

# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

## Crank It Up

### 80 mph OK'd for coaches in Texas

AUSTIN, Texas – Motorcoach operators looking to shave a little time off those seemingly endless drives across west Texas have a new tool: They can crank up their buses to 80 miles per hour.

That's because the Texas Transportation Commission has raised the speed limit to 80 mph on Interstates 10 and 20 in west Texas.

The speed limit change applies to a 432-mile stretch of I-10 between Kerr and El Paso counties, and an 88-mile section of I-20 from the Kerr/Gillespie county line west to where the highway connects to I-10 — east of El Paso.

The speed-limit change applies to autos; "vehicles engaged in transporting passengers for compensation or hire," meaning buses and commercial vans; school activity buses, and light trucks (those rated to carry not more than 2,000 pounds).

The speed limit for larger trucks and big rigs remains 70 mph during the day, and the speed limit for all traffic is 65 mph at night. Existing speed limits for school buses also remain unchanged.

It is doubtful many coach operators will allow their drivers to run at the higher speed limit. Most operators are believed to have had their electronic engines programmed to limit top speeds to around 70.

The speed-limit change was made possible by legislation passed last year, designating the segments of Interstates 10 and 20 for higher speeds. The 80-mph

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►



Officials want to avoid a repeat of last year's muddled New Orleans evacuation.

## Storm evacuation plans take shape in Louisiana

### Operators may not like some elements

BATON ROUGE, La. — With another hurricane season at hand, officials in Louisiana are making plans for possible evacuations by lining up an armada of motorcoaches and buses of all sizes and types.

However, plan elements and signals being sent by some officials may not receive an enthusiastic welcome from many motorcoach operators.

For example, Louisiana is working with the same trucking logistics company that coordinated last year's disastrous evacuation of New Orleans and left a trail of bit-

terness among scores of operators.

And one evacuation official says coach operators may be forced to take pets on their buses — whether they like it or not.

The evacuation fleet being lined up by Louisiana, which will exceed 700 vehicles, would include charter coaches, transit and school buses, and possibly military carriers, officials told *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

In an effort to keep track of evacuees, officials want to use a bar-code system with wrist bands. But with New Orleans' dire financial situation, the city needs assistance if the tracking program is to be adopted, a New Orleans homeland security official says.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►

## Bus brokers: Parasites or expanding business? Operator debate grows

Bus brokers are changing the way people book motorcoach charters, but their practices are causing many operators to re-think the way they do business with them.

Operating over the Internet where their easy-to-find and alluring Web pages are drawing more attention these days, the brokers are often the first to be contacted by groups looking to charter buses.

While operators debate whether the third-party trend has truly provided new opportunities or expanded the market for charter bus services, there's no question that coach operators are being routinely bombarded with e-mails and faxes from brokers looking for rate quotes. For many, it has left them with a financial dilemma.

The reason? Most brokers try to book charters on 30- or 60-day credit, and some operators worried about losing business are giving it to them. A few of the brokers, however, have been lax about paying their bills.

*Bus & Motorcoach News* has received complaints about one broker in particular, US Coachways of Staten Island, N.Y. The Better Business Bureau of New York reports it has gotten more than a dozen complaints about US Coachways in the past year and 85 percent of the complaints left the customers dissatisfied.

While complaints about bus brokers to state and national in-

dustry trade groups don't appear to be too numerous yet, concerns among carriers are everywhere evident. A number of operators say they have had a tough time collecting their money, while others say they haven't been paid at all and at least one is preparing to sue to get his money.

*'Bus brokers contribute very little — if anything — to the business.'*

"I've just sent the paperwork to my attorney for collection," reported Bill McCreary of American Charter Coach in Naperville, Ill, who said he is owed \$5,000 for two charters he did for US

Coachways in February and March. "I've tried to contact them numerous times, but I can never reach the right people and they don't return phone calls."

Repeated efforts by *Bus & Motorcoach News*, both by phone and e-mail, to obtain comment from US Coachways also received no response.

### Good advice

To ameliorate the problem, many coach companies are beginning to heed the advice of industry veterans who urge operators to turn down credit requests from bus brokers and insist on getting their money before they put their equipment on the road.

"Every legitimate motorcoach company in the country should require payment in advance and then no one would have a problem," insists Steve Kirchner of the National Motorcoach Network

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►



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## Collision, repair centers become more tech savvy as bus complexity grows

The men and women who put the nation's motorcoaches back on the road after they've crashed or need to be repaired, require much more than a good set of wrenches to do their job these days.

