

Cell phone use by drivers is becoming more routine; New worry: GPS devices

Despite the mounting nationwide controversy over cell-phone use in motor vehicles, motorcoach operators say they are seeing positive effects from drivers having in-coach phones.

This is especially true for drivers who need instant communication in an emergency or who require on-the-spot directions.

A spot check by *Bus & Motorcoach News* of a number of coach operators found that companies generally are not providing their drivers and tour guides with cell phones, but are willing to reimburse them for business-related calls on their personal phones.

And, in a new development, more drivers are purchasing their own portable GPS devices to assist in navigating unfamiliar roads and streets. The satellite-enabled GPS devices, the acronym for global positioning system, can not only assist in navigating untried roads but can guide drivers right to a specific street address.

The portable GPS devices being purchased by drivers typically start at around \$500 and go up to \$800 and \$1,000.

"Some have more bells and whistles," said Jim Lienhart, president of Arrow Coach Lines in Little Rock, Ark. Drivers who use them most are the ones who go on longer trips of perhaps four or five days to places they're not familiar with, he says.

"Even though we supply maps, they feel (their portable GPS device) is an easier way to get around," Lienhart says. "They seem to like them and they're not getting lost as much."

Despite the convenience and increased security that cell phones provide, they also present problems for motorcoach owners, like trying to limit their use and comforting passengers, especially seniors, who get nervous when they see their driver yapping away on a cell phone.

Even if the driver is using a hands-free phone, which is required by law in New York, seniors often don't like it.

Isaac Lunger of Monsey Tours in Brooklyn, N.Y., says all of his 25 charter drivers have their own cell phones, but for the company's

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►

FMCSA top positions are being filled

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, which has been operating with acting administrators for the past two months, will get a new top administrator once the U.S. Senate acts on President Bush's nomination of John H. Hill to head the bus and truck safety agency.

The possible nomination of Hill, who had been the No. 3 administrator at the agency, had been the subject of considerable speculation in recent weeks.



John Hill

If ratified, Hill will essentially succeed two people.

Annette Sandberg left the top job at FMCSA in early April and she was replaced by Deputy Administrator Warren Hoemann, who became acting administrator.

Within two weeks of taking over as acting administrator, Hoemann announced he too was leaving and would be gone by the middle of last month.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ►

Negotiations to change charter bus rules begin; committee is expanded

By Michael Grebb

WASHINGTON — Parties in the long-running dispute over federal charter bus rules have laid the groundwork for working out their differences and plan to tackle their biggest disagreements in the coming months.

At the Federal Transit Administration's first Charter Bus Negotiated Rulemaking Committee Meeting last month, professional facilitator Susan Podziba coaxed representatives from the private bus industry and public transit sector through a series of procedural matters, setting rules for what could be a contentious battle throughout the rest of the year.

"If we can come together as a group, everybody gets a bit more," she told committee members. "That's the idea of enlightened self interest."

At issue is the FTA's requirement that public transit agencies inform private bus operators in their area when they plan to provide charter bus service.

Current rules require public providers to step aside if a private operator is willing and able to do the job, but private operators com-

plain that many transit agencies routinely ignore the rules.

Acknowledging "a problem that seems to have been festering for quite a long time," Podziba urged the two sides to "try to get the most on the issue that matters to you and be flexible on issues that don't matter to you."

FTA General Counsel David Horner, who chaired the session, said the FTA hopes to draft rules that won't face opposition from either side. "Hopefully, the public comment will be silent or de minimus," he said.

The first two-day meeting — at the U.S. Department of Transportation headquarters building here last month — mostly involved process issues.

However, committee members still wrangled over everything from how to word its mission statement and preamble, to setting up a system for naming additional members of the panel. After some debate, committee members agreed to decide those issues by consensus rather than an up-or-down vote. Any member, however, can hold up agreement with a lone dissent.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 ►

New coach sales continue climb in first-quarter '06

First-quarter sales of new motorcoaches in the U.S. and Canada were roughly 5½ percent higher this year than during the same three months last year, *National Bus Trader* magazine reports.

Coach manufacturers said they sold a total of 490 new coaches during the quarter ended March 31, up from 464 units during the same period a year ago and 326 coaches sold during the first quarter of 2004. The 2006 number is the best

first-quarter sales figure since 2002 when a total of 596 new coaches were sold.

National Bus Trader Editor Larry Plachno, who has been analyzing new coach sales for more than 20 years, attributed the modest first-quarter gain primarily to two factors: a slowdown in imported coach sales, and a dip in sales of conversion shells.

The continued upward march in the value of the Euro versus the

U.S. dollar may be penalizing European-built coaches. Since November, the decline in the value of the dollar has pushed the cost of a euro from \$1.17, to more than \$1.27, not far from its peak in 2005, and a stunning 50 percent higher than five years ago.

Sales of conversion shells dropped to 64 units in the first quarter. That compares to 83 sold in the first quarter of last year and 70 two years ago.

Plachno said there appears to be two reasons for the slide in conversion shell sales. "One is that there sometimes is a reduction in the conversion market when the economy starts picking up as businessmen decide to park or sell their rigs and get back to business. A second is that there are fewer major conversion companies recently."

While much of the first-quarter sales report appeared cut and dried, there were a couple of noteworthy

developments: No. 1, bus operators opted for a little more diversity in their new-coach purchases this year, and No. 2, their love affair with the ZF AS-Tronic transmission continues unabated.

Some specifics:

A year ago, the top three selling coaches — the MCI J4500; the MCI D4500, and the Van Hool 2045 — captured 80 percent of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

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Mississippi casinos recovering faster than expected

BILOXI, Miss. — Nine months ago, the dozen floating casinos on Mississippi's Gulf Coast were wiped out by Hurricane Katrina.

Today, three casinos have reopened and are raking in money at about double their pre-Katrina rate.

In the next six months, seven more casinos are expected to

reopen, including the palatial Beau Rivage, which bills itself as the premiere Mississippi vacation resort and casino.

Clearly, Mississippi's gaming palaces are coming back faster than most anyone expected.

Accelerating the pace of recovery was a decision by Mississippi legislators that is allowing casinos

to rebuild on beachfront land, rather than requiring them to hang their gambling halls over the muddy brown water of the gulf.

Allowing land-based gambling "caused us to have a lot more confidence in the market," says Isle of Capri Biloxi executive Duncan McKenzie.

Now, casinos only have to be

built within 800 feet of the gulf shoreline. The change has helped accelerate reopenings because temporarily in convention halls, meeting rooms and lobbies.

Here's a quick rundown on the status of most of the Gulf Coast casinos:

- Casino Magic Bay St. Louis

reopens in the fall as a 40,000-square-foot operation inside converted hotel space. A permanent casino will be built within the next two years to replace it.

- The Silver Slipper Casino near Bay St. Louis, set to open in October, will be the first casino built from the ground up since

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

\$11 million proposed to settle Texas coach fire during evacuation

DALLAS — The victims of a horrific motorcoach fire that killed 23 nursing home patients fleeing Hurricane Rita last year have reached an \$11 million settlement with the bus operator and the bus broker that arranged the coach.

The coach caught fire in traffic near Dallas last September after leaving Houston. Several passengers and the driver escaped, but the flames, which spread quickly, trapped many inside.

Court documents filed here say Global Limo, whose coach burst into flames, and BusBank, which hired the bus company for a suburban Houston nursing home, are planning to pay the maximum coverage of their insurance policies to the court. Global's insurance policy has a \$5 million limit, and BusBank has a \$6 million policy.

"It's terribly inadequate to compensate the people for what was done, but that's all there is," said attorney Robert Luke, who represents the families of six victims. "I think bus operators should be required to carry more insurance

than \$5 million if they're going to carry 40 people around."

Said another attorney: "They have 23 people that died the worst way you can die. They feel betrayed by the nursing home. They feel betrayed by the BusBank. They feel betrayed by Global Limo," added Randy Sorrels, who represents the families of two victims.

Attorneys for the victims agreed to the \$11 million payout, saying it was the best option because the companies don't appear to have many assets other than their insurance policies.

