

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Negotiations

Private bus coalition, APTA seek accord on charter issue

WASHINGTON — Negotiators for the private bus industry are reporting progress in their talks with the American Public Transportation Association to reach an accord on the issue of federal charter service rules.

While there's agreement on most issues related to new legislation that would update and revise the rules, there remains one critical sticking point where the two sides remain far apart.

The issue has to do with transit agencies providing direct charter bus service to local government and social services organizations. The long-stalled highway and public transportation reauthorization bill now before Congress contains a provision that would allow trans-

sit systems to provide such charter service to local government units and social service agencies.

The United Motorcoach Association, the American Bus Association and other private-sector bus groups oppose the provision, which is being pushed by APTA and its transit system members.

At their first face-to-face negotiations in weeks, representatives from the Coalition of Private Transportation Associations and APTA focused on permitting some service but creating a limit, or "cap," on the amount of charter service transits could provide.

The coalition proposed that a transit agency provide no more than 24 "bus hours" of charter service

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Findings from crash investigation could have industry-wide impact

WASHINGTON — The crash 18 months ago of a Neoplan coach owned by a Baptist church, that wasn't even aware its bus was considered a commercial vehicle and was supposed to comply with federal safety regulations, could have significant consequences for much of the U.S. motorcoach industry.

The National Transportation Safety Board conducted an in-depth investigation of the crash, issuing a 100-page analysis. But it is the agency's "Safety Recommendations" that are likely to have a far-reaching impact. Among other things, the NTSB wants the:

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to develop performance standards for the passenger seat anchorage systems used in all coaches;
- Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to develop a method

for inspecting motorcoach passenger seat mounting hardware, and to revise Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations to require inspection of seat-restraint systems;

The NTSB said the church was clueless when it came to complying with regulations, and other critical safety factors.

- Neoplan USA Corp. to beef up the passenger seat anchorages in its coaches, and to begin including information in its owner and maintenance manuals about the proper procedures to be used when checking passenger seat anchorage hardware;
- Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance to develop out-of-service

criteria for inspecting tires to make sure they have the proper speed rating for the vehicle on which they are being used.

The NTSB also wants the FMCSA to study the effectiveness of the self-inspection and certification process that thousands of truckers and motorcoach operators use daily to comply with annual vehicle inspection requirements, and to improve that process.

The Safety Recommendation aimed at Neoplan contains particularly tough and pointed language.

Basic findings

In its investigation of the crash, the safety board said the driver probably caused the accident because he suffered from chronic insomnia and was fatigued. The 1992 coach he was driving

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Emergency phone number to be posted in Coach USA buses

Acting on a recommendation from the National Transportation Safety Board, Coach USA soon will begin posting notices — inside all of its motorcoaches — that give passengers telephone numbers they can call if they have concerns about their driver or think there is an emergency situation.

The company, which operates in the northeastern and north-central parts of the U.S., said it would have the decals installed in its more than 1,000 coaches by July 1.

The request came from the NTSB following an investigation into an accident in Victor, N.Y., in 2002, in which the driver fell asleep and rolled his coach down an embankment, killing five passengers and injuring two-dozen others. Some passengers told investigators they saw the driver nodding off but did not know who to call on their

cell phones to report it.

The bus that crashed was owned and operated by a Coach USA subsidiary, Arrow Line, which later was sold as part of Coach USA's downsizing.

"We considered the recommendation and thought it was a good one because it gives our passengers another option, and particularly if it prevents even one incident," said Dale Moser, Coach USA's chief operating officer.

Although Coach USA and Arrow Line were the subject of the investigation, the NTSB recommended that all motorcoach companies post emergency telephone numbers inside their buses that passengers can call in an emergency involving the driver. At least one other company has already agreed to follow the suggestion and several others say they are considering it as



well.

The Coach USA notice will read: "In case of an emergency call" It also will give the identification number of the bus and two telephone numbers for passengers to call — a toll-free number to a call

center and the standard 911 emergency number.

Most of the buses will carry a single decal at the front of the bus, while a few will require multiple decals because of the way the seats are configured, explained Charles

Corder, Coach USA's regional safety manager.

Calls to the toll-free number will be answered by a private call center, the same one that answers calls from motorists who use the

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Greyhound reveals 260 more stations to be cut

DALLAS — Greyhound Lines is eliminating another 260 stops later this month as the systemwide restructuring it began just over a year ago rolls into the eastern half of the United States.

The latest abandonments are in Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. Greyhound said that more than half of the stops being eliminated had no outbound ticket sales. The last day the stops will be served is June 21.

In Alabama, where Greyhound has 49 stops, the company is eliminating all but a dozen, retaining service only in the state's larger population centers.

In Florida, service is being discontinued to 33 communities, or nearly half of the 69 cities and towns it has been serving.

In Indiana, 22 of 52 stops are being trimmed.

In Kentucky, service to 21 towns and cities is being cut. The company currently has more than 30 stops in the Blue Grass State.

And, in Mississippi, 36 of 69 stations, of more than half, are being eliminated.

The company announced the cutbacks in news releases sent to local and regional news outlets and in letters to community leaders.

The summer cutbacks follow a series of service eliminations that began last July in the western and north central U.S. During the ensuing nine months, Greyhound abandoned service to 485 communities mostly in states that are west of the Mississippi River or in the upper Midwest.

"Financial results and customer feedback in the areas we restructured to date have favorably exceeded our expectations and significantly increased our revenue per mile," Greyhound President and CEO Stephen E. Gorman said in a statement released to news organizations in the nine states affected by the latest cutbacks.

"This has given us the confidence to move quickly into other regions and create a network that will improve service for our customers and eliminate marginally profitable routes and schedules."

The next phase of the Greyhound restructuring is planned for implementation with the company's fall schedule change and will be along the Interstate 95 corridor in the eastern U.S. When Greyhound first announced the system makeover the company said it would take two to three years.

The newest cutbacks mean that roughly 62 percent of Greyhound's network restructuring is complete.

Unsung Hero

Driver helps recover stolen coach

NEW YORK CITY — Thanks to an alert driver for the New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority, a motorcoach stolen from a hotel parking lot in New Jersey at the end of March was recovered.

The stolen bus was a 1998 MCI DL3 belonging to Virginia Coach Co. of Purcellville, Va.

It was found because MTA driver William Zimmerman noticed the coach as he was driving his daily route — No. M50 — along

48th and 49th streets in Manhattan. The MCI caught his attention because it was parked illegally and was accumulating parking tickets over a two-week period.

Zimmerman called the New York City Police Department to ask if the bus had been reported stolen but the police apparently brushed him off, making no effort to look into his inquiry, said both Betty Jo Counselman, who owns Virginia Coach with her husband James, and

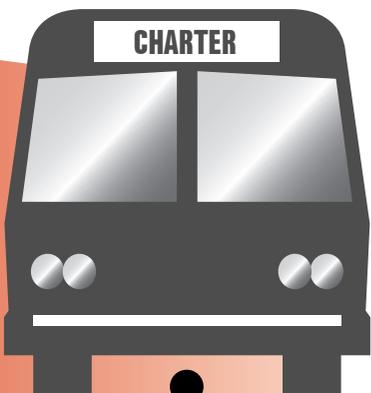
Randy O'Neill of Lancer Insurance, which insures the coach.

Getting no action, Zimmerman got on the Internet and tracked down Virginia Coach, whose livery he remembered from the side of the bus. He called the company and asked if it had a bus parked in Manhattan.

The Counselmans phoned Lancer, which contacted the NYPD, which followed up on its

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THE DOCKET

Wisconsin fuel-tax indexing is big burden for carriers

MADISON, Wis. — The next time some bright legislator in your state proposes indexing the state fuel tax, kick him or her in the shins and send 'em to Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association, parent organization of the Wisconsin Motor Coach Association, reports that the state Legislative Fiscal Bureau has calculated that Wisconsin has collected billions of dollars more in state fuel

taxes because the tax is indexed.

Under the Wisconsin system, which is used by only a few other states, the fuel tax rises along with the general rate of inflation. Of course, such a system guarantees fuel taxes will climb but legislators won't have to vote for the higher tax rate. The increases typically happen once or twice a year in those states that use indexing.