Now, they have to pack a high-end laptop computer in their toolboxes, too.

Without one, say managers of collision, repair and service centers, most mechanics would be unable to function successfully.

"With today's high technology coaches, you just can't be without a laptop computer any more," stresses Wayne Wolfe, president of CoachCrafters in Northfield, Minn. "In fact, the laptop is often the most important tool in the toolbox these days."

Computers loaded with dozens of sophisticated software programs not only give mechanics and body repair technicians access to thousands of parts for just about every bus on the road, but they also provide step-by-step details on everything from performing minor tune-ups, to trouble shooting, to doing major repairs.

The need to put laptop computers on the workbenches in collision centers and repair shops across the country is being driven by the sophisticated and highly technical vehicles, systems and components that coach manufacturers and the after-market industry are turning out.

"The vehicles are so advanced that we often have to hook up the laptops to get something done," offers Greg Dotseth, operations manager at the ABC Companies service center in Faribault, Minn.

### Challenges abound

Wolf said the biggest challenge facing today's body and service technicians are the multiplex electronic systems being installed on just about every bus that leaves the assembly line at every manufacturing plant.

"They may make it easier to diagnose a problem, but the systems can be very complicated and difficult to figure out when they have been damaged," he says.

Repairs to the systems are further complicated by the many options coach manufacturers are offering, which make it tough for technicians to figure out how each system was programmed to perform its various functions.

In addition to the complex multiplex electronics, collision and service center bosses say their workers are facing much more sophisticated transmissions, brakes, electrical components, cooling and heating units, hubs, on-board entertainment gear and wheelchair loading and unloading equipment. Particularly challenging can be body and chassis rebuilding work, including repairing damages caused by fires.

"And it's going to get worse," says Dotseth.

"The new '07 engines will present challenges with their new configurations and emission-control equipment."

### Recruiting the best

The body shops and service centers are trying to keep pace by recruiting technicians skilled in electronics and who are capable of absorbing a wide range of knowledge and are willing to learn quickly.

"You need high-caliber techs, good computer people, and that's been an uphill climb," notes Dotseth.

He says, however, he has good luck recruiting locals who not only have a strong background in electronics and computers, but who have a high degree of interest in the motorcoach industry.

The company then spends about \$60,000 training them — both on the job and in the classroom — so they can work on a variety of makes and models of coaches and be certified in a good mix of repair work.

"Then we have to keep them," says Dotseth, adding that rapid turnover of technicians not only is expensive because of training costs, but it does not leave a good impression with regular customers. "Fortunately, the owners of the company understand the value of good employees and are willing to take care of them."

### Seeking experience

Jerry Cignarella, vice president of service center operations at Motor Coach Industries in Blackwood, N.J., said his company generally looks for people with at least five years experience, but also goes after educated apprentices because today's trade schools are doing a good job of training their

## Greyhound eyes major challenge

DALLAS — Having spent the past two years plowing the road to improved profitability by overhauling its route system, Greyhound is now embarking on a really tough challenge: upgrading its image and customer service.

Greyhound announced late last month it hopes to revamp its public perception and attract more riders by redoing terminals, buses and the way it interacts with customers.

One initiative: Installing greeters, a la Wal-Mart, at some terminals.

Another: Giving kiddie passengers activity books.

The "Elevate Everything" program, which is being kicked off in Texas, includes updating nearly 80 terminals, as well as 120 intermodal facilities, with new signage, better lighting, fresh paint and big-screen, flat-panel televisions.

New fixtures and tile will be added to terminal bathrooms, and stations will get customer-service greeters and additional security guards. Employees will undergo customer service training and be outfitted with new uniforms.

Oh, yes, the food in terminals also is supposed to get better.

Greyhound actually began the bus rehab aspect of its program a year ago when it contracted with MCI, Complete Coach Works and others to begin refurbishing 1,800 coaches. The buses are getting new interiors, including new seats, and redesigned exterior livery. (See May 15, 2005 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

"We have a solid, core network, and business now that is profitable and which we view as a platform for growth," Greyhound President and Chief Executive Steve Gorman told a Dallas newspaper.

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# THE DOCKET



Gov. Bob Riley, seated center, signed legislation eliminating inconsistencies for motorcoach registrations and taxes in Alabama. Rates could vary ten-fold from county to county. (See story in May 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Joining Riley at the bill signing were Alabama Motorcoach Association Vice President Frank Montgomery, far left; AMA President Bill Tilton, center left; Jim Thrasher, AMA immediate-past president, center right, and AMA Director Charles Payne, far right.