However, one attorney said settlement negotiations may continue because Global Limo and BusBank might also be covered by an insurance policy held by the Houston-area nursing home, Brighton Gardens of Bellaire.

"The settlement that we contemplated was contingent upon confirmation that the insurance that we knew about was in fact the only insurance," the attorney said.

The money will be divided

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

South Carolina association aids in hurricane planning

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Members of the Motorcoach Association of South Carolina are working with state officials to develop plans for the emergency evacuation of sick and elderly residents during hurricanes.

Walter Bryant Jr., chairman of the association emergency preparedness committee and co-owner of Bryant Tours in North Charleston, said preliminary discussions have been held with state agencies in preparing for the evacuation of limited mobility residents from coastal areas in the event of a hurricane.

The planning is part of a

stepped-up effort by the state to prepare for the 2006 hurricane season, which officially began June 1.

South Carolina officials, in a briefing last month for Gov. Mark Sanford, told the governor they were nearing completion of an agreement with the association that would assure nearly 200 buses are available to evacuate the sick and elderly.

The 35 members of the association operate roughly 220 buses.

Bryant said he informed state officials they face potentially significant problems in planning for

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THE DOCKET

Higher costs are slowing road projects

State departments of transportation are reporting that double-digit price increases for cement, asphalt, steel and diesel fuel are pushing up the cost of highway maintenance and construction, meaning road expansion and improvement projects are being scaled back.

The squeeze is occurring at the same time that new attention is being focused on highway congestion (see related story on this page), and the funding of highway projects nationwide.

The Ohio Department of Transportation says that rising oil prices and higher construction costs may delay several major road projects planned in the state over the next few years.

In Virginia, the state DOT expects climbing prices for building materials to cost the agency an additional \$180 million this year for roadway upkeep and construction programs.

Prices for heavy highway construction products, including asphalt, concrete and steel, rose about 12 percent last year. That was on top of a 7.5 percent increase in 2004, according to Ohio DOT officials.

Others say the inflation rate for highway building materials is faster than that. Climbing petroleum prices pushed up the cost of asphalt by nearly 16 percent between February of last year and February of this year, reports the American Road and Transportation Builders Association.

Ohio DOT is reconsidering its entire roadway program, from routine maintenance to complex interstate construction jobs.

VDOT managers say the higher costs are forcing them to switch to cheaper, less-durable asphalt for paving work planned this spring for Interstates 264, 564 and 64 and for state Route 58.

As has been reported in these pages previously, federal and state fuel taxes aren't keeping up with the cost of road building.

Between 1998 and 2005, which excludes the sharp increases of last year and the first half of this year, materials and labor for road construction rose 35 percent, while the consumer price index rose 19.8 percent, according to the American Road and Transportation Builders Association.

USDOT unveils plan to reduce congestion

WASHINGTON — Saying highway, airport and seaport tie-ups are strangling the U.S. economy, Transportation Secretary Norm Mineta has unveiled what he calls a "national strategy" for combating congestion.

However, not much in the strategy is new, and it is more of a blueprint than an actual plan for coping with the mushrooming road, airport and port congestion that is hamstringing the economy, as well as threatening the quality of life for millions of Americans.

Still, aspects of the program are likely to generate some controversy, like the U.S. Department of Transportation coming out strongly for and encouraging the sale or lease of public roads, bridges and other transportation infrastructure to private investors.

In addition, Mineta is proposing a category of federal grants that would force regions to prioritize projects that would reduce congestion.

And what would a new federal strategy be without the obligatory demonstration project?

In this case it is called the "Corridors of the Future" program, and it asks local and state governments to compete to gain fast-track approval for three to five major projects that would slash congestion by the greatest amounts.

The private bus industry needs to keep an eye on implementation of the strategy because of one major plan element and because of major shortcomings in the strategy.

In explaining how it intends to help relieve urban congestion, the USDOT proposes entering into what it calls Urban Partnership Agreements with "model" cities, where the cities and the department

would create or expand "express bus services."

In recent years, almost all express bus services, including express commuter services, have been initiated by public transit agencies hell bent on expanding their territories and reach.

Throughout the report, there is an emphasis on involving and expanding private-sector investment in the U.S. transportation infrastructure.

However, nowhere in the report does it propose expanding the involvement or role of the private-sector bus industry in helping reduce roadway congestion. In fact, the report totally ignores the private bus industry, just as it ignores Amtrak.

And where the report says the USDOT will work with cities to secure agreements from major employers to establish or expand telecommuting and flex scheduling, it fails to propose the increased use of van pools or shuttle bus services as a means of reducing corporate commuting.

The strategy's proposal for expanded private partnerships for highway projects builds on earlier studies such as one released in January by a blue-ribbon panel of the National Research Council.

"The federal government should encourage states to experiment with arrangements for tolling and private-sector participation in road development," the NRC report said.

The new USDOT strategy contains no new money for congestion mitigation. Instead it proposes shifting some money, committing "discretionary resources and expertise" to support the program, and using the "Urban Partnership Agreements" with major metropol-

itan areas and communities interested in congestion relief.

The plan encourages states to pass laws that let private companies invest in transportation and it promotes such technological improvements as better real-time traffic information.

In unveiling the strategy last month, Mineta called congestion one of the single-greatest threats to the economy, and told the National Retail Federation that "congestion

kills time, wastes fuel and costs money."

"Congestion is not a fact of life. We need a new approach and we need it now," Mineta said.

The initiative is called the *National Strategy to Reduce Congestion on America's Transportation Network*.

To read the plan, which contains fewer than seven pages of text, go to <http://isddc.dot.gov/OLPFiles/OST/012988.pdf>.

South Carolina requests permission for I-95 tolls

COLUMBIA, S.C. — The South Carolina Department of Transportation has told the Federal Highway Administration it wants to impose tolls on Interstate 95, clear across the state, a distance of about 190 miles.

The state DOT submitted what is called an "expression of interest" to the Federal Highway Administration seeking permission to toll I-95 from North Carolina to Georgia.

The state said tolling would pay for reconstruction and rehabilitation of the highway.

Tolling of I-95 — the primary North-South corridor on the East Coast — also is under consideration in both North Carolina and Virginia.

Under the federal highway and public transportation law adopted

by Congress late last summer, three states may be granted permission to impose tolls on rural Interstates under a pilot program. The law says no state may toll more than one rural interstate highway.

Missouri already has applied for permission to toll I-70 and Virginia has asked for authority to toll I-81.

The next step in the process is for South Carolina to submit a formal application to the Federal Highway Administration which, if approved, will be followed by an environmental review and another application which would likely take several years.

The South Carolina DOT also would need permission from the state legislature to impose tolls.

Utah considers toll road to ease Salt Lake traffic

SALT LAKE CITY — A two-month series of town meetings kicked off late last month to discuss a controversial proposal to build a six-lane, north-south tollway, called the Mountain View Corridor, through western metro Salt Lake City.

At the meetings, Utah Department of Transportation officials are explaining the project and giving the public a chance to weigh in on the highway that would stretch 35 miles from Salt Lake City International Airport, south to Pleasant Grove, along the western side of Salt Lake and Utah counties.

A bill passed during this year's session of the Utah Legislature would make it possible for private investors to contract with the state to build roads in exchange for charging tolls to recoup their investment, plus profit. The state

would retain ownership of the road and could resume control when the contract expires.

While no highway project was named in the bill, its sponsor and others have said Mountain View is the likely first candidate because, as a toll road, construction could begin by 2009; without tolls, the project could be delayed or never built.

Proponents say the project is attractive as a tollway because there are tollfree north-south alternatives, including Bangerter, I-215, Redwood Road and I-15.

Still, the project is being strongly opposed by Utah truckers, with the Utah Trucking Association actively campaigning against it. The truckers say they would support an increase in fuel taxes instead of toll roads.

For more information, go to www.udot.utah.gov/mountainview.

\$20 bln. transportation bonds to be decided by Californians

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a series of bills last month that propose spending nearly \$20 billion for highway and transportation system upgrades.

The improvements are to be financed through bonds that will be submitted to voters for their approval on the state's November ballot.

Schwarzenegger said if voters approve the bond measures, it will help relieve traffic congestion on California's roads, augment mass transit and rail systems, and im-

prove air quality around ports.