During the period 1985 through

last year, the Dairy State fuel-tax index meant Wisconsin collected some \$3.2 billion more in fuel taxes than it would have without indexing, according to the Legislative Fiscal Bureau.

And that figure doesn't include the extra revenue that is being collected this year as a result of the latest fuel tax increase of 0.8 cent per gallon that became effective April 1.

As a result of its indexing,

Wisconsin has one of the highest fuel-tax rates in the U.S. On most lists, depending on the time of year, it usually ranks second or third. Generally, only California and New York ever have higher fuel tax rates than Wisconsin. Currently, Wisconsin has a tax rate of 32.9 cents a gallon for both diesel fuel and gasoline.

The motor carriers association is not only outraged that its mem-

bers have to pay some of the highest fuel taxes in the nation, but also that Wisconsin fuel taxes are used to help pay for a variety of entities and programs not related to building and maintaining roads and bridges. In other words, highway users are paying for non-roadway-related programs.

Obviously, the association would like to see the indexing driven into oblivion.

FMCSA wants simple registration for carriers

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has proposed a revised and simplified registration system for interstate bus and truck operators.

While the proposed system would apply to all "private or for-hire motor carriers transporting property or passengers in interstate commerce" it is not expected to have a major impact on companies that are already registered with the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Under the proposed revisions, companies that are registered would need only to update their registration every two years with more information than they currently supply.

The revised system would not be available for bus and truck carriers based in Mexico and operating between Mexico and points in the U.S. beyond the commercial zones along the border.

Last month, the agency published an official Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in the Federal Register for what it is calling a "Unified Registration System." The notice came nearly 10 years after Congress directed the USDOT to

replace four current ID and registration systems with a single online registration system.

The FMCSA said the proposed system would simplify the registration process by requiring that carriers complete only one form, which would be known as the MCSA-1—FMCSA Registration Form.

Under the system, only one identification number would be needed — the USDOT number. The MC, MX and FF numbers would no longer be issued, and current MC, MX, and FF numbers would be phased out within two years of the final rule's effective date.

Electronic filing via the internet would be strongly encouraged.

The deadline for submitting comments on the proposed change is Aug. 17.

Comments can be submitted online at www.regulations.gov or at www.dms.dot.gov; by fax to (202) 493-2251; by mail to Docket Management Facility, DOT, 400 Seventh St. SW, Nassif Bldg. Room PL-401, Washington, DC 20590-0001. The docket number (FMCSA-97-2349) should be cited on all comments.

UMA backs 7(a) proposal

WASHINGTON — The United Motorcoach Association has joined a coalition of groups representing small businesses in support of a bill that seeks to restore funding for the U.S. Small Business Administration's 7(a) loan program to year-ago levels.

The legislation, called the Small Business Access to Capital Act (H.R. 1868) also would reduce borrower and lender fees on 7(a) loans, would restore piggyback financing that allows a combina-

tion of conventional and govern-

ment-guarantee loans, and increase loan and guarantee limits. The SBA 7(a) loan program has often been used by motorcoach operators to help finance their operations. Last year, in a budget-deficit-reduction move, the federal subsidy for the 7(a) program was replaced with lender and borrower fees.

H.R. 1868, which was introduced by Rep. Nydia Velazquez, D-N.Y., and five co-sponsors, seeks to restore funding for the program to the fiscal 2004 level of \$79 million.

Tire pressure warning for 15-pax vans

WASHINGTON — The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has issued a new warning about 15-passenger vans, this time focusing on the importance of proper tire inflation.

A new NHTSA study released late last month has reconfirmed that improperly inflated tires can dramatically change the handling characteristics of 15-passenger vans, increasing the prospect of a rollover crash.

Previous NHTSA research has shown that 15-passenger vans have a much higher propensity to rollover than most other vehicles. In fact, 15-passenger vans with 10 or more occupants have a rollover rate in single-vehicle crashes that is nearly three times the rate of those that are lightly loaded. That is, with fewer than five occupants.

The NHTSA also found that 22 percent of 15-passenger vans on the road had at least one tire overinflated by at least 25 percent of the recommended pressure. Many were found to be inflated beyond the maximum pressure recommended on the tire sidewall.

In the past four years, the NHTSA has issued three advisories related to the safety of 15-passenger vans. The agency says the public is taking note. Fatalities from 15-passenger van rollover crashes have declined 35 percent since the advisories began in 2001.

"Fifteen-passenger vans are convenient, but drivers and passengers have to use extra caution," said Jeffrey Runge, M.D., NHTSA administrator. "Routinely checking the condition of the tires, including the tire pressure, should be at the top of the list."

FMCSA adds Web site for medical registry plan

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has launched a Web site for its proposed National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners program.

One long-time coach industry safety expert said that establishing the Web site is a clear indication of the FMCSA's strong intention to implement the controversial medical registry. "This is the first time I've ever seen them develop a complete Web site for something that is still in the formation stage," said the expert.

The proposed medical registry program is a key provision in the delayed highway and public transportation reauthorization bill now being considered by Congress. It's designed to produce trained, certified medical examiners that are more knowledgeable about the medical standards in the Department of Transportation Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations.

Medical examiners will be expected to understand how the standards relate to the mental and physical demands of operating a commercial motor vehicle.

If the proposed NRCME pro-

gram is established by Congress, FMCSA will require all interstate commercial vehicle drivers to obtain their medical certificates from a medical examiner listed on the national registry.

The FMCSA said the new Web site is one component of a comprehensive communication campaign for the NRCME intended to reach a diverse audience, including medical examiners, commercial motor vehicle drivers, motor carriers, safety groups, federal and state enforcement agencies, labor organizations and others.

For more information, go to www.nrcme.fmcsa.dot.gov.

FMCSA estimates that upwards of 300,000 medical examiners perform exams on approximately 6.4 million commercial vehicle drivers on a biennial basis.

Last month, a group of medical, transportation and safety executives announced the establishment of the National Academy of DOT Medical Examiners (NADME), a non-profit organization aimed at addressing "serious flaws" in the medical-certification process for commercial vehicle drivers. (See June 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Transits 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 their services or to bid on contract opportunities. UMA urges appropriate operators to take the time to respond to these notices:

Vermillion, S.D. Deadline: June 15, 2005. Write to: Barb Ballensky, Transportation Coordinator, Vermillion Public Transit,

604 1/2 High Street, Vermillion, SD 57069. Phone: (605) 624-7433.

Davis, Calif. Deadline: July 1, 2005. Write to: Anthony Palmere, Assistant General Manager, Unitrans, One Shields Ave., Davis, CA 95616-8759. Phone: (530) 752-2877.

Xenia, Ohio. Deadline: July 1, 2005. Write to: Rich Schultze, Executive Director, Greene County Transit Board, 245 Valley Road, Xenia, OH 45385. Phone: (937) 562-6522, or e-mail rschultze@co.greene.oh.us.

Bill proposes more security money for coach industry

WASHINGTON — For the fourth year in a row, legislation has been introduced in Congress that would substantially boost federal funding for motorcoach industry security improvements.

Similar big-money bills in the past have failed to win congressional approval.

The newest version of the legislation proposes federal grants totaling \$50 million be awarded to over-the-road bus companies during each of the next three years to help pay for security improvements. Federal grants for over-the-road bus security since the terrorist attacks of 9/11/01 have averaged less than \$10 million annually.

The money in the latest proposal could be used by motorcoach operators to help finance a wide range of security upgrades, including terminal and station reconstruction, driver protection, passenger and package screening, employee training, background investigations, employee IDs, and surveillance and emergency communication equipment.

The new over-the-road bus security initiative, which is nearly identical to the previous measures,

is included in a comprehensive bill called the Transportation Security Improvement Act of 2005.

It was introduced by the chairman and co-chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, Sens. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, and Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, and fellow committee member Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va. Joining them as co-sponsors were eight other senators, most of them also members of the Senate commerce committee.

The new bill is different in a

couple of significant respects from last year's version. First, it would switch administration of the grant program from the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to the Transportation Security Administration, which would have been the administrative agency in earliest iterations of the bill.

