" at the state capitol, with members calling on legislators to discuss tourism funding, plus other critical issues, including restoring the state rolling stock exemption.

For information, contact the association at (217) 525-3474.

INDUSTRY NEWS

APTA seeks \$2 billion for transit security in '05

WASHINGTON — The American Public Transportation Association has asked Congress to provide \$2 billion in fiscal 2005 to improve security for public transit systems.

In written testimony to the House and Senate subcommittees on homeland security appropriations, APTA President William W. Millar requested \$1.2 billion for capital security needs and \$800 million for security-related operating costs.

"We can't wait for another wake up call," said Millar. "The Bush Administration and Congress need to act now to ensure safety for the millions of people who depend on public transportation."

APTA noted that even though more people travel on public transportation than fly, the airline industry has received \$11 billion from the Department of Homeland Security for security since 9/11, while \$115 million was earmarked for transit agencies.

"Making sure America's riders on public transportation are as safe as possible should be a top priority of our federal leaders," said Millar. "The federal government must help the public transportation industry now by funding security initiatives as it does for the aviation industry."

"Allocating \$2 billion into next year's DHS budget is a necessary step forward towards help-

ing America's public transportation providers keep their riders safe," Millar added.

APTA says public transit agencies have spent \$1.7 billion on security since 9/11, using fare and tax revenues.

Screening test at rail station

WASHINGTON — The Transportation Security Administration has chosen a rail station in New Carrollton, Md., for a two- to three-month test of a passenger screening system.

The test, which is expected to begin by the end of this month, comes in the wake of deadly March

11 rail bombings in Madrid.

The rail platform in New Carrollton serves both Amtrak and MARC, a commuter rail system operated by the Maryland Transit Administration.

TSA officials are considering several technologies to use in the screening of luggage and carry-on bags. They say the biggest challenge will be to expedite the process so trains are not delayed.

Some bus industry observers think the process being tested in New Carrollton could be a forerunner of a system for bus stations.

Rail travel cannot be 100 percent safe

WASHINGTON — Amtrak President David Gunn said in an interview that a Madrid-like explosion could occur in the U.S., but he said Amtrak has not received any specific threats.

"I don't think there's any point in pretending there isn't some risk," said Gunn. "If people are trying to do damage to you, there is no way you are ever going to be in a situation where you can be 100 percent certain that something can't be done."

Gunn said it would be impossible to put in place a screening process like the airlines use. Screening passengers and luggage along commuter rail lines could destroy the service, he said.

Amtrak is seeking \$110 million to improve security, primarily in its tunnels.

Bomb dogs proposed to boost security

RESTON, Va. — Bomb-sniffing dogs are the least expensive and fastest way to prevent a Madrid-style terrorist attack, say transit security officials and counterterrorism veterans.

A panel discussion sponsored by The Transportation and Development Institute, part of the American Society of Civil Engineers, also recommended that bus, train and trolley systems not wait for federal homeland security grants to use dogs.

"Don't sit around and wring your hands because you don't have any money," said James Broder, a former FBI agent with 40 years' experience in counterterrorism. "Roving inspectors can be taught the behavioral patterns of bombers. Keep your programs simple. Don't overreact."

New product detects odors

NEWBURY PARK, Calif. — Electronic Sensor Technology says its new "zNose" technology can recognize suspicious odors such as explosives, drugs, chemical weapons and money in luggage and other containers.

The company claims its technology can separate and measure the chemistry of any fragrance, odor, vapor or smell. And, unlike trace detection technology, zNose can distinguish chemical odors.

Blue Bird revamps school bus plants

FORT VALLEY, Ga. — A \$12.6 million renovation of the three North American school bus manufacturing facilities of Blue Bird Corporation have been completed. The renovations began last fall.

"These improvements will continue to keep Blue Bird on the cutting edge of technology, and open the door for newer innovative products for the future" said Blue Bird Chief Executive Jeff Bust. "Not only will this enable our workers to be more productive and provide a better environment to work, but it will also ensure quality and on time deliveries, and be more cost effective."