Voters will be asked to approve four separate bond measures — \$19.9 billion for transportation, \$10.4 billion for schools, \$4.1 billion for flood control and \$2.9 billion for housing.

As part of the agreement, voters will also be asked to change the state constitution to restrict the legislature's ability to borrow gas tax money to pay for other expenses.

Most of the money earmarked for highway improvements is expected to go for highly congested roads.

Transportation security card program moves ahead

WASHINGTON — Federal transportation security officials have taken another step toward implementing the Transportation Worker Identification Credential by approving proposed regulations for the program, and revealing that the ID cards will cost individuals as much as \$139 for a five-year period.

Next stop on the road to the card that one day will be required of all workers in the transportation industry is the publication of a proposed rulemaking that lays out specific details on the program.

The public will then be able to comment on the program and four meetings will be conducted by the Transportation Security Administration and Coast Guard to solicit public input.

The early focus of the program is on anyone who works at or has access to U.S. ports, including motorcoach drivers who pick up and deliver passengers at cruise ship terminals.

The Transportation Worker Identification Credential, which goes by the name of TWIC, "is designed to ensure that individuals posing a security threat do not gain access to our nation's ports," said Assistant Secretary Kip Hawley of TSA. "Today's proposed rulemaking represents a significant milestone towards putting TWIC on the fast track."

Earlier last month, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff announced the department will begin conducting name-based background checks on approximately 400,000 port workers in the U.S. These checks are designed to give a running start to the expedited rollout of the TWIC.

The TWIC rule proposes that:

- TSA collect worker's biographic information, including 10 fingerprints; name; date of birth; address and phone number; alien registration number, if applicable; photo; employer, and job title.

- All individuals with unescorted access to secure areas of port facilities and vessels be required to have a TWIC. This includes long-

shoremen, port operator employees, bus and truck drivers and rail workers.

- Background checks would include a review of criminal history records, terrorist watch lists, legal immigration status and outstanding wants and warrants.

- TWIC would utilize Smart Card technology and include a

worker's photo, name, biometric information and multiple fraud protection measures.

- The program is expected to eventually cover 750,000 workers and would be funded through user fees.

- TSA anticipates workers would pay \$139 to receive a TWIC. Workers with "current, comparable

background checks" would pay approximately \$105 for the credential. A TWIC card would be valid for five years.

In addition to the proposed rulemaking, the TSA also will issue a solicitation for TWIC enrollment services and the operation of the data management system, including system maintenance.

The goal is to pick one contractor that will make all the pieces fit together into an effective, integrated security process, said Hawley.

"We have looked at the entire picture and the quickest and best implementation of TWIC will be achieved through one integrated enrollment and data integration process," Hawley added.

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Miss. lawmakers block biodiesel

JACKSON, Miss. — A proposal to mandate the sale of biodiesel fuel in Mississippi has been shunted aside.

A legislative initiative that would have required biodiesel be sold in the state will be studied by a commission set up by state lawmakers.

The commission will take a look at the use of biodiesel in commercial motor vehicles, as well as means of encouraging the use of the alternative fuel. The commission is to report back to the legislature.

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FMCSA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

At that point, Hill, who had been assistant administrator and senior safety officer at FMCSA for the past three years, became acting administrator.

Early last month, Rick Schweitzer, general counsel of the National Private Truck Council and the American Bus Association, complained that a "void in leadership" at the FMCSA was delaying action on a variety of issues.

He specifically cited anticipated new rules on electronic onboard recorders and minimum new driver training standards. "This lack of leadership will affect when things get done," he said at a National Private Truck Council meeting in Nashville.

Rulemakings for onboard recorders and training for new drivers were expected to be released before Sandberg left the agency but that didn't happen.

With Hill as Sanberg's successor, the learning curve will be much shorter than had Bush nominated someone from outside the agency.

At about the same time the White House was unveiling Hill's

appointment, U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta was announcing the hiring of David H. Hugel to replace Hoemann as deputy FMCSA administrator.

Hugel, who was scheduled to join the agency May 30, is coming to the FMCSA after serving the past three years as administrator of the Maryland Division of Motor Vehicles.

"David Hugel has a strong record on management and motor vehicle safety issues," said Mineta. "As the number of trucks and buses on our roads continues to increase, David will play a critical role in helping reduce the severity and number of crashes involving trucks and motorcoaches."

Hugel's career has included work in the public and private sectors, but has focused on motor vehicle issues for the past 19 years.

Prior to joining the FMCSA three years ago this month, Hill was commercial vehicle enforcement division commander of the Indiana State Police.

At the FMCSA, he has been the U.S. Department of Transportation's lead for pandemic influenza planning and the secretary's representative concerning Hurricane Katrina.

Conn. adopts transportation plan

HARTFORD, Conn. — Connecticut legislative leaders and Gov. Jodi Rell have agreed on a 10-year, \$2.3 billion transportation program that will not raise fuel taxes or require tolls.

The plan includes money for a commuter rail line between New Haven, Conn., and Springfield, Mass., and a study of a commuter line from New London, Conn., to Worcester, Mass.

State lawmakers plan to set aside another \$2.2 million to \$2.4 million next year for other projects, including more highway construction.

Instead of being funded with taxes or tolls, about \$1 billion of the \$2.3 billion package will be bonded. Additional money will come from the federal government and a gross receipts tax on petrole-

um products, which now goes into the general fund.

Report on N.H. roads

CONCORD, N.H. — Even before the damage caused by the May rains, about half of New Hampshire's roads and a third of its bridges were judged to be in poor or mediocre condition, with state and rural roads considered the most deadly.

The Road Information Program, organized by the concrete and construction industries, gave New Hampshire a "D" grade for its roads and bridges and a "C" for traffic congestion and safety.

The report rated 47 percent of state-maintained roads as substandard and 32 percent of bridges as "structurally deficient" or "functionally obsolete."

Floods cause havoc

Last month's flooding in New England, the worst since the 1930s, shut down hundreds of roads and bridges, hampering bus and motorcoach operations throughout the region.

Among the roads that were closed during the height of the flooding were parts of busy Interstate 95 and Route 1 near Boston. In New Hampshire, more than 600 roads were damaged or flooded, while in Maine, flooding washed out dozens of roads and bridges.

The road and bridge closings, as well as the general flooding, resulted from the double-digit rainfall totals that inundated parts of the three states, making it impossible for bus and other drivers to navigate many roads.

Public transit agencies seek 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 service. UMA urges operators to respond to these notices:

Fresno, Calif. (Fresno State

University football games.) Deadline: May 30, 2006. Write to: Planning Division, Fresno Area Express, 2223 'G' St., Fresno, CA 93706-1600. Phone: (559) 621-1393.

Springfield, Mo. Deadline: 4 p.m. June 11, 2006. Write to: Carol Cruise, Director-Transit, City Utilities Transit, 1505 Boonville,

Springfield, MO 65803. Phone: (417) 831-8784.

Greater New Haven, Conn. Deadline: June 23, 2006. Write to: Brenda Clark, Executive Assistant of Special Services, Greater New Haven Transit District, 840 Sherman Ave., Hamden, CT 06514. Phone: (203) 288-6282.

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Toromont CAT
3131 Highway 7 West
Concord, Ontario, Canada
RSVP: marketing@mcicoach.com

Des Plaines, Ill., Thursday, June 8
RSVP: Sue Nay 847-285-2180

Vancouver, B.C., Canada, Thursday, June 15
Western Bus Parts & Service
95 Phillip Avenue, North Vancouver, B.C.
RSVP: marketing@mcicoach.com

Calgary, Alberta, Canada, Friday, June 23
Calgary CAT
6735 11th Street NE
Calgary, Alberta Canada
RSVP: marketing@mcicoach.com

Minneapolis, Minn., Tuesday, June 27
Ziegler CAT
8050 County Road 101 East
Shakopee, MN 55379
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Its springtime in D.C. and Amtrak dreams of billions

WASHINGTON — The annual battle over federal funding for Amtrak is under way with supporters hoping the passenger rail system will receive more than the \$1.2 billion it got from Congress last year.