In fact, in the preamble to the new bill, the sponsors note that recent reorganizations and budget reallocations have emasculated surface transportation and maritime

security programs administered by TSA. The sponsors, mostly Democrats, maintain that transportation security "is a national security function and an economic necessity," and belongs in the hands of government.

Additionally, the new bill is limited to maritime, rail, aviation, hazmat, pipeline and over-the-road bus security. Previous versions have proposed billions for public transit security.

The bill also differs significantly from the federal government's current — much smaller — bus security

grant program. This year's program, which will award just over \$9 million, is only available to intercity bus companies. Tour and charter operators are forbidden from applying.

Although all motorcoach companies apparently could apply for the grants to be awarded under the proposed legislation, the grants would be awarded on a 90-10 basis, meaning the federal government would pay 90 percent of the cost of security improvements planned by individual companies and the operators getting the grants would have to come up with the other 10 percent.

Such provisions are generally considered unfair to small and very small businesses, which compose upwards of 90 percent of all motorcoach operators.

Since the federal government began beefing up traveler security in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, the motorcoach industry has received modest funding compared to the airlines. Air carriers have received nearly \$15 billion, while motorcoach operators have received less than \$40 million, including the money being awarded this year.

Truckers wants standard for diesel

WASHINGTON — The American Trucking Associations is urging the U.S. Department of Energy to consider creating a single national diesel fuel standard in an effort to hold down diesel fuel prices.

In a letter to Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman, ATA president Bill Graves wrote that the "ongoing proliferation of so-called boutique fuels adds to the complexity and costs of diesel fuel refining. The trucking industry believes that a

single national diesel fuel standard is the best way to ensure an adequate, uninterrupted supply of this commodity."

The price of diesel fuel soared earlier this year, setting all-time records from late March into mid-April, when the national average peaked at \$2.316 a gallon. Since then, diesel prices have fallen more than 12 cents a gallon as crude oil prices have slipped.

Among truckers, fuel is often the second-highest operating ex-

pense after labor, making up 10 to 25 percent of operating expenses, according to the ATA.

The percentage of operating expenses represented by fuel costs is less for a motorcoach, often averaging around 6-9 percent.

Graves said that while the economy is still solid, rising energy costs have sapped consumers and businesses of purchasing power, weakening the broader consumer sector and potentially cutting into economic growth.



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NTSB

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slammed into the rear of a tractor-trailer near Tallulah, La. (See May 1, *Bus & Motorcoach News*)

The crash impact disintegrated the front of the coach, killing 8 of the 14 passengers onboard and seriously injuring the other six. Many were crushed between rows of seats. The 66-year-old driver was injured but survived.

Most of those on the coach were members of the First Baptist Church of Eldorado, Texas. They had been on the road for less than two hours the morning of Oct. 13, 2003, when their bus plowed into the truck that happened to be stopped at the side of the road because its brakes had been smoking — even though a self-inspection by the owner had cleared it to operate.

As one might surmise from the first three recommendations, the NTSB was particularly upset that the crash caused row after row of passenger seats in the coach to tear loose and collapse together like an accordion, smashing passengers and producing more severe injuries.

In a letter to Colorado-based Neoplan, the NTSB came within a whisker of accusing the company of gross negligence in the design, manufacture and installation of its seat anchorage system, and failing to tell customers how to reposition and re-secure seats properly. Nothing in the owner or maintenance manuals informed operators how to make seat adjustments or properly re-secure them, the NTSB said.

One safety expert who has worked with the NTSB for more than a dozen years said the NTSB's letter to Neoplan was "unprecedented in placing blame."

Tough on Neoplan

Here's what the NTSB said:

"Neoplan clearly used hardware to secure its seating systems that was inadequate to retain the seats in a frontal collision of a severity similar to the Tallulah accident," Mark V. Rosenker, acting chairman of the NTSB, wrote to Neoplan CEO John Russell.

"No federal regulation requires the use of specific strength seat anchor hardware. Nonetheless, some seat and motorcoach manufacturers are using more robust hardware that has been proven capable of withstanding the force involved in accident scenarios comparable to the Tallulah accident.

"Using lesser quality hardware in the crucial area of passenger protection is not (an) occupant safety-oriented design. Occupant safety should be of paramount importance when designing and manufacturing passenger vehicles. The safety board concluded that the inadequate seat anchorage hardware used by Neoplan failed during the accident and resulted in more severe injuries to passengers," Rosenker wrote.

"The Safety Board believes that, until the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration develops performance standards for passenger seat anchorages in motorcoaches..., Neoplan should substantially increase the load capacity of the

passenger seat anchor systems in its newly manufactured motorcoaches so the seats will not become detached during frontal impact collisions, side impact collisions, rear impact collisions and rollovers," Rosenker added.

The letter went on to say that one reason the seats came loose during the impact was because several of the T-bolts that fastened them to the floor track had been incorrectly installed. The T-bolts were designed so they could only be inserted into the track when the bolt head was positioned parallel to the track. Turning the bolts slightly less than 90 degrees, so the head of the bolt was nearly perpendicular in the track, locked them into place and prevented the bolt and seat pedestal from "lifting" out, the NTSB said.

Of the 32 T-bolts in the 16 seat frames found outside the coach, 7 T-bolts had not been properly secured to the track in the perpendicular direction, the agency discovered.

In addition, three out of four T-bolts from the Neoplan that were tested after the crash had an average hardness below HRB 70, indicating they did not match the hardness of even the lowest-rated industry bolts, the NTSB noted.

Crash comparison

The safety board compared what happened to the seats in the Tallulah crash with a similar accident on the Pennsylvania Turnpike in June 1998, when a Greyhound coach smashed into the rear of a tractor-trailer, killing the driver and six passengers.

The safety board found that even though the crash scenarios were "very similar," and both the Neoplan and Greyhound had "comparably designed seat anchorage hardware," the seats in the Greyhound withstood the crash forces. "Moreover, passengers (in the Greyhound that were) seated outside the intrusion area sustained only minor injuries. In the Tallulah accident, even passengers seated outside the intrusion area sustained serious and fatal injuries due to seat anchorage failure," the NTSB said.

Finite element analysis of the seat-anchorage hardware showed that the seat hardware on the Greyhound was of "a more robust design." In other words, the bolts were much stronger than those in the Neoplan, apparently holding the Greyhound seats in place.

Calls to Neoplan seeking comment were not returned.

There has been speculation in safety circles that once the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration begins its follow-up of the NTSB findings it could order an industrywide recall of buses with seat anchorage systems it thinks might fail in a crash.

The issue also is of critical importance to motorcoach industry safety considerations because of the long-held contention that passenger seat belts aren't needed in motorcoaches because the high-back seats are specifically designed to compartmentalize passengers and restrain them.

That argument goes up in smoke if the seats are ripped loose

when unrestrained passengers are thrown forward, uprooting seats and pinning passengers between them, increasing the severity of injuries or actually crushing passengers.

Tire speed ratings

Although it was not a factor in the crash, NTSB investigators also found that the Neoplan coach was equipped with speed-limited tires that were meant for use on a transit bus.

According to the manufacturer, the tires were designed to provide high-load capacity and durability but to be used on inner city transit bus-type vehicles, which typically do not exceed 55 mph.

Using such speed-limited tires on vehicles that routinely operate at higher speeds is not recommended because of the propensity of the tires to generate excessive heat, resulting in abrupt failures.

The NTSB found that state and federal bus inspection guidelines contain no procedures for checking for — or identifying — speed-limited tires. The safety board concluded that because the commercial vehicle inspection criteria used by Texas, the CVSA, the FMCSA, and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators do not address the identification and appropriate use of speed-limited tires, "they overlook an important vehicle safety factor and can result in commercial vehicles intended for highway use being operated with tires not suited for highway speeds."

Finally, the NTSB urged the FMCSA to develop and distribute educational materials for "nontraditional" commercial vehicle owners, such as church groups, on how to comply with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations. At a minimum, the FMCSA should post such information on its Web site, the safety board said.