The renovations also allow Blue Bird to standardize production processes, as well as introduce updated manufacturing features, including just-in-time inventory, point-of-use storage,

Andon lights, new paint booths, automated pull-line production, and waste elimination processes.

"The bottom line is, it helps us build a more consistent, safe and quality school bus," Bust said. "It will also increase production, which means we'll be adding around 350-400 jobs."

Blue Bird's home plant in Fort Valley will now focus on transit school buses, such as the All American FE and RE, which are built on a new body line.

The LaFayette, Ga., facility will focus on Blue Bird's new VISION school bus.

And the Brantford, Ont., facility will produce the VISION and SBCV/International products, along with the Micro Bird, Blue Bird's small bus product line.

Blue Bird also operates plants that build motorcoaches and commercial buses at Fort Valley.

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Safety council recommends emergency evacuation actions

WASHINGTON — The Bus Industry Safety Council has issued new emergency evacuation recommendations for motorcoaches, including guidelines for handling individuals with disabilities.

Included in the guidelines is a recommendation that drivers ask for volunteers to help evacuate passengers with disabilities when an on-the-road emergency occurs.

The council said passenger safety should be the first priority when there's a fire or other emergency, and passengers who are in wheelchairs or who need help in getting off the bus should get special attention.

"If you have a passenger or passengers with disabilities on the coach and they require assistance to evacuate, ask for a volunteer or volunteers to assist," the council says.

It noted that, if possible, disabled passengers should be taken from the bus with their wheelchair or other disability aid, although the protection of life is more important than the equipment.

The recommendations came from a council committee that looked into evacuation procedures as part of an effort to make drivers

more aware of what to do in an emergency, including how to deal with passengers with disabilities.

While the recommendations are aimed at motorcoach evacuations, the procedures suggested by the council could apply to all types and sizes of buses, said Paul Murphy of Motor Coach Industries, who chaired the Bus Industry Safety Council committee that considered the issue.

The council's recommendations have been posted on the Web pages of the American Bus Association, which sponsors the council.

"We put them out there for whoever needs them and it is up to the operators to develop them as procedures," Murphy said.

Here are the council recommendations for handling emergencies when there are disabled passengers:

- Park the bus as far as possible from the road.
- Turn on hazard lights.
- Set the parking brake.
- Turn engine off.
- If possible turn off master power.
- Tell the passengers that you are concerned for a threat of fire

'If possible, disabled passengers should be taken from the bus with their wheelchairs.'

(or other emergency), and that passenger safety is your first priority. If you have a passenger or passengers with disabilities and they require assistance to evacuate, ask for a volunteer or volunteers to assist in evacuating the disabled passengers. Next, assure the passenger or passengers with

disabilities that you will provide whatever assistance is needed to allow them to exit the coach in a timely manner.

- Open — or ask others to open — the roof hatches to help with ventilating of smoke and to assist others in getting off safely and then say, "Evacuate in an orderly fashion."

- Call or have someone call the fire department, and the highway patrol/police.

- Move to assist passengers using mobility aids or who otherwise cannot exit the coach, either through the lift access door or other exits as required. Select the most promising helper(s) and ask them for assistance. Ask for assistance from others as needed.

- If there is time, and the wheelchair lift can be used, then do so. Although removal of the passenger with his or her mobility aid is the ideal action, protection of life is more important.

- Continue to check for passengers, including lavatory, making sure it is empty while removing the fire extinguisher or first-aid kit, if needed.

- Evacuation through the front door is fastest. A fire at the front of the bus may make the regular entrance unusable and an alternate route of evacuation necessary, such as the emergency windows.

- If you can attack the fire, do so carefully. Do not endanger yourself or allow anyone else to endanger him or herself fighting a fire.

Stewart & Stevenson lifts are acquired by Ricon Corp.