As has been the case since Amtrak's creation in 1970, the executive branch has offered the smallest annual bailout amount.

President George W. Bush proposes the railroad get \$900 million for fiscal 2007, which begins in October, but with tight strings attached to assure meaningful reforms are adopted.

Amtrak, on the other hand, has asked Congress for \$1.6 billion, but it promises to begin implementing major reforms similar to those proposed by U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta just over a year ago.

Congress, however, leans toward a costly proposal: the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2005, sponsored by long-time Amtrak backer Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss.

In addition to spending \$11.3 billion on Amtrak over the next six years — nearly \$1.8 billion in 2007 alone, Lott's bill would change the federal statutes governing Amtrak operations and interrupt the management and operational reforms now underway or promised by Amtrak's new management.

Amtrak critics see Bush's \$900 million proposal as the best choice.

Keeping Amtrak on a tight budget will force its management to take the necessary steps to reduce excessive costs, implement operational efficiencies, and improve the quality of the service provided, say critics.

Financial failings

As Amtrak's most recent annual report reveals, the railroad's financial and operational problems

continue to worsen.

- Despite economic expansion and the recovery of the travel market from the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Amtrak's ridership increased by a modest 1.3 percent last year, compared to a 3.6 percent gain for domestic airlines.

- During fiscal 2005, passenger revenues at Amtrak (tickets and food service) fell slightly, while employee wages increased, marking the second year in a row in which wage and salary costs exceeded ticket sales.

- As a result of these and other cost and revenue deficiencies, Amtrak's loss from continuing operations was \$1.179 billion, down only slightly from the previous year's \$1.214 billion.

Congressional hearings a year ago revealed that Amtrak loses money on virtually every service it provides, including the sale of beer and hamburgers.

Federal law requires Amtrak to provide food and beverage service on its trains only if revenues from the services each year at least equal the cost of providing the service. Amtrak food service operations have racked up huge losses each

year.

In a report, the U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General concluded that eliminating sleeper cars, dining cars, entertainment, lounge seating, and checked baggage service on Amtrak's long-distance routes could provide operational savings of between \$375 million and \$790 million, plus another \$395 million in avoidable capital expenditures over five years.

The question remains, however: How can a company lose so much money selling food and renting clean beds?

Paying its food service workers \$54,800 per year (plus tips) is part of the problem, and Amtrak's shortage of customers also plays a role.

On average, Amtrak trains are less than half full (48.4 percent load factor in 2005).

The inefficiencies and incompetence that cause Amtrak's food service losses are present throughout the system — in the maintenance yards, ticket sales, train operations, stations, signal and track repair, janitorial services, and a host of other services that Amtrak attempts to perform. All of these

combine to create huge per-passenger losses on some of the routes Amtrak inherited from a bygone era. A sampling:

- One of the least efficient routes is the Sunset Limited connecting Los Angeles and Orlando. Serving only 81,348 passengers in 2005, the route generated annual losses of \$35.2 million (compared to \$29.3 million in 2004), while earning revenues of only \$10.8 million, yielding a loss of \$433 for each passenger. Amtrak could save money by shutting down the line and buying each passenger an airline ticket.

- The Silver Service connecting New York and Florida lost \$105.3 million last year (compared to \$87.9 million in 2004) on ticket sales of \$60.9 million, yielding a loss per passenger of \$146.

- Overall, Amtrak's long-distance trains accounted for 80 percent of its cash operating losses while carrying only 15 percent of its passengers.

Despite Amtrak's three-and-a-half-decade record of huge losses and worsening service, its many defenders in Congress, the unions that represent its workers, and a

nationwide network of train clubs have succeeded in defending and preserving its mediocre performance. In defending its claimed need for generous subsidies, Amtrak and its supporters often make claims that are contrary to the facts.

In an effort to set the record straight, the USDOT estimated the annual subsidies (or "profits") for 1990 to 2002 for each major transportation mode and expressed them in terms of dollars per passenger per 1,000 miles.

According to the DOT report, in 2002, motorists returned a dollar to the federal government for every 1,000 miles driven. Buses returned \$1.79 per 1,000 miles.

Aviation passengers received a subsidy of \$6.18 per 1,000 passenger miles. This subsidy reflected the reduced number of flights after 9/11. In the several years prior to 2001, commercial aviation earned a profit for the government.

In contrast, each transit bus and rail passenger received a subsidy of \$159.24 per 1,000 miles, the highest ever recorded in the 12-year survey.

Given that public transit receives up to 25 percent of federal surface transportation spending while carrying only 2 percent of passengers nationwide, this result should not be surprising.

Yet, as poorly as transit performs, Amtrak does even worse, recording a subsidy of \$210.31 per passenger per 1,000 miles for 2002. Unlike transit, however, 2002 was not Amtrak's worst year. In 1998, its subsidy per passenger per 1,000 miles reached a staggering \$383.82.

Information in this report was taken from an analysis by Ronald D. Utt, Ph.D., Herbert and Joyce Morgan Senior Research Fellow in the Thomas A. Roe Institute for Economic Policy Studies at The Heritage Foundation.

Letter: 'Complete' articles wanted

Bus & Motorcoach News is respected for its balanced and in-depth reporting, so one could not help but wonder why the writer felt it necessary to describe the first megabus.com trip as a "misadventure" (May 1 issue).

As an industry publication, shouldn't the article cover the entire story, including how megabus.com took care of its passengers, as well as the initial success of the new service?

Whenever possible, this industry and this newspaper — as one of its prominent trade publications — should encourage operators to take

the initiative and experiment with creative methods to get people on the bus.

megabus.com's "seats as low as \$1" is a promotional attraction, modeled after the airline industry, enticing students, seniors and people tired of \$3-a-gallon gasoline to ride the service.

The promotion represents a few seats on each departure, sold on a first-come, first-served basis through an Internet-based reservation system. The concept is already profitably operating in the United Kingdom and is growing in popularity.

We believe in supporting our industry and the motorcoach owners and operators who use our products. We further believe that the news and articles shared within your publication, which we also regularly support, should continue to be a resource for news that is meaningful and complete.

Patricia A. Ziska
VP Corporate Marketing
Motor Coach Industries

Editor's note: Other articles regarding megabus.com have appeared in the May 15 and April 1 issues of Bus & Motorcoach News.

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Breakdown Maintenance Syndrome: Is your fleet infected?

By Louis Hotard

Breakdown Maintenance Syndrome.

Does your bus maintenance operation suffer from it?

There seems to be a "syndrome" for everything these days, so why not one for bus maintenance?

We read countless articles about best maintenance practices, Preventative Maintenance, PM software, PM procedures and the like. There's a wealth of information about every aspect of this ongoing challenge for fleet managers.

But Breakdown Maintenance Syndrome, or BMS for short, is nowhere mentioned in any texts, manuals or PM schedules.

However, it is rampant today — in large fleets, midsize operations and small companies.

I hear it everyday in our technical support center here at ABC Companies in Orlando. The following scenario will give you an idea of what I am talking about.

It goes like this: "My coach is broken down between El Paso and San Antonio, and you need to find someone to fix it, ship the parts, and also transport my passengers."

I'm sure you can appreciate the challenge for a technical support person who is 1,500 miles away from the busted coach.

So, with that in mind, let me explain my new phrase.

BMS is just what it says: Equipment is maintained **after** it has broken down.

Our industry has evolved into one where mechanics commonly review driver write-ups to determine the fitness of a coach for the next trip. That is not a sound practice.

An "OK" driver write-up can give a mechanic a false sense of security that the coach is in good condition for another trip. A driver write-up does not qualify as, nor is it a good substitute for, a PM inspection.

The driver cannot see under the coach, do a brake inspection, inspect all required engine-compartment systems and so on. The

driver write-up is for describing what he or she sees, feels and hears during their time behind the wheel, and to acknowledge that a previous mechanical defect has been repaired prior to the next trip.

BMS is the most costly way to maintain equipment.

It is uncommon in the bus industry to see a component replaced before it stops working. We always want to get every last mile out of it first.