The NTSB said the church was clueless when it came to driver qualifications, limitations on driving, vehicle standards, subcontracting agreements, insurance requirements, requesting operating authority, complying with regulations, and other critical safety factors.

Driver shortage bad for truckers

NASHVILLE, Ind. — A transportation forecasting firm, FTR Associates, is predicting the trucking industry will suffer a larger-than-expected shortage of 54,000 drivers by the fourth quarter of this year.

FTR's truck-share-of-employment index for the first quarter of this year indicated an "extremely tight" labor market for drivers.

According to FTR, it appears that the driver pool remains low — even as freight continues to moderately expand.

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The enemy within

Since the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Transportation Security Administration were formed three years ago, there has been a small army of bureaucrats in Washington whose job it is to worry about terrorists mounting attacks against bus industry targets.

At the same time, a different group of federal bureaucrats has been secretly conspiring to make sure that convicted criminals, some of who are dangerous, are regularly riding the nation's intercity buses alone and unescorted.

Late last month, thanks to the work of two reporters at the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, it was learned that federal prison officials are routinely putting convicts on Greyhound and other intercity buses and letting them travel alone and unannounced from one prison to another.

The practice came to light after a convicted drug dealer, riding from Minnesota to California, decided to get off the bus in Las Vegas and disappear. The druggie, known as "Shadow," is considered "armed and dangerous" by the U.S. Marshals Service, which now must try to track him down.

The reporters couldn't find out how many other Shadows are riding intercity buses or how many have decided to escape. However, they did learn that U.S. Marshals are tracking "dozens" of prisoners who are on the run after escaping during bus rides.

Amazingly, U.S. Marshals' files show that prisoners are sometimes allowed to ride alone despite a history of escapes.

The prisoner transfer program was started by the federal Bureau of Prisons to save money and relieve prison crowding. It's usually reserved for prisoners being transferred to low security facilities, which typically house nonviolent inmates, and those with relatively

little time remaining on their sentences.

Before the convicts leave on their trips they must sign a letter promising they won't try to escape. If they do run, an additional five years can be tacked onto their sentences when they're caught.

The federal prosecutor who sent Shadow to prison in 1992 told the San Diego reporters he thought the policy was "beyond comprehension."

"We've got people concerned about their safety because this guy is out," said Monty Stiles, a prosecutor in Boise, Idaho. "When I first heard it I couldn't believe it. I thought it was a joke."

When contacted by the newspaper, a spokeswoman for Greyhound, which gets most of the prisoner passengers, said the company was shocked to learn that cons were crisscrossing the country alongside innocent passengers.

She said the company had no idea unescorted prisoners were being put on its buses until it was contacted by the San Diego paper. "We have no arrangement with the Bureau of Prisons," said spokeswoman Kim Plaskett. "None at all. If there is anything putting our customers at risk for their safety we are going to do what we can to prevent that."

Plaskett said Greyhound would be asking prison authorities to explain why they're putting unescorted convicts on its coaches — and why they never notified the company of the practice.

The ability of the federal bureaucracy to amaze just never ceases. While TSA and Department of Homeland Security bureaucrats worry about keeping terrorists off buses, other federal bureaucrats are happily making sure another class of potentially dangerous lowlifes are sitting next to unsuspecting bus passengers. Unbelievable.

School bus groups coalesce

Three national associations that represent various elements of the student transportation industry have formed a coalition to improve cooperation and communication, and to present a united front — whenever possible — on legislative and regulatory matters.

The coalition is composed of the National Association for Pupil Transportation of Albany, N.Y., the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services of The Plains, Va., and the National School Transportation Association of Alexandria, Va.

The agreement creating the coalition was worked out during nearly 18 months of discussions by representatives from the organizations and two executives from International Truck and Engine Corp., the parent company of IC Corporation, the big school bus manufacturer.

While the three associations intend to continue operating as independent organizations, they also see benefits to cooperating, working together on critical issues, and communicating on a regular basis.

According to a statement issued by the presidents of the associations, the "guiding and foremost principle of the coalition"

is that the members agree "to inform the other member associations of any legislative and/or regulatory activity, or other important issues that they learn about that is/are underway at the federal level, and that can impact the pupil transportation industry." The notification is to be swift and to specific individuals.

The genesis of the agreement goes back three years when representatives from the associations met to discuss working together. Nothing much concrete happened, however, until 18 months ago when two new players were added to the meeting group, Michael Cancelliere, vice president and general manager of the bus vehicle center at International, and David Hillman, marketing director/bus at International.

Bringing Cancelliere and Hillman to the table were Michael Martin and Steve Kalmes representing NAPT; Pete Japikse and Charlie Gauthier from NASDPTS, and Terry Thomas and Dennis Hammel from NSTA. Within a short time the the group had coalesced, developing the framework for the coalition.

Japikse is president of the NASDPTS, and Kalmes is president of the NAPT. Dale Krapf,

president of the NSTA, while not a member of the discussion group, actively supported the NSTA representatives.

The coalition already is seeing both tangible and intangible benefits from the cooperative effort. These include:

- The three association presidents are now communicating on an almost weekly basis.
- Other officers and members from the three groups also are working and talking regularly.
- Joint statements have been issued by the presidents that address industry issues and current events.
- NASDPTS and NAPT have joined with NSTA for its annual Capitol Hill visits.

All three organizations have had staff members actively working together on Clean School Bus USA projects.

The three organizations have joined to form an industry terrorism task force to support on-going efforts to preserve the safety and security of school children.

All three organizations are working together to engage the federal government in school bus specific initiatives to maximize safety and security in school buses.

Journal: Surcharges may not be end all

NEW YORK CITY — The use of fuel surcharges to blunt high fuel prices may not be enough to help operators cope with stratospheric oil prices, *The Wall Street Journal* reports.

That's because surcharges typically trail fuel prices by several weeks, which can limit carriers' ability to collect surcharges, the newspaper said.

For example, FedEx Corp. indicated it was finding it hard to keep

up with fuel price increases even though it has an 8.5 percent surcharge on air and 1.75 percent surcharge on ground shipments. It can take the company up to six weeks to collect the charge, which could affect its quarterly earnings figures, said the Journal.

Meanwhile, BNSF Railway Co. says it will begin assessing fuel surcharges on a mileage basis, making it the first mileage-based fuel surcharge in the rail industry. Begin-

ning Jan. 1, the mileage-based surcharge will replace BNSF's current surcharge which is assessed as a percentage of a customer's freight transportation bill.

The railroad said that in an era of tight transportation capacity, rapidly rising fuel prices and fuel-price volatility, a mileage-based fuel surcharge program is the most direct and accurate method of reflecting the impact of fuel price changes.

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Driver retention starts with driver recruiting process

By Lancer Insurance

Everyone is talking these days about the problem of driver shortages. It's a very troublesome situation.

Your business operates through your driver force; drivers are your partners in getting and keeping business; drivers are the face of your company to your customers. You work hard to create new business but the driver retains or loses it for you. At the same time, recruiting and retaining qualified, enthusiastic drivers can be a frustrating, often exasperating, experience.

How do you go about finding qualified people to add to your driver force? Often, you begin your search by seeking people who are experienced drivers. But when you rely on experience as the No. 1 qualification, you can miss some potentially talented candidates. You need to devise ways to hire high-quality people with good attitudes, and then teach them to be good drivers. And that involves training.

Tap local resources

Outside resources can be a good source for employees. In many areas, community colleges conduct driver training schools; they train candidates to obtain CDLs and they teach them safe driving. If they are good schools with skilled professionals doing the training, this is a viable option. If you have a school like this near you, speak to the administrators about their training program and how you might be able to help each other. This can be an immense help with your recruiting efforts, and you will no longer be a slave to the "experienced" driver profile you have historically sought.

There are other techniques to help your recruiting. Try using a finder's fee. Pay employees to bring in qualified friends, neighbors and acquaintances. You won't be sorry because, in the majority of these cases, the applicants brought in are pre-screened for you. That should be worth whatever you spend. But you will need to do a couple of things to make a program like this work.