PANORAMA CITY, Calif. — Ricon Corp. has begun producing the motorcoach wheelchair lifts that previously have been manufactured by Stewart & Stevenson Power Inc. of Commerce City, Colo.

The transfer of production follows Ricon's acquisition of the assets of Stewart & Stevenson's lift product line. The purchase included the popular Baylift and Powerlift models, plus other rail and airport specialty lift products.

"Both companies have long-standing, well-established reputations for providing top-quality accessibility equipment," said Ricon President and Chief Executive William Baldwin.

"This purchase is in step with our renewed focus on the commercial motorcoach and transit industries. With the addition of these new products, our system and equipment options are now broader and more comprehensive than any other U.S.-based manufacturer in the motorcoach industry."

The Stewart & Stevenson

wheelchair lift product line was transferred from Colorado to Ricon's manufacturing facility in Panorama City. The acquired products are now being marketed under the Ricon brand.

The long-time sales manager of Stewart & Stevenson's wheelchair unit, Bill Hodgson, has joined Ricon in a consulting capacity. He commutes between his home in Colorado and the Ricon plant in Southern California.

Ricon has more than 32 years of experience in the design, manufacture and installation of wheelchair lifts and ramps for personal, commercial and heavy transit vehicles. The company's modern, 225,000-square-foot facility helps make it the largest manufacturer of its kind in the world.

In addition to making lifts, Ricon also provides engineering and technical support services.

Three years ago, Ricon became the first domestic lift manufacturer to achieve an ISO 9001 certification.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

NY operators

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Co., Green Bus Lines, Jamaica Buses, Queens Surface Corp., Liberty Lines Express, New York Bus Service and Triboro Coach.

The relationship between the companies and the city is complex and difficult. The city owns the 1,300 buses operated by the companies and two of the depots from which buses operate. The companies operate the buses under franchise agreements with the city and own the other depots used to store and maintain the buses.

Under the deal between the MTA and the city, MTA will lease the buses and the city-owned depots from the city. In addition, the MTA will spend \$322.5 million to replace old buses and make other capital improvements.

Some of the private operators reportedly will try to stymie the takeover by refusing to sell their depots to the MTA, which needs them to operate the buses. "They are not for sale and they are not for lease," Jerry Cooper, chairman of a coalition of four of the seven bus companies, was quoted as saying.

A major factor driving the city to get out of the bus business has been the political turmoil created when drivers at the seven companies occasionally strike. Two years ago, Queens' drivers went on strike for a week, affecting more than 110,000 riders each day.



New York Bus Service, one of the seven companies serving the boroughs of New York City, has a sprawling facility on Interstate 95 in the Bronx.

As one official pointed out: For \$150 million, the same amount the city currently is spending for bus subsidies, the Bloomberg Administration gets rid of the bus contracts and a major political

headache.

By coming under MTA jurisdiction, the bus drivers will be subject to state laws that prohibit them from striking.

It is unclear what will become

of the 400 nonunion employees of the seven companies. They reportedly will not find automatic employment with the MTA once it takes over the service.

The takeover deal also includes

a fare increase for riders. The fare goes to \$2 from \$1.50, but riders will be able to transfer free to other buses or subways. Currently, they pay a 50-cent transfer fee. Other MTA riders pay a basic \$2 fare.

FMCSA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

safety fitness of over-the-road motorcoach companies and other operators of commercial vehicles.

Currently, the compliance review process consumes more than 40 percent of the FMCSA's staff time. That percentage could grow significantly during the rest of this decade because of the increasing number of commercial vehicles, especially heavy-duty trucks. The number of commercial vehicles is growing at a faster rate than passenger cars. Additionally, Congress has mandated that the FMCSA inspect all "new entrants" within 18 months of beginning operation.

Plus, the federal government has set an ambitious safety goal for commercial vehicles during the next four years; commercial vehicle security has become a major requirement, and the border with Mexico may open in the next year or two.