## Senate bill proposes changes to border crossing requirement

WASHINGTON — The comprehensive immigration reform bill passed by the Senate last month contains a provision that would delay implementation of a requirement that all travelers entering or re-entering the U.S. from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean or Central and South America must have a passport or other internationally accepted travel document.

The National Tour Association is commending the Senate “for taking this significant step of tremendous importance to the North American travel industry.” (See April 15, 2005 and Feb. 1, 2006 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

NTA, the United Motorcoach Association and scores of other travel industry-related organizations are worried the proposed requirement, known as the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, will curtail cross-border travel, includ-

ing educational travel to and from Canada.

Currently, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative has an implementation date of Dec. 31, 2007, but an amendment in the Senate immigration bill would postpone implementation until June 1, 2009, “allowing time for a comprehensive public education campaign on cross-border travel requirements,” says the NTA.

Additionally, the amendment authorizes the secretary of Homeland Security to waive documentary requirements for children traveling in groups of six or more to or from Canada, provided each child can demonstrate parental consent.

Also, fees established for the proposed “People Access Security Services” card, which would be accepted for cross-border travel, have been capped at \$20 and would be waived for travelers age 18 and

under.

Plus, the amendment establishes a 72-hour “day pass” for those not possessing a passport or a PASS card.

“This is a huge victory for the travel industry,” said NTA President Hank Phillips. “These common-sense changes to (the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative) will help to maintain border integrity yet facilitate cross-border tourism. But the fight is not over. We have to keep working to ensure this amendment survives the conference committee.”

The House immigration bill does not contain the proposed changes.

Sen. Norm Coleman, R-Minn., and Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., developed the amendment adopted by the Senate. The NTA and others worked with two senators to craft key provisions of the amendment.

## Minnesota roads getting bumpier

SAINT PAUL, Minn. — Check your shocks, the ride is getting bumpier in Minnesota.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation reports more highway improvement money has been pumped into getting rid of bottlenecks and making safety improvements instead of keeping the pavement smooth.

MnDOT says that 67 percent of

the state’s highway miles provided a smooth ride last year, down from 81 percent six years ago.

During the first half of this decade, Minnesota spent most of its highway dollars to reduce bottlenecks and make safety improvements.

“The expectation that came along with that money was that it would deliver some expansion projects,” said Bob Winter, director

of district services for MnDOT. “The public likes to see new projects and maybe we should have, in retrospect, spent more money on pavement to keep up.”

MnDOT does not consider bumpy roads to be a safety concern, but for three straight years the department has missed its target of having a smooth surface for 70 percent or more of its highways.

## Oregon experiments with mileage-based road fees as alternative to fuel tax

PORTLAND, Ore. — The experimenting has begun.

As government officials across the U.S. cast about for ways to find more money to pay for highway construction and upkeep, Oregon has started a program that charges a select group of motorists a fee of 1.2 cents for each mile they travel within the state — instead of the 24-cents-a-gallon state tax on gasoline.

Oregon’s experiment with so-called “mileage-based road pricing” — which is a quantum leap from traditional tolling — is being seen as a possible model for states wanting to move away from traditional fuel taxes during the next decade or two, say experts.

Later this year, some volunteers in the state’s road-pricing experiment will be separated into a second group that’s charged 10 cents a mile for driving during rush hour on weekdays anywhere in metropolitan Portland, and less than a half-cent per mile for other in-state travel.

For more than 50 years, federal and state taxes on fuel have been the primary means of paying for highway construction and maintenance in the United States.

The federal fuel tax of 18.4 cents a gallon has not been increased since 1993, allowing inflation to steadily erode its buying power. Similarly, legislators in many states have been unwilling to raise state taxes on fuel.

Other factors have eaten into the value of the fuel tax, including improved fuel economy and consumers’ growing acceptance of alternate-fuel vehicles.

Now, states are scrambling to find new systems that provide steady or increasing road revenues.

In Oregon’s experiment, 280 volunteer motorists are allowing their vehicles to be outfitted with Global Positioning System devices that rely on satellite signals to tally miles driven.

The devices, which will distinguish between miles driven inside Oregon and outside the state, will bill motorists only for in-state miles. The system also will verify miles driven in metro Portland during rush hour.