First, the amount of money you pay should be large enough to attract the attention of your employees. After all, they are putting themselves and their reputations at risk, so you need to offer adequate compensation to entice them. Second, you should pay the fee in installments. Pay a portion at the time of hire, and more later —

after the new employee has been successfully on the job for a predetermined amount of time (i.e. 90 days). Finally, you need to give this type of approach time to work. It might take months to get your employees interested and, in the meanwhile, you need to continually promote participation.

If a finder's fee doesn't help right away, recruit from sources that work for you. Where have you found drivers in the past? Are your drivers full time or part time? Are they local or did you recruit them from distant points? Think about what has worked in the past, and go back to those sources. And don't just blanket your operational area with ads in newspapers; think carefully about who you want working for you, then advertise directly to them.

Vets are excellent candidates

Have you thought about the military as a source of employees? There are many qualified drivers coming out of the military every day — and most are looking for work. The military runs an outplacement service and it offers you a chance to list your job for review by those coming out of the service. Call your local military base or recruitment center to learn more about this unique opportunity to get your driving jobs filled.

Once you've hired your drivers, your problem becomes retention. Driver turnover is a very serious problem. It will determine whether you spend your day looking for new opportunities or filling holes in your workforce. And it can affect your safety record. New drivers have more crashes. That's a fact. If you always have new drivers coming into your workforce, you'll always have a higher crash rate and the high insurance costs that go along with it.

Once you've gone through the trouble and expense of finding someone, you don't want to lose them. While you can't stop turnover completely, you can affect it, slow it down and, in many cases, significantly minimize the problem. First, understand why people leave. While there may be dozens of reasons, studies have shown that what managers and supervisors view as the reasons are very different from what the drivers themselves describe.

Managers always think it's about money and they attribute turnover to drivers finding other higher paying jobs. But finding higher pay at another job is a result

of a job search, not the reason for leaving. Something else put that driver in a state of mind to want to leave, and that is what you have to understand if you want to make an impact on turnover rates.

It's not always money

Drivers leave jobs for the same reasons you would leave a job. It begins with expectations. Is the job they have the same job you described during the interview?

Did you explain the rough things about the job? The late hours, multi-day trips, long layovers, or other negatives that hurt attitude and morale? If an employee

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Back-up your computer, back it up often, back it up right

By Bill Harnett
RBS Inc.

CHERRY VALLEY, N.Y. — Sooner or later, you're bound to face this problem: What do you do when your computer system fails?

At RBS, we get at least one call every month where there has been a computer hardware failure. This can occur for any number of reasons: a network is unprotected from viruses and spyware and has become unstable; a lightning strike has fried some key component, or a key piece of hardware has failed.

Every computer component has a "mean-time-before-failure" rating. That means it will eventually fail, and the cheaper the computer the lower the rating. So, your first defense against this problem is not to get the cheapest computer you can find to run your business but to get the best you can afford.

So, something has gone wrong, and it's time to restore from a backup. Could you do it under the pressure of having to?

Most companies think they are backing up but don't find out until it's too late they are not. One rule of thumb is that if you cannot restore from a backup you do not have one.

We have seen more than one scenario where a company has tried to reconstruct its business from paper records after a failure

because it did not have a recoverable current backup. And, there have been extreme cases where companies have failed because they did not know where to send their coaches or who owed them what.

Here are some simple rules to help you avoid these nightmares:

1. Make sure current spyware and virus protection is installed on your computers. Just

Bad guys write new viruses all the time and you need to have a current subscription to get the current prescriptions

because you got a free trial to Norton Anti-Virus when you purchased your system two years ago does not mean you are protected. The bad guys write new viruses all the time and you need to have a current subscription to get the current prescriptions. Check that your virus protection is up-to-date and working.

2. Back-up: Built into the RBS system is a utility from SYBASE (our database provider) that allows the open server copy of the database to be copied as a scheduled task to a backup folder that can then be copied to a tape or other back-up medium, using whatever back-up software you have. One common mistake people make is thinking that because they have some tape software backing up the entire server hard drive they are also getting a copy of their most current charter data. Open databases cannot be copied, just like open Word documents on a network cannot be copied or changed. The internal back-up is set up to work with any new installation by RBS technicians. But, a server upgrade, or change in administrator passwords can cause these Windows-scheduled tasks to be ignored. Anytime this type of change is made call us to make sure your internal back-up is still working.

3. Back-up often: Once you get over the hurdle of having the internal back-up working properly, you need a back-up strategy based on time. The next most common mistake is the back-up data file is copied to some external media, disk tape, memory key, but only yesterday's data is backed-up. This is fine if you discover the problem tomorrow. But, if you discover the problem two days later or if for some reason last night's back-up did not work, you will not be as current as you would like to be. A professional back-up strategy is to have a back-up or tape for each day of the week. And, have one for the end of the week and then one for the end of the month. Going backwards is sometimes a good thing for restoring back-ups.

4. Back-up right. One of the right things

to do is to have a daily, weekly and monthly strategy as described above. We have customers that have licensed a single-user copy of the RBS system and in addition to their other back-up strategy have us set it up so they can back-up to a workstation system so they can be back up and running on the system while whatever hardware solutions to fix the problem are implemented. In more extreme situations, where a customer has a 24/7 operation where they need a fail-safe system, they have a standby server and an hourly clone of the data to this server. This is the setup we had with our contracts for the Olympics in Atlanta and Salt Lake City, and we have a similar arrangement with a number of our "regular" customers.

5. Disaster recovery drill. No matter what strategy you deploy, you should practice recovery to see if you can actually do it. And don't just do it on your own. Have your local technical adviser involved, or give us a call and we will help you, so you do not overwrite new data with old. Whether this is a drill or a real recovery, do not panic. Think before you act. Get someone else involved. Get a second opinion. We have seen more than one case where the problem was made worse by jumping to quickly. We call it Do-It-Your-Self-Brain-Surgery.

When you choose a software vendor for your mission-critical applications you need to select one that is willing to provide the after-sales support to ensure your systems stay running and that even the smallest things can be the most important.

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Applying the lessons from the 'hard' insurance market

By Michelle Silvestro
National Interstate Insurance

Now that the worst of the most recent "hard" insurance market is over, what has it taught us?

Clearly, the most important lesson is that traditional market insurance rates are dependent on capacity (i.e., the supply of insurance companies willing to write a class of business) and investment returns.

While rate increases of 20-plus percent are, for the most part, a thing of the past, now is a good time to use what has been learned to better cope with the cyclical insurance market. Your job, as a savvy insurance buyer, is to find the most cost-effective, stable, long-term risk-management solution.

Put your best foot forward

To prepare for an upcoming insurance renewal or audit, consistent and complete record keeping is the key. Most insurance companies that specialize in insuring passenger transportation businesses look for the same basic information every year: Complete application, current driver list, current vehicle list, current financial statements and current loss data. By maintaining complete files, most of the information that is needed should be at your fingertips. Providing updated information every year allows for changes in your business to be taken into consideration when underwriting and developing a premium quote.

A word about loss runs

Over the years, I've talked to many operators with the same problem. They can't get updated loss runs. The time to ask your agent or broker for loss runs is not the week before your insurance renews. Loss runs should be

used as a tool to monitor claims and to assist in loss prevention. Ask your insurance agent or broker to provide you with regular updates, either monthly or quarterly. Remember, you purchase insurance to protect you in the event you have a loss. Claims management is key to successful risk management.

Choose your business partners wisely

In an ever-changing insurance market, professional insurance providers (insurance companies, agents and brokers) that specialize in your business (passenger transportation) are a must. Your broker or agent is your professional adviser and should be there to help you through the renewal process as well as be available throughout the year for assistance and guidance.

In most situations, insurance companies do not quote business direct to the operators. They rely on agents and brokers to present the operator's information to them. Keep in mind that some insurance companies don't work with all agents and brokers. You might consider allowing more than one agent or broker to work on your account so that all potential insurance companies have the opportunity to look at your business.

The key is to know what insurance companies your agent or broker is submitting your information to and make sure to obtain a copy of the information being submitted.