"Obviously, we will have to work harder and smarter to continue our progress in improving safety," said Sandberg. "I'm very optimistic that, working together, CVSA and FMCSA can find more efficient, less resource-intensive ways to determining safety fitness and improving motor carrier safety," she said.

Sandberg has put together a strategic planning group within the FMCSA to begin the process of revamping the compliance review program. CVSA's new Program Initiatives Committee, which was set up this year to tackle new and strategic safety programs, will work with the FMCSA on retooling the safety fitness program.

Norm Littler, senior vice president for government and industry relations at the United Motorcoach Association and a member of CVSA, cheered Sandberg's announcement. He said the current compliance review system isn't getting enough unsafe

operators off the road. "They need to fix it," he said.

During her appearance, Sandberg created something of a dust-up when she displayed a large U.S. map that categorized the performance of states in collecting data on accidents involving commercial vehicles. The map showed that roughly half the states are not doing a good job of supplying the FMCSA with timely, quality information on crashes.

In February, the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Transportation blasted SafeStat, the federal government's system for ranking the safety of motorcoach operators and truckers. SafeStat is managed and operated by the FMCSA, using crash data supplied by the states. (See March 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

"I personally know how tough collecting and managing data can be," Sandberg told the CVSA delegates. "We are ready to help you with your data issues."

Sandberg pointed out that the FMCSA is now requiring states to show in detail how they plan to fix their crash data problems, implying states could lose federal funds if they don't get the problems fixed. However, she also said the FMCSA and other agencies could supply money to help states improve data-collection efforts.

Another major FMCSA priority discussed by Sandberg was the "New Entrants" program of inspecting start-up motorcoach and truck operators. She reiterated the FMCSA's commitment to the program, saying the agency now has enough money "to support 100 percent of your state's New Entrants' program."

The bulk of the money and responsibility for the New Entrants program is being shifted to the states. However, six states have chosen not to participate in the program. Sandberg said the FMCSA is working with those states in the hope of getting them involved.

Tennessee tickets buses at rest stops

KINGSPORT, Tenn. — The Tennessee Motor Coach Association reports that motorcoach drivers are being ticketed for pulling into the auto sections of roadside rest areas in Tennessee.

Several coach operators have received tickets from Tennessee Commercial Vehicle Enforcement officers, as well as Tennessee Highway Patrol officers. The drivers are being told they must use the entrances and sections designated for over-the-road trucks.

The association is protesting the enforcement action on the basis of safety and Americans with Disabilities Act considerations. The rest areas' truck sections frequently are not ADA compliant, requiring elderly and disabled passengers to negotiate several steps.



Six Flags ads use retro bus

OKLAHOMA CITY — For the first time in seven years, Six Flags has launched a national advertising campaign.

The new spots feature a retro-style bus and an exuberant, Larry 'Bud' Melman-like character who beckons families to escape their hectic lives for a day of play at Six Flags.

The bald-headed character travels in the colorful bus, bringing his signature music — "We Like to Party" by the Vengaboys — and an invitation to leave the boredom, stress and pressures of



everyday life behind.

Six Flags is running the spots on Fox's American Idol, ABC's Hope & Faith, NBC's Law & Order and in markets where Six Flags theme parks are located.

Can a *Bus & Motorcoach News* reader identify the bus?



FATHER KNOWS ...

John Bailey, president of Bailey Coach in York, Pa., wanted his daughter Courtney to have a 16th birthday she would long remember. So, dad suggested a bus trip. Courtney and her friend Kaylan Mahon invited 50 of their

friends for a joint birthday party. A Bailey Coach took the teenagers to a restaurant and video arcade in nearby Reading. All had a great time, especially Courtney. Dad had one more present for her: He said she didn't have to clean and service the coach.

People

Patrick Scully, executive vice president-chief commercial officer of *DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses North America*, has been elected to the board of the

Trailways Transportation System Inc. Scully fills a mid-term vacancy for Trailways' Northeast region. His job responsibilities include directing the operations of Setra of North America.