My friend Graham Dunnage of New York Trailways put it well in one of his preventative-maintenance articles: "Remember your last road failure? The phone calls? The bill from the local garage to diagnose the failure? The tow bill? The coach you had to hire from the competition to move your passengers? These are the tangible, meat-and-potatoes costs. What else? The lost revenue from the unhappy group who missed dinner? How many folks saw your big billboard on the side of the road?"

To stay out of the BMS trap, a fleet manager must walk a fine line with his/her maintenance program. Finding that all-important, end-of-life cycle of a bus component takes a lot of research and dedication.

Every fleet has different operating parameters and as such, life cycles can be dramatically different from one fleet to the next, and from one part to the next.

A fleet manager must track and document change intervals of various components. The cause of the failure must also be determined to find out if the part just wore out due to its normal life cycle, or was it damaged due to other factors.

Proper fluid usage, change intervals and PM schedules of a certain component might have to be reviewed. Maintenance practices might have to be changed and monitored before a life cycle of a part can be established.

Only then, can a mileage or hourly interval be set for a part or a major component replacement that will take it out before a breakdown.

This is a time-consuming process and takes patience and dedication from the owner, fleet manager and everyone involved with coach

operations. There is no magic software or program that can simulate an individual fleet operation. Facts and figures are needed to create history.

Today it is common for engines and other components to provide 1 million miles of operation. However it takes a lot of care to get them there. Then, when you get to a million miles, do you keep going or do you pull the component and call it a job well done?

The wrong decision can be a tow-truck ride home. Stretching the PM maintenance dollar too far always comes back to bite you.

Let's review:

- Make it a commitment to switch from BMS to a good PM maintenance program.

- Involve all levels of shop personnel to contribute to the goal of no breakdowns.

- Shop for quality equipment, replacement parts and vendors. The lowest-priced part is seldom the longest lasting.

- Component suppliers sometimes cannot provide accurate life-cycle estimates since good maintenance cannot be assured during the life of their parts.

- Stay committed to replace-



Louis Hotard

ment cycles once a time has been set for replacement.

- Ask component manufacturers for maintenance information

related to their products.

Louis Hotard is director of technical services for ABC Companies. He is based at the company Orlando location. Reach him at (407) 656-7977 ext. 7221.

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P.A. Post Agency, Espar relocate

Two long-time motorcoach industry suppliers have relocated.

P.A. Post Agency has moved its offices to Mahwah, N.J., from Hackensack.

The new P.A. Post address is: One International Blvd., Mahwah, NJ 07495. Phone: (201) 252-3010. The company Web address is: www.papost.com.

Espar Products, makers of Espar heater systems, has relocated its office and warehouse in Mississauga, Ont.

The new address is: 6099A Vipond Dr., Mississauga, ON L5T 2B2 Canada. The phone number remains unchanged: (905) 670-0960. The company Web address is: www.espar.com.

Charter rules

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Despite the agreement to rule by consensus, the makeup of the committee quickly became an issue.

Clyde Hart, senior vice president of government affairs at the American Bus Association, said the committee “under-represents coach operators who see the negative impacts of — can I say — extra-legal charter operations” and proposed adding two private-sector members to the committee.

The Coalition of Private Transportation Associations, which includes the United Motorcoach Association, the National School Transportation Association, the ABA and more than a dozen other private passenger ground transportation associations and groups, has complained for weeks that private interests were underrepresented on the committee. (See May 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

But public transit interests on the committee immediately questioned the move. Mark Huffer, general manager of the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority, argued that the FTA had already decided on the committee makeup. “We could just keep adding mem-

bers until doomsday,” he said. “At some point, we’ve got to say that’s it, and we’re going with what we’ve got.”

Daniel Duff, chief counsel and vice president for government affairs at the American Public Transportation Association, said he too could name several public-sector interests that should be on the panel. “The process may never end,” he said, eventually suggesting the addition of two members of his choosing.

Podziba called for a short break, during which Duff and Hart came to an agreement to each add two members. Hart proposed Michael Waters, president of the California Bus Association and vice president and general manager of Coach America, and Dale Moser, chief operating officer of Coach USA. Duff proposed Richard Ruddell, president and executive director of the Fort Worth Transportation Authority, and Sandy Dragoo, executive director of the Capital Area Transportation Authority in Lansing, Mich.

FTA Deputy Administrator Sandra Bushue has yet to approve the proposed appointments, but Coalition of Private Transportation Associations spokeswoman Becky Weber told *Bus & Motorcoach*

News that her group is pleased that the private-operator additions would “add a significant operator voice to the table.” She said the committee’s decision to rule by consensus rather than by vote also has somewhat eased private-sector concerns about being outnumbered.

The committee also agreed to work toward consensus on eight central issues over the next several months:

1. Are there potential limited conditions under which public transit agencies can provide community-based charter services directly to local governments and private nonprofit agencies that would not otherwise be served in a cost-effective manner by private operators?

2. How can the administration and enforcement of charter bus provisions be better communicated to the public, including use of internet technology?

3. How can the enforcement of violations of the charter bus regulations be improved?

4. How can the charter complaint and administrative appeals process be improved?

5. A new process for determining if there are private charter bus companies willing and able to pro-

vide service that would utilize electronic notification and response within 72 hours.

6. A new exception for transportation of government employees, elected officials and members of the transit industry to examine local transit operations, facilities and public works.

7. Review and clarify, as necessary, the definitions of regulatory terms.

8. FTA policies relative to the enforcement of charter rules and the boundary between charter and mass transit services in specific circumstances, such as university transportation and transportation to/from special events.

Committee members agreed to remove two other questions up for consideration. One would have carved out a new exception to the charter-bus rules for emergency services such as evacuation and emergency training. Horner pointed out that the FTA plans a rulemaking on that issue and wouldn’t include it in the charter-bus rules anyway.

Members also nixed a proposal to consider consolidating all charter service requirements (charter, school and paratransit) into one regulation out of fear it might create conflicts with rules stemming

from the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Committee decided it will meet every six weeks to allow enough time to discuss the issues with each member’s constituents.

The next meetings are scheduled for June 19-20, July 17-18, September 12-13, October 25-26, and December 6-7. Final recommendations will then go to the FTA for consideration when it drafts a proposed rulemaking on charter bus rules.

Reacting to the first meeting, committee member David Spacek, chief of downstate area programs for the Illinois Department of Transportation, said both sides need to “agree to disagree” on certain issues to find common ground on larger disagreements.

“The private sector needs to be understanding and supportive of the public providers obligations to meet local governmental requests, many of which come on short notice,” Spacek said. “And public operators need to understand the role of private charter carriers in the community and open up the transparency of charter bus service being provided by public entities.”

Michael Grebe is a freelance writer based in Washington, D.C.

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Greyhound adds frequent rider reward program

DALLAS — Greyhound Lines has launched a frequent-flier type program for frequent bus travelers.

Called Road Rewards, the Web-based loyalty program allows Greyhound customers to accumulate points toward free bus tickets and other rewards.

Customers earn points each time they purchase a Greyhound ticket online and take a trip.

In addition to bus tickets, the points can be applied to discounted food and drinks, as well as discounted companion bus tickets.

It takes 16 one-way trips to earn a free round-trip ticket to anywhere Greyhound goes, but other rewards, such as discounts on travel, can be earned with as few as six one-way trips. Points expire after a year.

Travelers sign up at www.greyhound.com/road_rewards.

Greyhound has completed its system restructuring that it began about two years ago. The streamlining has reduced the number of coaches in the Greyhound fleet by 26 percent, to fewer than 1,500, and the amount of miles in the system by 21 percent.

Calendar

JUNE 2006

3-6 Georgia Motorcoach Operators Association Annual Meeting and Marketplace, Pigeon Forge, Tenn. Info: Go to www.gamotorcoachoperators.org.

7 Texas Ground Transportation Council Get-Acquainted Reception & Meeting, Austin. Info: Doug Beach at (210) 247-4616 or e-mail DBeach@IMAX-SA.com, or Jerry Williams at (903) 561-6095 or e-mail lone-startw@aol.com.

11-15 Pennsylvania Bus Association Annual Meeting, Music Road Hospitality, Pigeon Forge, Tenn. Info: (717) 236-9042, or go to www.pabus.org.