Be an educated buyer

It's not only important to pick the right insurance company, agent or broker, but equally important to choose the insurance program that makes the most sense for your business. While insurance costs remain one of the top five expenses for any operator, you owe it to your business to educate yourself on what programs are available and which one is

right for your company.

While traditional first dollar and deductible insurance programs have been the "usual" choice, many operators have turned to the alternative risk transfer (captive) insurance market for better control of their risk management programs and lower, more predictable, insurance costs. While captive programs are not the best solution for all operators, careful consideration of all options is necessary.

Yes, you can control the insurance buying process

If I've heard it once, I've heard it a thousand times. Operators want to know how they can avoid receiving their renewal quotes minutes before their insurance expires. Here are the keys to controlling the insurance buying process:

- Start the process early. Don't wait until just before your renewal date to submit your information to your agent.
- Be proactive in the process. Follow up with your insurance agent or broker to determine if any additional information is needed by the insurance company.
- Pick a quote date and stick with it. While most insurance companies will not quote more than a month before the expiration date, they will quote more than a few hours before your policy expires. If you demand that all quotes be received by a certain day and you don't accept quotes after that

day, it will only take one renewal cycle for agents and brokers to understand you mean business.

- Look at all options objectively and openly. While you may be familiar with some options, you might not know exactly how all programs are structured. Take the time to learn what you can to improve your risk management and potentially save money in the long run.

- If you demand all quotes be received by a certain date, give the same courtesy back to the agents or brokers who are quoting. Advise them in a reasonable amount of time if you will be placing your business with them or not. If not, let them know why.

We don't want to be the bad guy ... really

Believe it or not, insurance companies, agents and brokers don't want to be the enemy. Consider your relationship with your company, agent or broker a partnership. While insurance companies, agents and brokers come and go, long-term relationships will prevail. Pick a stable insurance company that provides excellent claims service and, in the long run, you'll be ahead of the game.

Michelle Silvestro is assistant vice president and national marketing manager of National Interstate Insurance Co. Reach her at michelle.silvestro@nationalinterstate.com or (800) 595-2553 ext. 213.

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Coach USA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"How am I driving?" signs displayed on the rear of Coach USA buses and other commercial vehicles.

The operator fielding the calls will notify the Coach USA dispatcher, who in turn will telephone the bus driver if the complaint meets one of several situations contained in a criteria developed by the company. "The dispatcher will tell the driver they have a complaint from one of their passengers and ask what is going on," said Corder.

He would not divulge the criteria, but said it would cover imminent dangers, ranging from a driver having a medical problem such as a seizure, to rowdy passengers doing things like opening the roof hatch and tossing out objects.

Such passenger notices have created concerns in the industry that they could prompt malicious calls from passengers who might be upset with the driver over something or who were drunk and wanted to play a prank.

Corder, however, said he is not worried about such possibilities, noting that each complaint would be reviewed carefully. "This happens all of the time with motorists calling the number from the sign on the outside the bus," he said. "It just means we

have to sit down with the driver and go through the complaint."

Among motorcoach operators whose interest was sparked by the recommendation was Peter Pan Bus Lines, which purchased the Arrow Line from Coach USA in 2003. Safety and security director Christopher Crean said Peter Pan is upgrading its safety measures by installing computers and global positioning system equipment on its buses and has decided to make the decals part of that project.

"I don't have a problem in doing the number inside the bus and neither did the officers of this company," he said. "We all kind of thought it was a good idea, and it went right in line with our upgrade of the computers and GPS systems on our coaches."

Crean said he hopes to have the decals posted in all 380 Peter Pan coaches by the end of the summer.

The notices will not speak directly to driver issues or emergencies, but rather tell passengers to call a toll-free number if they have concerns or problems. "We didn't want to make it so we have 55 people just watching the driver for any negative move," noted Crean.

Peter Pan also will use a private call center to field the calls and relay complaints about drivers or other safety issues to a com-

pany dispatcher, who then could call the driver on a cell phone.

CUSA, the nation's largest tour and charter operator, is also studying the possibility of adding the decals to its coaches.

"It's a good idea and we're discussing it right now," said regional safety manager William Bartlett. "There are some issues but I think eventually we will decide on something. I just don't know when." He declined to identify the issues that might be holding up the idea.

Greyhound Lines is looking into new safety options, too, and the posting of emergency telephone numbers inside its buses is among them, according to spokeswoman Kim Plaskett.

She said the company for years has operated a successful "safe bus" program that includes a sign on the outside of the bus inviting people to call if they see a bus driving erratically. "And that has been for our passengers to use, too," she said.

Some state safety regulators also are supporting the idea of posting decals inside buses.

"It's absolutely a good idea and I don't think anybody is opposed to it," said Timothy Davis, chairman of the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance Passenger Carrier Committee and assistant director of the Massachusetts

Department of Telecommunications and Energy, which regulates motor carriers. He said companies involved in the CVSA generally agree with the recommendation, and discussions on finding the best way to implement it are ongoing.

Davis said he has not heard anyone raise concerns about an inside telephone number generating phony calls from passengers. "People could make those calls to 911 at any time right now," he said.

The New York State Department of Transportation, which participated in the investigation of the Victor accident and a similar one in January near Rochester that killed four passengers, welcomed the news that coach operators are addressing driver safety. "We are supportive of the fact the industry is talking about it," said spokesman Peter Graves. "We are open to anything at this point."

However, he noted there is a fine line in getting passengers involved in safety issues. "You don't want to ask the customers to become the police or give them the false impression they should be nervous while riding the bus," he emphasized. "But we know the industry is trying to address the concerns that passengers might have while at the same time understanding that it is the job of the passengers to enjoy the ride."

Gray offers '05 product catalog

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. — Gray, the largest U.S. manufacturer of portable lifting equipment, has introduced its 2005 product catalog highlighting its wireless portable lift system.

Since 1952, Gray has been marketing shop service equipment factory direct for the automotive, bus, truck and service vehicle industries.

Among Gray's newest products is the wireless portable lift system that uses state-of-the-art electronics and an electric/hydraulic power source to provide a new level of sophistication to the lifting industry.

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Driver retention

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

expects certain things, he or she can handle it better and your credibility doesn't suffer when they learn the truth. So, honesty in interviewing is the first step in cutting turnover because you'll probably avoid hiring someone who is destined to quit.

What are some of the other reasons drivers leave? Every study on turnover points to the Human Resources/Personnel Department issues as critical to keeping employees. Fairness, respect, courtesy, family and lifestyle issues all come into play. Do you have a system in place that maximizes the positives for these driver concerns?

Drivers want to know that you are keeping up with the latest developments in the industry, and that you're helping them do the same. Education helps everyone be better at their job. So make an effort to make those safety meetings and training sessions as relevant, informative and interesting as possible.

Driver recognition pays big dividends

Every employee wants recognition. The simplest and easiest way to single someone out is to say "thank you" for a job well done. A safety recognition and awards program is a terrific way to reward drivers. Don't just hand out awards; create a ceremony around the presentation. Invite the driver recipients' spouse and children, give everyone a meal and give your employee a chance to be in the spotlight for a job well done.

Driver shortages can be addressed. Good recruiting techniques, opening yourself and your company up to training and using your employees as recruiters can all help. To retain drivers, do what you can to increase employee satisfaction with the job. Employ truth in hiring, and try to recognize and meet the ongoing needs of your drivers.

If you put some effort into thinking about how you can better manage this issue, you can put an end to the driver shortage problem dominating the operation of your business.

Thor buys bankrupt Goshen Coach

GOSHEN, Ind. — Thor Industries, the nation's largest manufacturer of cutaway buses, has acquired most of the assets of Goshen Coach of Elkhart, Ind., the No. 2 producer of small and midsize buses.

Thor said it paid a bankruptcy court roughly \$9.5 million for Goshen, which had annual sales of about \$75 million. Goshen had filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection early last month.

Goshen's product line includes seven models, ranging from 8- to 11-passenger shuttles, to 40-passenger buses. Thor said it will operate Goshen as a separate unit.

The acquisition gives Thor nearly 45 percent of the small- and midsize-bus market. Three Thor subsidiaries produce buses: ElDorado National, Champion Bus and General Coach. Other subsidiaries produce recreational vehicles and travel trailers, including Airstream, Keystone, Damon and Cross-Roads. Thor is North America's largest RV maker.