To bill drivers participating in the test, the state has installed electronic-data readers at several gas stations, so when motorists stop for fuel, there will be a wireless transfer of the mileage data.

That data will plug instantly into the gas station’s point-of-sale system, levying the mileage fee and deducting the state gas tax.

State officials will review whether the participants “change their habits” and drive less at rush hour, or even less overall, to reduce their road-use charge.

Oregon officials acknowledge that because the test substitutes a flat charge, for the state gas tax, it doesn’t differentiate between vehicles getting good or poor fuel economy.

If the test of mileage-fee technologies is successful, the Oregon legislature could install a more complex system of road-use fees that could vary the charge based on fuel economy or other factors, say officials.

Collecting mileage charges at the pump ensures everyone pays something for using the roads.

Non-residents driving on Oregon roads would pay the state tax until a nationwide system of mileage fees can account for interstate travel, officials say.

## Top USDOT officials affirmed

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate has OK’d President Bush’s nominees for the top jobs at two key agencies in the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Confirmed as administrators were: Richard Capka of the Federal Highway Administration and Nicole

Nason of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Separately, Annette Sandberg, former administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, has become chief executive of a Washington consulting firm, TransSafe Consulting LLC.

# Connecticut law to require stricter driver training for drivers

HARTFORD, Conn. — Connecticut is about to get a law that will require written certification of truck and bus driver skills, capabilities and fitness.

The law says motor carriers must sign a document vouching for their drivers' ability to operate the bus or truck assigned to them.

The legislative initiative was passed last month in direct response to a horrific crash last July at the intersection of State Routes 10 and 44 in Avon, Conn.

The widely publicized incident left four people dead and at least 20 injured.

The driver of a dump truck that caused the tragedy had been hired by a company called American Crushing & Recycling of Bloomfield only two days before the fiery crash.

After the incident, it was learned the truck driver had been fired from a similar job three days earlier because of unreliable work habits and improper operation of one of that company's trucks.

The out-of-control truck came barreling down Avon Mountain and smashed head-long into cars

and a bus waiting at a traffic signal. The truck driver was one of those killed.

"One of the factors in this tragic occurrence was, I believe, driver training, or rather the lack of driver training," said state Sen. Jonathan Harris of West Hartford, who co-sponsored the measure.

"What this amendment does is that it requires the owners of trucks (and buses) ensure that their drivers are properly trained to operate the exact kind of truck (or bus) they will operate."

The measure states that no motor carrier shall authorize or employ any person to operate any motor vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating or gross combination weight rating of 18,001 or more pounds without an "on-the-road skills test" performed in the same type of motor vehicle that they will be driving on the road.

It also requires the motor carrier to issue written, signed and dated certification that the driver possesses "the skills, capability and fitness" to operate such motor vehicle safely.

The office of Conn. Gov. M.

Jodi Rell has indicated she will sign the measure.

A number of questions have been raised about specifics of the law, how it will be administered and applied, and exactly what com-

panies will be subject to it.

The Connecticut Department of Transportation and Motor Vehicle Division are already wrestling with those issues, say state officials.

"Exactly what we have to do is unclear," said Michael Neustadt of Coach Tours Ltd. in Brookfield, Conn. "But whatever it is, we'll do it."

The law goes into effect July 1, if signed by the governor.

## 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 service.

UMA urges appropriate operators to take the time to respond to these notices:

**Metro Madison, Wis.** Deadline: June 23, 2006. Write to: Karen Meudt, Transit Accountant, 1101 E. Washington Ave., Madison, WI 53703-3052. Phone: (608) 266-4904.

**Port Townsend and Jefferson County, Wash.** Deadline: July 1, 2006. Write to: Curtis Stacey,

Transit Programs Administrator, Jefferson Transit, 1615 W. Sims Way, Port Townsend, WA 98368. Phone: (360) 385-3020.

**Davis, University of California at Davis, and Yolo County, Calif.** Deadline: July 1, 2006. Write to: Anthony Palmere, Assistant General Manager, Unitrans, 5 South Hall, One Shields Ave., Davis, CA 95616. Phone: (530) 752-2877.

**Benton, Carroll, Madison and Washington counties, Ark.** Deadline: July 3, 2006. Write to: Ozark Regional Transit, Attn: Charters, 2423 E. Robinson Ave., Springdale, AR 72764. Phone: (479) 756-5901 Ext. 247.

## N.Y. caps sales tax on fuel

ALBANY, N.Y. — New York has capped its sales tax on diesel fuel and gasoline at eight cents per gallon when the price of fuel is at least \$2 a gallon.