20-22 FedFleet 2006, Los Angeles Convention Center, Los Angeles. Info: Go to www.fedfleet.org.

23-25 Bus History Association 2006 Convention, Holiday Inn Toronto-Markham, Toronto. Info: Go to www.bus-history.org.

JULY 2006

20-23 National Motorcoach Network 2006 Invitational 2006, Stonewall Jackson Hotel & Conference Center, Staunton, Va. Info: (540) 477-3323 or go to www.motorcoach.com.

American Coach execs join Coach America

LAKE WORTH, Fla. — Virtually all of the top executives of American Coach Lines have joined Coach America (formerly CUSA), following the completion of Coach America's purchase of American Coach Lines. (See May 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Until its acquisition, American Coach Lines was the largest motorcoach operator in the southeastern U.S. and the fifth largest operator

in North America.

Here's a run down on former American Coach Lines' executives: George Del Pino, chief financial officer of American Coach Lines, becomes CFO of the Southeast region of Coach America.

Adam Binder, corporate director of sales and marketing of American Coach Lines, becomes director of sales of the Southeast region of Coach America.

Vesa Nikunen, corporate director of fleet maintenance, becomes Southeast region director of maintenance for Coach America.

Lynette Sterline, director of human resources for American Coach Lines, becomes HR director of the Southeast region of Coach America.

Bill Bergstrom, former president and chief operating officer of American Coach Lines, became

Southeast region vice president of Coach America.

American Coach Lines' Chief Executive Mark Konttinen will be a consultant to Coach America for an undefined period.

Konttinen was vice president of Midnight Sun Tours in Florida before it was acquired by Coach USA and eventually became one of the nine companies that comprised American Coach Lines.

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Motorcoach Expo 2007 January 16 - 20

Driver use of cell phones: Steering clear of liability

By Garen E. Dodge

There are two important reasons why employers should adopt cell phone-use policies.

First, states have taken an increasingly active role in addressing the relationship between driver cell phone use and traffic safety. (See related article on this page.) While these laws do not directly address employer liability, they have the potential to increase employer exposure for cell phone-related accidents.

Second, there are a growing number of lawsuits involving employer liability for traffic accidents caused by employees talking on cell phones.

- An attorney struck and killed a teenage girl in Virginia. The lawyer, who was returning from a work meeting, was allegedly talking on her cell phone with a client at the time of the accident. The deceased's family filed a \$30 million lawsuit against the employer.

- A Miami jury found an Arkansas lumber company liable for more than \$20 million in damages after one of its employees struck a car, gravely injuring a passenger. The employee was using his cell phone for a sales call when the accident occurred. The company settled the case for \$16.1 million.

- An appeals court ordered the state of Hawaii to pay \$1.5 million in damages after a state teacher, who had just completed a cell

phone call, struck a pedestrian while driving to work.

- A stockbroker struck and killed a motorcyclist. The broker was making a sales call using his cell phone at the time of the accident. His employer paid \$500,000 to settle the case even though it did not provide the employee with the cell phone.

Greater liability

There are generally two theories that plaintiffs can use to hold employers liable for cell phone-related accidents.

Under the theory of *respondent superior*, an employer may be liable for any damages caused by an employee who is acting within the scope of his employment. Consequently, if an employee gets into an accident while making a business phone call, the employer could be liable.

A second ground for employer liability is negligence. Based on this theory, an employer could be liable for permitting employees to use cell phones without first providing proper training or adopting appropriate cell phone use policies.

Generally, when an accident involves a party using a cell phone, the plaintiff must prove that the use of the cell phone caused the crash. This additional layer of proof has afforded employers some degree of protection.

However, recent cell-phone

legislation may change this. Significantly, laws that prohibit the use of cell phones while driving, such as the law in the District of Columbia, could eliminate a plaintiff's need to show that using the cell phone caused the accident.

For example, if an employee gets in an accident while talking on a cell phone in a state that prohibits using cell phones while driving, it would be easier to hold the employer liable because the plaintiff may no longer need to show that the employee's use of the cell phone caused the accident. The mere fact that the employee was using the cell phone, in violation of a statute, could be sufficient to find the employer negligent.

Employer guidance

While there is no guaranteed defense to liability, developing appropriate policies, training and enforcement mechanisms can help limit potential liability and increase public safety.

Some companies prohibit employees from using cell phones while driving on company time. In contrast, other companies adopt cell phone safety guidelines and focus on training and enforcement.

Each company should determine whether the benefits of employee cell phone use outweigh the risks. Some examples of cell phone use policies include:

- Completely banning cell phone use while driving.

- Requiring employees to use hands-free devices while driving.

- Directing employees to comply with all applicable state and local laws governing cell phone use.

- Requiring employees to pull over to take or make phone calls.

- Instructing employees to avoid or terminate phone calls involving stressful or emotional conversations.

- Limiting the scope of certain employees' job descriptions so that it is clear that their positions do not include using cell phones while driving.

- Prohibiting cell phone use in adverse weather or difficult traffic conditions.

- Restricting driver cell phone use to brief conversations.

- Emphasizing the importance of safety while taking phone calls on the road.

Model policy

A sample cell phone-use policy might read as follows:

"Employees are required to comply with all state and local laws regarding the use of wireless phones while driving. All employees must use a hands-free device while driving. Whenever possible, employees should not make or receive telephone calls while driving.

"Employees should let incoming calls go to their voicemail and then find a safe place to pull over and park before initiating a call.

Under no circumstances should employees use wireless phones during adverse weather or difficult traffic conditions.

"This employer takes its phone use policy seriously. Any violations of this policy will subject employees to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment."

Regardless of the policy each company adopts, all employers should educate their employees about the dangers of talking on a cell phone while driving, and should double check their insurance coverage.

Employers should train employees on how to use cell phones safely and should make it clear that failure to comply with company guidelines may result in disciplinary action.

Garen E. Dodge chairs the employment and labor practice of the Washington law firm of Wiley Rein & Fielding LLP. He can be reached at (202) 719-7388 or gdodge@wrf.com. Brendan Carr, an associate with the firm, assisted with the article.

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Cell phones

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

30 commuter drivers, a form of communication, sometimes as simple as a two-way radio, is provided.

"We don't provide the cell phones for our charter drivers, but we do require them to have one," he says.

What's more, the company no longer reimburses drivers for cell-phone use. Monsey Tours did offer reimbursement some years ago when cell phone minutes were expensive, but with so many free minutes being offered in most plans, the difference in cost is minimal, says Lunger.

At America Charters in Charlotte, N.C., general manager Billy Ray Rhyne, says his drivers buy their phones and pay their bills.

"We don't mind reimbursing them for business calls," he says. "They just have to bring us the bill. It's a negligible expense and a necessary evil, like bathrooms and DVD players. They come in handy."

That handiness becomes more critical when the destination is Washington D.C., or New York City, says Rhyne. Sometimes a tour guide needs to call ahead to keep hotel reservations or to make sure a boat doesn't leave, Rhyne notes.

Even so, cell phones have their drawbacks, like contributing to hazardous driving.

"They can be a dangerous piece of equipment," Rhyne says. America Charters, with 150 drivers and eight tour guides, tells its drivers when to use cell phones and when not to use them.

"When you're in heavy traffic, let the phone go," he says. "Safety first, phone call last."

Rhyne expects America Charters, a unit of Coach America, to implement a company policy soon requiring the use of hands-free head sets with cell phones.

(Previous coverage of this issue in May 15, 2004, and Aug. 15, 2004, issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Lienhart of Arrow Coach in

Little Rock says that providing cell phones for his 30 drivers would be problematic. "It seems like everybody's got one. Normally, they buy their own. They get what they like and they might not know how to use one if we provided it," he says.

If drivers run up excessive minutes, Arrow Coach provides reimbursement. "The big thing," says Lienhart, "is they're buying portable GPS devices. I don't know how good they are but the drivers don't have to worry about getting directions anymore."

Though not required, most drivers use hands-free phones. Limiting how much drivers use their phones is difficult, says Lienhart.

"We try not to call them, except when we know they're on a break," he says. "Or, they call us if they have a question or a passenger gets sick."