There was a short-lived competition to get Goshen, which collapsed under a pile of debt totaling at least \$30 million, including hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical claims filed by the company's 400 employees.

Others that expressed interest in acquiring Goshen were Forest River Inc., parent company of Glaval Bus and Starcraft Bus, and Supreme Industries, which manufactures small and midsize buses under the StarTrans name and also produces a line of trolley buses sold under the name Classic American Trolley.

The failure of Goshen marks the second time in a decade that the second-largest U.S. manufacturer of cutaway buses has failed. In the late 1990s, Metrotrans Corp. of Georgia went belly up and out of business under a mountain of debt and mismanagement.

Negotiations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

per year, and not more than 3 hours per month. The APTA negotiators countered with a proposed cap of 240 hours per year, with no more than 30 hours per month. The APTA suggestion was met with strenuous objections by the negotiators from the private-sector coalition.

Future negotiations will seek to resolve the issue.

"If we can't reach a consensus

on the cap issue it is likely that the existing toothless (federal charter) rules will remain unchanged through the next four-to-five years," said one source familiar with the negotiations.

Issues that have been resolved include:

- The willing-and-able process revisions in the highway bill would give private operators a first option on all charter service that is requested of a public transit agency.

- Transit agencies would be

required to transmit a list of private operators to anyone who asks them to provide charter service.

- Transit agencies would be prohibited from soliciting, coordinating or configuring charter service for third-party entities or advertising charter service.

There also was discussion regarding the possibility of additional staff at the FTA be dedicated to resolving public-private issues. An ombudsman would serve as a private operator advocate within the FTA.

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Indiana operator is newest member of Trailways system

Fairfax, Va. — Excursions Inc., a Fort Wayne-based charter and tour operator, is the newest member of the Trailways Transportation System. Excursions Trailways joins Southeastern Trailways of Indianapolis as the two Trailways affiliates in Indiana.

Excursions was founded five years ago by coach industry veterans Thomas Bazow, president, and Patrick O'Brian, vice president.

Operating on a philosophy of superior service delivery, the company has grown from a single coach to a fleet of five and 28 employees.

Bazow said growth is continuing this year, a trend he expects the Trailways affiliation will help sustain. The Trailways brand, he said, will enable his company to broaden its market base and, at the same time, provide stronger travel confidence for customers.

"We are impressed with Trailways' standards and commitment to installation of high-tech security devices on coaches, grant-writing assistance, and universal member-approvals by the U.S. Department of Defense," Bazow added.

Hero

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

call, found the bus and impounded it. Godfrey Lebron of Paradise Trailways of West Hempstead, N.Y., working with Lancer, bailed the bus out of the impound yard for the Counselmans and drove it to New Jersey where it was eventually picked up by Jim Counselman and his mechanic, who had flown up the coast to retrieve the bus.

Lancer verified Zimmerman's story and gave him cash to reward him for his initiative and plans to present him with a plaque recognizing

him for his role in getting the bus back. "He is the humblest guy," said O'Neill. "He said he was only doing what was right."

As expected, the bus was stripped of its A/V equipment but otherwise was in decent shape. There was no vandalism and even the break-in, through the bathroom window, did no damage. There were dings to the body, apparently from the 163 miles the thieves put on the vehicle.

The bus was taken March 31 from the parking lot of a Quality Inn in Lyndhurst, N.J., which is about 11 miles north of Newark.

VIP Tours Los Angeles

Since its founding 15 years ago, VIP Tours and Charters has grown to be one the largest independent coach operators in Southern California.

The full-service tour operator has locations in both Los Angeles and Anaheim, serving all of Southern California and the western U.S. The company fleet has grown to 42 vehicles and the number of employees now totals 65.

VIP Tours' driver-guides provide tours in eight foreign languages — Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

The latest additions to the com-



pany fleet are two Prevost H3-45s and two H3-41s. The coaches are equipped with Series 60 Detroit Diesel engines, Allison B500 transmissions, and five-monitor REI A/V systems with DVD, CD and video cassette players, plus wireless microphones. The passenger seats are Prevost brand. The coaches also were spec'd with passenger window

blinds, Xenon front headlines and Michelin tires.

"We are a fairly new Prevost customer, and we only own six of their motorcoaches. But customers seem to like them the most," says company President Marco Khorasani. "A lot of it has to do with the styling. There is something about the look that really stands out."

Northwestern Stage Lines Spokane, Wash.

Northwest Stage Lines/Trailways has taken delivery of its eighth MCI E4500 coach. Northwestern provides both scheduled and tour-and-charter services, and maintains offices and maintenance facilities in Spokane and Boise, Idaho.

Founded in the 1930s, Northwestern Stage Lines was purchased by the late AJ Achabal in 1952. Son Cleto Achabal joined the company after college in 1981.

Northwestern, which bought its first MCI coach in 1968, has grown to a fleet of 29 MCIs and a staff of 67 employees — many of whom have been with the company for 15



years or more.

The company transports more than 400,000 passengers annually, with nearly 60 percent of its business coming from charters and tours and about 40 percent from daily scheduled-route service.

"We've been a fan of the MCI E4500," said Cleto Achabal, president of Northwestern. "Business is looking better, and we thought it was a good time to purchase another coach. We like to keep our E4500

coaches for tours, but we will put them on scheduled runs during our busy holiday and summer seasons."

Northwestern Stage Lines' new E4500 coach is equipped with a Ricon-S&S wheelchair lift, a Caterpillar C13 engine and ZF AS-Tronic transmission, Amaya passenger seating, and an entertainment system by REI.

Visit their website at www.NorthwesternTrailways.com for more about the company.

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Tri-City Charter Longview, Texas Bossier, La.

Tri-City Charter has added three more Van Hool C2045s to its fleet, bring to nine the number of C2045s the company has added in the past six months.

Tri-City was formed about a dozen years ago in east Texas and eventually expanded into Louisiana. Six years ago, Jim Pitstick purchased the Louisiana operation. He maintained the name Tri-City Charter and later picked up the Texas operation that also was continuing to use the Tri-City name.

Because Van Hools were part of the initial purchase, Pitstick says he cut his teeth on them, and has "just stayed with them and have never had any reason to change. I like the continuity it gives my fleet, plus our new coaches are just a magnet for attracting business."

The company's major business is charter runs primarily in the Southeast. But the company also



operates throughout the U.S. and Canada. Bookings include senior groups, church affiliations and youth camps, athletic teams from colleges and public schools, as well as military transport and airport runs.

The company has grown to 30 employees and 16 Van Hool coaches, 8 at each location.

Pitstick attributes company growth to providing value to his customers. "We are not selling price, we are selling service. The overall value is the most important consideration, not the price. The key to our growth has been providing reliable, safe and dependable transportation with our exceptional personal service at a fair price. We

have repeat customers that don't even bid their trips; they know they'll get the best service at the right price from us," said Pitstick.

The company's newest Van Hools are equipped with Caterpillar C13 engines, Allison B500 transmissions, Jake Brakes, and Firestone tires. Other specifications include Amaya Brasil seats, Monogram recirculating flush-type toilets, REI A/V systems with four CRT monitors, radios and DVD players. The six coaches delivered earlier were equipped with Cummins ISM engines and Allison B500 transmissions.

Tri-City is a member of the Louisiana Motorcoach Association.

Calendar

JUNE 2005

24 Raynald R. Dupuis Charity Golf Classic, Gillette Ridge Golf Club, Bloomfield, Conn. Info: E-mail: Mitch.Guralnick@mcicoach.net.

JULY 2005

16-19 Georgia Motorcoach Operators Association Annual Meeting and Market Place, Lake Lanier Islands, Gainesville/Hall County, Ga. Info: (886) 376-7770 or www.gamotorcoachoperators.org.

17-20 National School Transportation Association Convention and Annual Meeting, Renaissance Mayflower Hotel, Washington. Info: www.schooltrans.com.