ABC Companies has named **Matt Hall** account executive for

New York and New England. Hall brings 12 years of transportation industry experience to ABC. His background includes being transportation coordinator for Caravan Transport in New Jersey and five years in bus sales at Wolfington Body Co. in Exton, Pa.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Stagecoach to make special payout to its shareholders

PERTH, Scotland — Stagecoach Group PLC, the parent company of Coach USA, plans to make a one-time payment to shareholders of up to \$444 million.

Stagecoach said its earnings for the year ended April 30, 2004, will

exceed market forecasts as a result of better-than-expected results from its rail operations in the United Kingdom.

The special payout, which must be approved by company stockholders, is likely to be on a pro-rata

basis to all shareholders. The exact nature of the payment will be announced June 23, when Stagecoach reports its financial results for fiscal 2004. Stockholders should get their share of the money before year end.

The company said its directors do not intend that the return of capital will affect the level of regular dividends or its progressive dividend policy.

Stagecoach said it decided to make the payout after considering

various options for increasing shareholder value. It rejected such alternatives as buying or investing in other companies, deciding instead that the best course was to return capital to Stagecoach shareholders.

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Also have one 1988 MCI 102 for sale.

Fax letter of interest to Michael:

(305) 743-2018



Thrasher Brothers Birmingham, Ala.

Thrasher Brothers Trailways of Birmingham has added 6 Setra S417 luxury motorcoaches to its 18-coach fleet. The company offers tour, charter and shuttle services throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico.

"In order to be the market leader we have to have a superior product," said company Vice President Alan Thrasher. "We have a reputation for giving customers what they want and we believe the S417 has the technolo-



gy and features that will exceed their high expectations."

Thrasher Brothers is located near the only Mercedes-Benz manufacturing plant in the U.S. The DaimlerChrysler plant produces Mercedes-Benz M Series sport utility vehicles. Setra also is owned by DaimlerChrysler.

"We're proud to represent DaimlerChrysler in our area, and look forward to providing the high level of quality transportation the plant's international visitors demand," said Thrasher.

Thrasher Brothers has been in business for over 30 years, is owned by Jim and Barbara Thrasher.

Trailways operators take delivery of J4500 coaches

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — Members of the Trailways system are taking delivery this spring of 26 J4500 coaches manufactured by Motor Coach Industries.

The Trailways' operators adding J coaches include:

- Fullington Autobus of Clearfield, Pa., which took delivery of two coaches with ZF Astronic transmissions, bringing its MCI fleet total to 45.

- Burlington Trailways of West Burlington, Iowa, which took delivery of two new J4500s.

- Concord Trailways of Concord, N.H., which offers service from Maine and New Hampshire to Boston, is taking

delivery of four J coaches.

- Peter Pan Trailways of Springfield, Mass., took delivery of 12 J4500s, the same number it purchased last year, bringing its fleet to 150 MCI coaches.

Martz Trailways of Wilkes-Barre, Pa., is adding six J4500s to its fleet later this spring.

The pace of orders has boosted confidence at MCI that it will deliver more J4500 coaches to Trailways operators this year than it did last, when Trailways companies purchased more than 50 J models.

MCI believes the J4500 coach eventually will become as popular as its MC 9 and D4500 models.

Robinson Coach Evanston, Ill.

Robinson Coach, which has added 14 buses to its fleet in the past three years, has purchased its first MCI J4500 coach. The Evanston-based company provides charter services in greater Chicago and attributes its growth to customer service and attentiveness.

The company was founded 40 years as a school bus operator by Leon Robinson, who also set up Robinson Coach Company in 1980. Today, the company is a diversified ground transportation carrier with a fleet of 20 over-the-road MCI coaches, two midsize



buses and five transit buses.

The staff of 50 employees is headed by Chief Operating Officer Stephen Philips and General Manager Richard Hausman.

Robinson's new J4500 features

Amaya seating for 56 passengers and is equipped with a Detroit Diesel Series 60 engine, an Allison B500 transmission with retarder, a REI A/V system with six monitors, Carrier A/C and Ricon lift.