The company handbook states that drivers should use their phones as little as possible. "We don't want them talking to their wife or family," Lienhart says. "At first, people

were on them all the time. We had some calls from passengers who were concerned, so we had safety meetings with our drivers."

There's no real way to control incoming calls, he says, except for the fact that "they've got 40 to 50 people watching them."

Lienhart reiterated what others said about passengers becoming nervous if the driver seems to spend too much time on the phone.

Lunger of Monsey Tours in Brooklyn agrees that senior riders get very concerned when they see the driver on a cell phone, even if he or she is using a head set.

"It's a major concern we have if senior citizen groups take the bus and become nervous," he says. "We don't really have an answer to that.

Realistically, we can't tell the driver never to use the phone, if he's sitting in traffic or checking on road conditions."

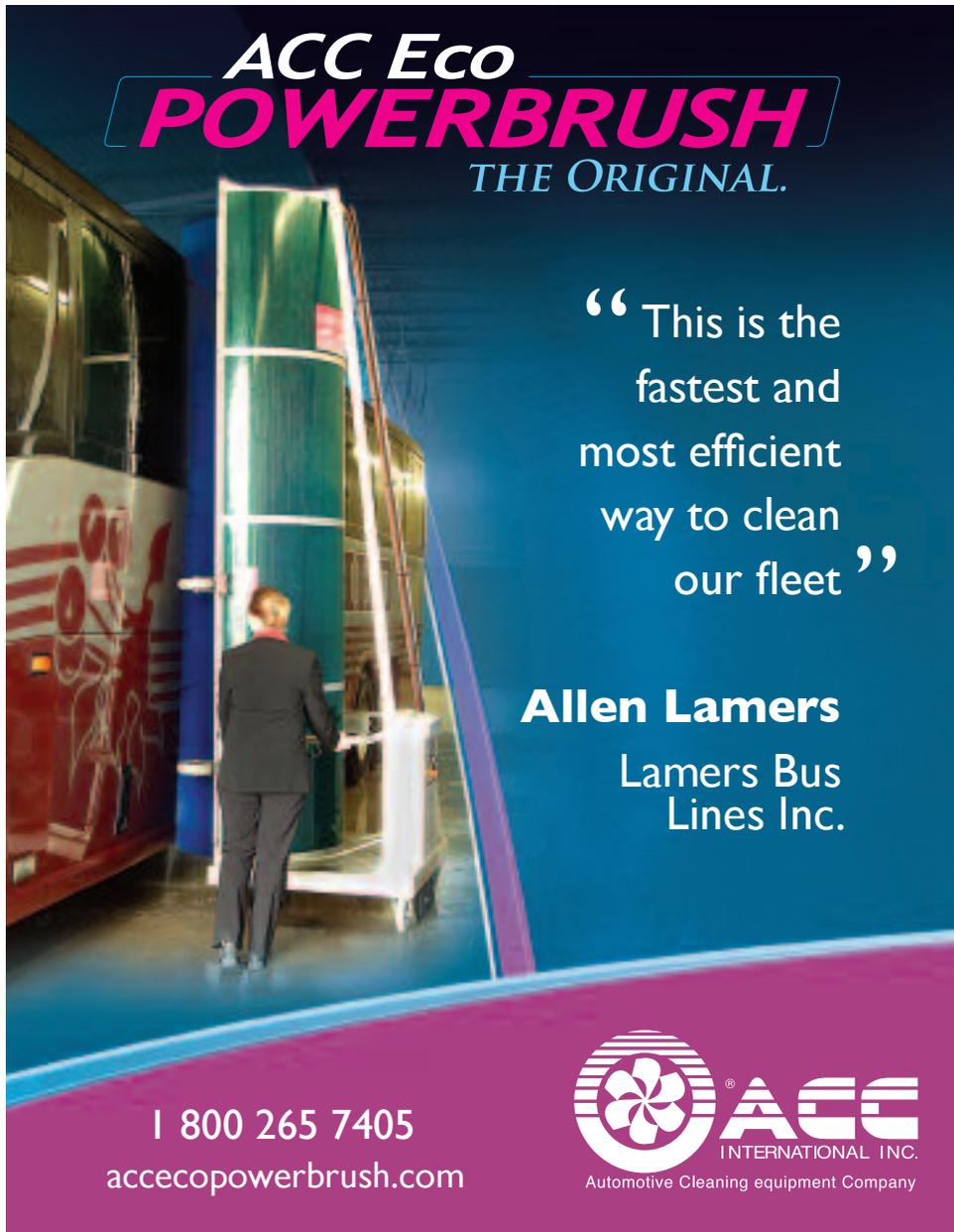
Giving out the driver's cell phone number is common. It's handy for the customer and the driver.

"Let's say they go to Washington D.C. and have four or five stops," Lunger says. "Parking is difficult. He drops off the customers at one location and doesn't want to leave his parking place until they're ready. He gives them his cell phone number and says he can be there to pick them up in a few minutes after they call. In the meantime, the driver can relax a little."

Lienhart of Arrow Coach Lines says groups often request the driver's cell number, especially if it involves an airport pickup. The customers might be at the baggage claim area and want to know where the bus is.

Still another advantage, Lienhart says, is if the driver is operating a bus that's new to him. "He'll call a driver who has driven that bus and ask for instructions on, perhaps, how to regulate the air conditioning or the kneeler," he says. "Sometimes he'll be hauling a group and the charter order doesn't say who's in charge."

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Bus sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

market in the first quarter of 2005. This year, the three best selling coaches — the J4500, the D4500 and the Prevost H3-45 — were responsible for 63 percent of the seated coach sales in the first three months.

In his analysis of this year's first-quarter sales, Plachno found that 59 percent of the seven top selling coaches were equipped with the ZF auto-stick transmission. His figures exclude the D4500 because so many of that MCI model go to public transit agencies which do not spec the ZF.

The other coaches making up the top-seven sellers during this year's first quarter were No. 4., the Van Hool C2045; No. 5, the MCI D4505; No. 6, the Van Hool T2145,

and No. 7, the MCI E4500. MCI had the distinction of having four of the top seven selling models during the first quarter.

Making sales moves during the first quarter this year versus a year ago were the Prevost H3-45 and the Van Hool C2045, which swapped the third and fourth positions. And the MCI D4505, which was introduced a year ago and ranked No. 5 on the latest list.

Plachno declined to speculate about new coach sales for the rest of the year, suggesting the industry may be peaking after six straight quarters of increases. "These next three months could be interesting," he said.

Questions about *National Bus Trader's* quarterly and annual sales reports should be directed to Larry Plachno at (815) 946-2341, or e-mail lplachno@busmag.com.

Casinos

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Katrina. Previously, it operated as President Casino on a barge in Biloxi.

- Isle of Capri Biloxi reopened in December using convention space for gambling. Owners hope to build a larger casino within two years.

- Treasure Bay, Grand Casino, Beau Rivage, Boomtown and IP Hotel & Casino plan to expand their operations in Biloxi.

- Hard Rock Cafe, which was preparing to launch when the hurricane hit, hasn't said when it will open.

- Two casinos closed permanently.

The improving outlook for Mississippi gambling also has drawn interest from potential developers outside the state. Fox-



woods Development, affiliated with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, plans to build a \$400 million casino in Biloxi starting later this year.

Larry Gregory, executive director of the Mississippi Gaming Commission, estimates the amount wagered in the region could hit

\$1.6 billion next year, a 30 percent increase from the pre-Katrina base.

Patronage at the casinos that have reopened has been boosted by workers helping to rebuild the area. The Gulf Coast had been the third-largest casino market in the U.S. after Las Vegas and Atlantic City.

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Bus Fire

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

among the 21 survivors and the relatives of the 23 who died, attorneys for the victims said.

A motion filed by one of the law firms involved says that both sides have agreed to an "interpleader," in which the companies deposit money with the court in exchange for being released from the lawsuits.

Several attorneys reportedly have met with a mediator to make presentations about their clients'

South Carolina

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

emergency evacuations because of a propensity by Florida emergency preparedness organizations, including utility companies, to contract for buses during hurricane season at high daily rates.