21-22 National School Transportation Association Safety and Security Workshop, National Transportation Safety Board Academy, Ashburn Va. Info: (800) 222-6782.

21-23 National Motorcoach Network / Trailways Transportation System Network Invitational 100, Wyndham Riverfront Hotel, Little Rock, Ark. Info: (888) 733-5287 or www.motorcoach.com.

AUGUST 2005

13-16 Alabama Motorcoach Association Annual Meeting and Marketplace, Embassy Suites, Montgomery, Ala. Info: (866) 376-7770 or www.alabamamotorcoach.org.

24-27 International Motorcoach Group Strategic Alliance Meeting, Lake Geneva, WI. Info: (913) 906-0111 or www.imgcoach.com.

30-Sept. 1 Florida Motorcoach Association Appointment Show, Sheraton Sand Key Resort, Clearwater Beach, Fla. Info: (407) 647-2491 or www.floridamotorcoach.org.

Magnolia Childs dies in Chicago

CHICAGO — Magnolia A. Simmons-Childs, who operated a single-coach tour and charter company in the south Chicago suburb of Dixmoor, died late last month.

Her death from cancer came three days before her 66th birthday. She was a native of Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Mrs. Simmons-Childs operated Joy Motor Coach for five years before illness forced her to close the business earlier this year.

She is survived by her husband James Shelly Childs, six children and a sister.

People

Michael R. Rushin has been named president and chief operating officer of **Laidlaw Transit Services**, a leading provider of municipal transportation and paratransit services. Rushin has been with **Laidlaw Education Services** for 14 years, most recently as senior vice president for business develop-

ment and operations support of the Overland Park, Kan.-based subsidiary of **Laidlaw International**.

Separately, Laidlaw International announced that company president and CEO, **Kevin Benson**, is assuming the additional responsibility of managing Laidlaw Education Services. **Hugh MacDiarmid**, current president and chief executive of Laidlaw Education Services, is to become a special adviser,

reporting to Benson, and will remain with Laidlaw until the end of the year. Benson said that with the recent divestiture of Laidlaw's healthcare unit he now has the time to manage the school bus business and get its margins up.

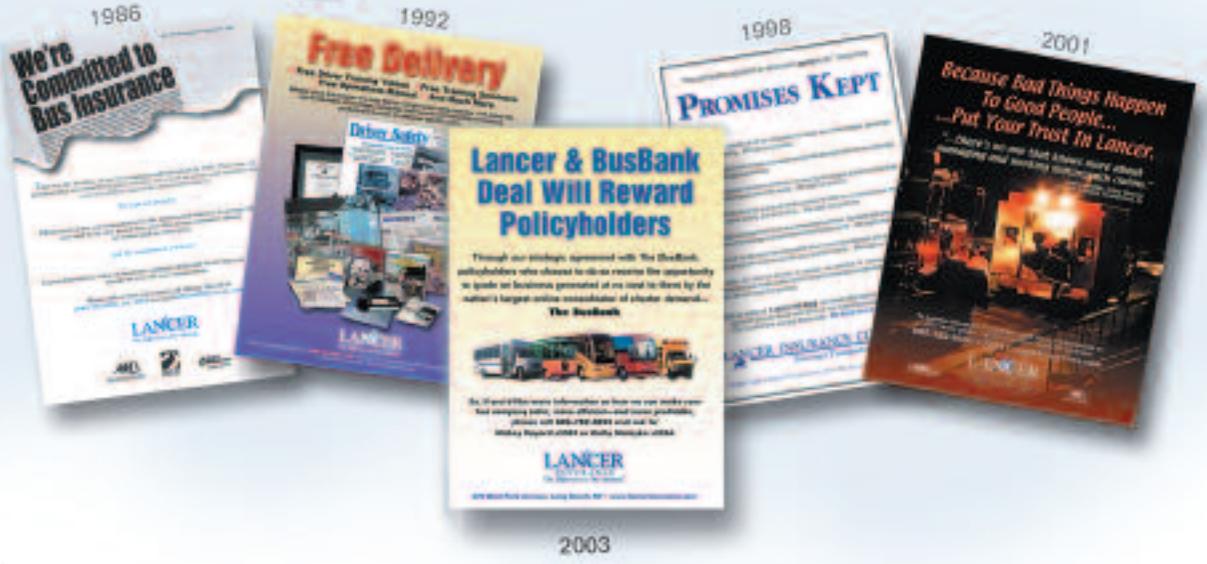
Ken Presley of **Service Insurance Agency** has received the Outstanding Volunteer of the Year award from the **Trailways Transportation System**.

Lancer Insurance Company of Long Beach, N.Y., has announced that it has promoted **James M. Harinski** to assistant vice president and associate general counsel, and elevated **Eileen FitzGerald** to assistant vice president and associate general counsel.

Harinski joined Lancer three years ago, while FitzGerald has been with the company for four years.



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And, if you'd like more information on our full range of motorcoach insurance products and customer support services, please call Mickey Bayard at 800-782-8902 x3304 • mbayard@lancer-ins.com.

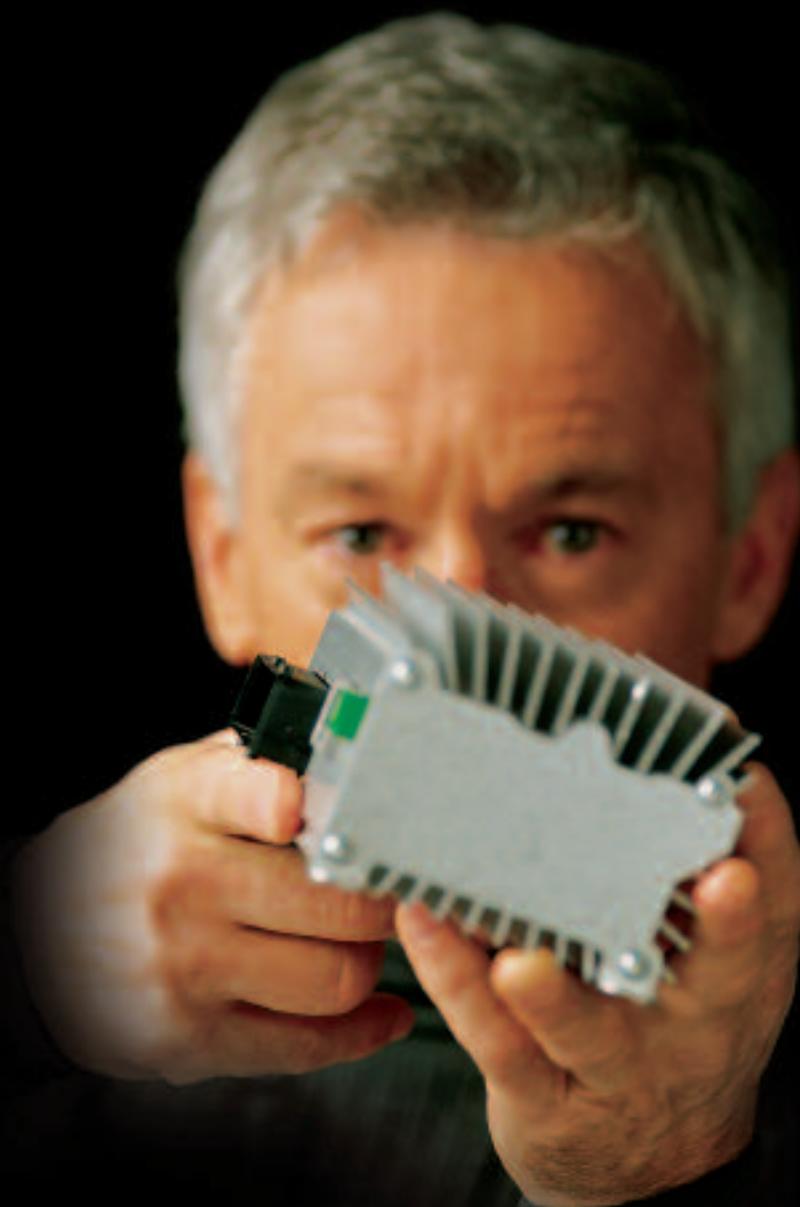


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