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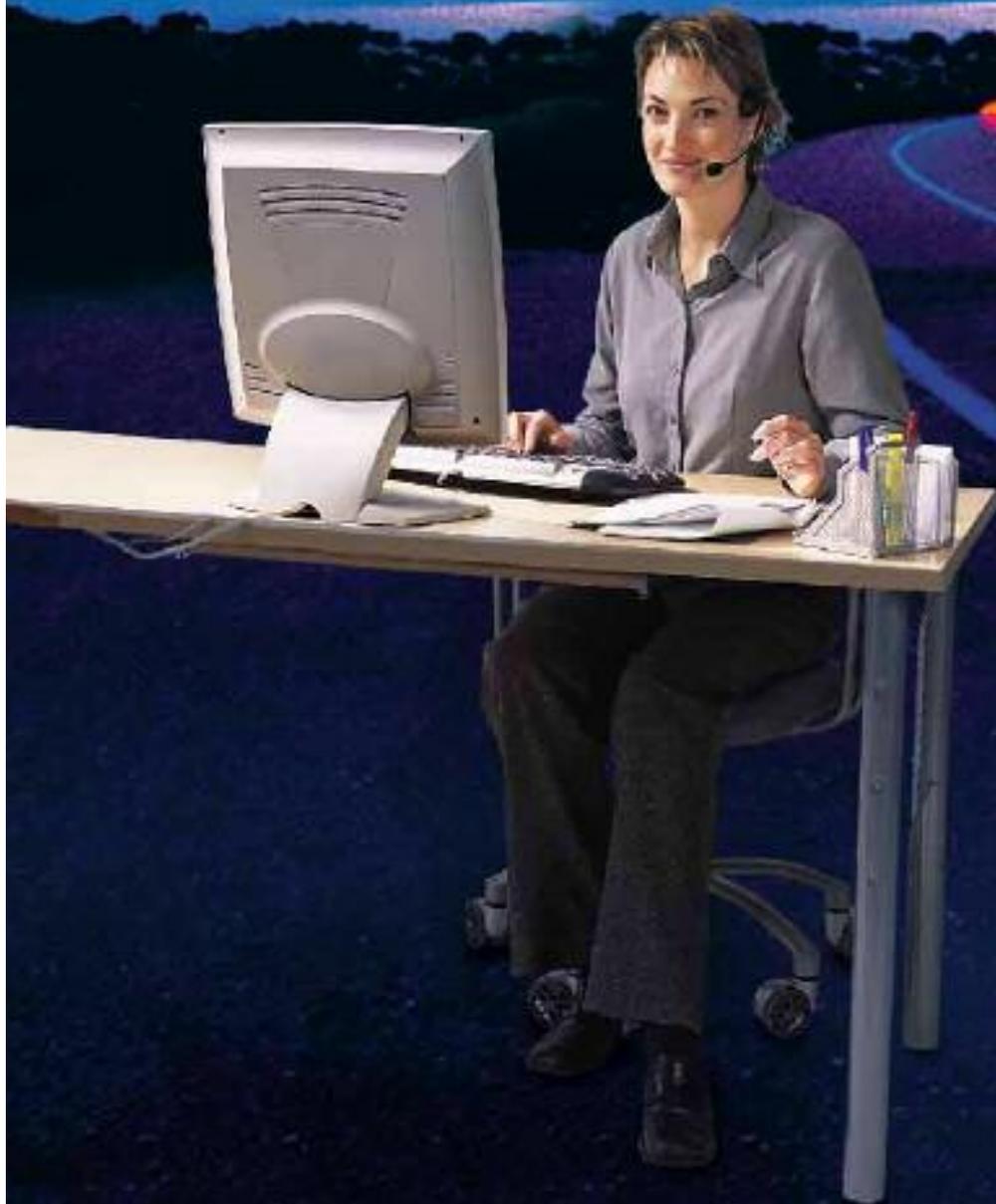
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