Such arrangements, Bryant said, could leave South Carolina without enough buses if a large hurricane were to inundate parts of the state coastal region known as the Low Country.

Earl Hunter, commissioner of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, said people from his agency had met with nursing home and hospital groups to come up with a list of facilities in the most vulnerable locations or with the least sturdy construction.

As a result of the meetings, he said the agency is now able to tell bus companies which locations will need to be evacuated first. The health agency also will begin contacting facilities 96 hours before a storm is forecast to hit so "if a problem pops up, we know it when it happens, not 12 hours later," Hunter said.

claims and negotiate how to divide the money.

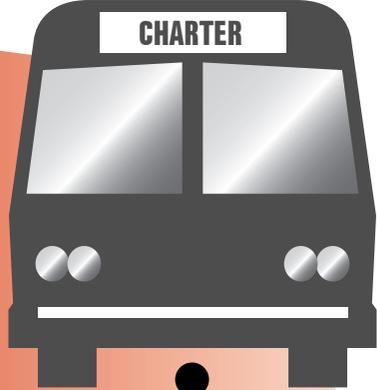
The victims also are suing Sunrise Senior Living, which owned the nursing home, over negligence claims, and Motor Coach Industries, which manufactured the E4500 coach, claiming it had design flaws.

The coach fire was the worst transportation-related disaster in the U.S. since a 2001 plane crash. It has prompted lawsuits, a federal criminal investigation, a revamp of Texas evacuation plans, and an investigation into what caused the

fire and the subsequent deaths.

Attorneys also are exploring why the fire spread quickly to the cabin and why nursing home employees didn't know the windows could pop out and serve as emergency exits.

"Why in the world do you load these people 10 or 12 rows back from an exit when to exit they have to be carried?" asked Larry Wilson, an attorney for the families of three victims. "These buses should never be held out as buses that should ever be used for something like this."



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Brent Lynch, popularized Hampton Jitney, dies at 66

SOUTHAMPTON, N.Y. — J. Brent Lynch, who built Hampton Jitney motorcoach company into a transportation fixture in metropolitan New York and on Long Island, died last month of lung cancer. He was in his home in Quogue, N.Y., when he died at the age of 66.

Mr. Lynch had a diverse career and came to the bus industry via an unusual route — the tug and ferry boat industries — and after earning degrees in engineering and law.

Born in New York City and raised in Tarrytown, N.Y., Mr. Lynch graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with an engineering degree, and received a law degree from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland.

After school, he joined General Motors, where his father was a senior executive for GM in Europe.

In 1968, he married Jered Ann McAllister and left GM to work for his wife's family business, a tugboat company operating out of New York. Five years later, Mr. Lynch and a partner purchased Cross Sound Ferry from his wife's family business.

In 1988, he sold the ferry operation and purchased Hampton Jitney, which at that point had been in business for 14 years. Until Mr. Lynch took over, Hampton Jitney was largely a van operation, providing service between eastern Long Island (The Hamptons) and greater New York.

Mr. Lynch transformed the company to a fleet of motorcoaches and limousines, and presided over a period of rapid expansion. In addition to its commuter service from Long Island into Manhattan and area airports, Hampton Jitney also provides charters and tours throughout the northeastern U.S. and Canada, tours of the Long Island wine country, runs to Foxwoods casino, and snowbird service to Florida.

Ten years ago, Mr. Lynch suffered a debilitating workplace accident that resulted in the loss of a leg

Frederick Murray joins MCI sales

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — Frederick 'Rick' Murray has joined Motor Coach Industries as director of public sector sales.

Murray comes to MCI after a 13-year career with ATC, the consulting group that specializes in transportation management. At MCI, Murray will be responsible for sales and new business development for the West Coast. He reports to Michael Melaniphy, MCI vice president of public sector sales.

and most of his hearing. Despite his disability, he traveled frequently and even snow skied with a custom mono ski, which he had made and later donated to the Sun Valley Adaptive Sports Program in Ketchum, Idaho.

He remained chairman of

Hampton Jitney which is headed by his son, Geoffrey.

In addition to his wife of 38 years, Mr. Lynch is survived by three sons, Andrew, Peter and Geoffrey of Quogue; a daughter, Stephanie Douglass of New York City; and a brother, Frank.

A memorial has been established in Mr. Lynch's name with the East End Hospice, P.O. Box 1048, Westhampton Beach, NY 11978, or contributions may be made to the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, P.O. Box 27106, New York, NY 10087-7106.



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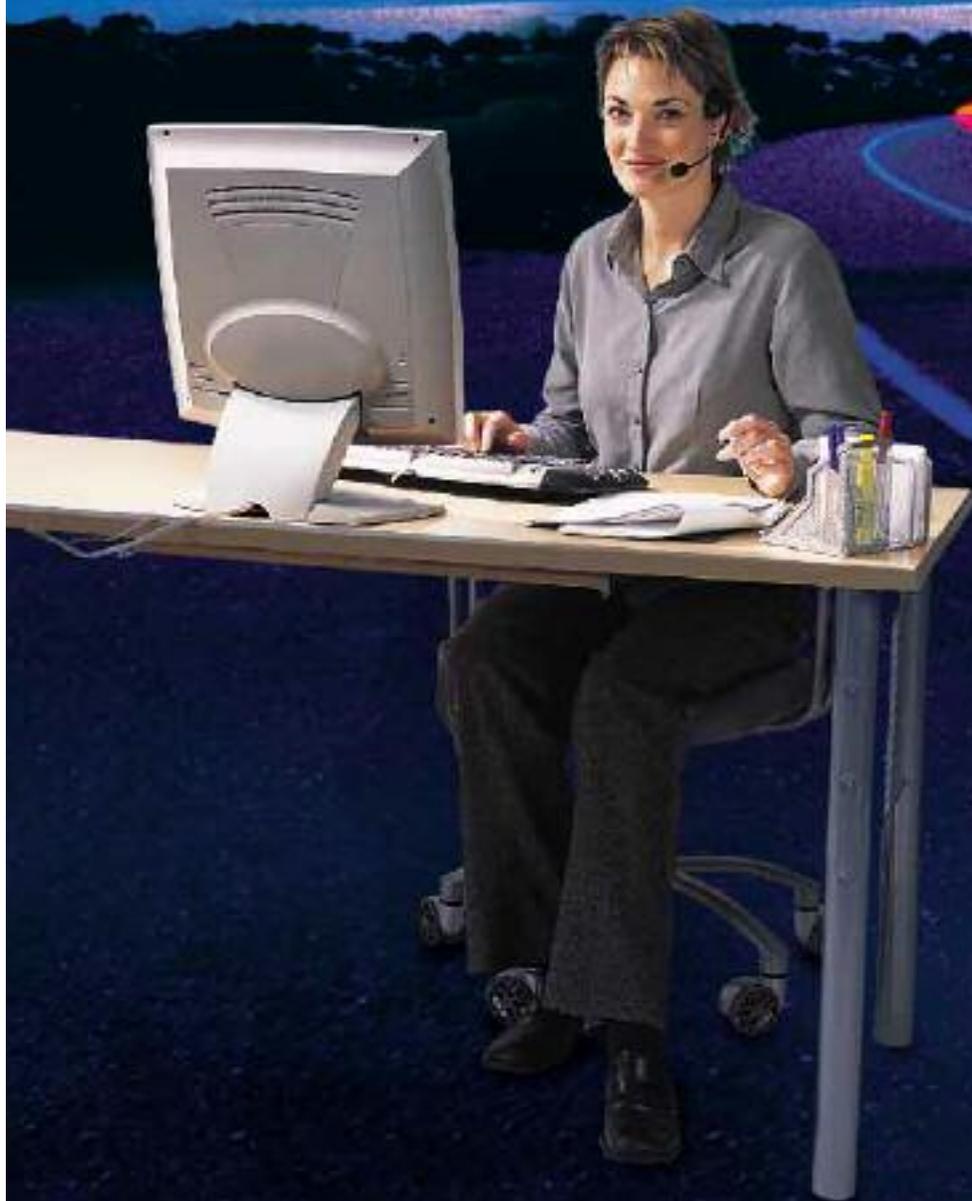
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