New York is one of roughly a dozen states that impose a sales tax on fuel. The New York sales tax, combined with the state's conventional fuel tax, means New York bus and truck operators pay the highest fuel taxes in the U.S.

During the fourth quarter of last year, the tax on diesel fuel

was 41.65 cents a gallon in New York and the tax on gasoline 42.2 cents. The next highest states were Pennsylvania at 38 cents per gallon tax on diesel fuel, Connecticut at more than 36 cents per gallon, and Wisconsin at nearly 33 cents a gallon.

New York Gov. George Pataki signed the fuel sales tax cap into law. Under the law, in the unlikely event that fuel prices fall below \$2 a gallon, the sales tax will be proportionally applied at 4 percent.

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## Ken Presley to join UMA as V.P. industry relations

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Ken Presley, a veteran motorcoach industry insurance executive, is joining the United Motorcoach Association this month as vice president of industry relations.

Presley has spent most of his career with Service Insurance Agency in Richmond, Va., but he has built a national reputation as an expert on motorcoach industry safety, business management, leg-

islative and regulatory affairs, and policy development.

"Ken brings a great deal of operator knowledge and insight to UMA," said UMA President and Chief Executive Victor Parra.

"His experience in helping Trailways operators get ready for DOD inspections, his work in developing pro-forma financials and performance benchmarks for operators, plus his extensive

knowledge of safety and operator regulatory requirements will serve him and our membership well," Parra added.

Presley's industry activities are extensive, and not a few of them have garnered him awards.

He is a member of the motorcoach associations of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Tennessee and Virginia, and on the boards of the

Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and South Carolina associations.

He is co-chair of the marketing committee of the Trailways Transportation System and was named 2005 Trailways Associate of the Year.

In January, he was selected as the Tennessee Motor Coach Association Associate of the Year.

And he is chairman of the Bus Industry Safety Council regulatory

committee.

But it has been the assistance he has provided his motorcoach insurance clients that has made him a popular figure with operators throughout the southeast. He has provided valuable guidance in such areas as business management, establishing credit, risk management, partnering, grant programs, budgeting and cost control.

"Sometimes it seemed like I spent more time assisting clients in financing motorcoaches than insuring them," he says. "Mutual success has always been important to me."

Now, says Presley, he's "eager to get started at UMA."

And Parra is just as eager.

"We're excited about having Ken on board," said Parra. "Because of Ken's extraordinary capacity to handle numerous projects, he'll be instrumental in helping us develop and manage new and improved services for UMA members."



Ken Presley

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## Atlantic City driver safety program is set

HAMMONTON, N.J. — The South Jersey Transportation Authority is offering a comprehensive driver safety training program later this month near Atlantic City.

The free, three-hour session will begin at noon Wednesday, June 28, at Wash's Catering Service in Pleasantville, N.J. A shuttle will operate from the Atlantic City Transportation Center bus parking lot to Wash's on the day of the session.

Topics to be covered include:

- Accidents and collision avoidance
- Passenger safety, avoiding slips and falls
- Protecting yourself and your company from unwarranted litigation resulting from accidents
- Maintaining a "clean" driving record
- New penalties for serious violations

The presentations will be led by John Cheruka, president of Commercial Vehicle Safety & Accident Specialists in Gilbert, Pa. Joining him will be transportation defense attorney John T. Pion of Dickie, McCamey & Chilcote in Pittsburgh.

All attendees will receive certificates and lunch.

To attend, call the authority at (609) 345-5572 or (888) 565-7582. Ask for extension 423.

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## A wet welcome in New Orleans

One of New Orleans' most popular tourist attractions and civic gems, the Aquarium of the Americas, has reopened.

The aquarium, an integral part of the famed Audubon Institute, was forced to shut down following Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent loss of power. The facility lost tens of thousands of fish and other sea creatures.

Thanks to diligent efforts of staff, volunteers, members, supporters and colleagues around the world, the aquarium has been restocked and is again delighting visitors.

Among the crowd-pleasing exhibits back on display are the penguins and sea otters. Both of the aquarium's penguin colonies, the African Black-Footed and the Rockhopper, survived Katrina but had to be evacuated. They have been returned, along with sea otters Buck and Emma.

One of the aquarium's most famous residents is Spots, a white alligator. He has a genetic mutation that causes his unusual color, including steely blue eyes.

The Seahorse Gallery showcases those mystical and magnetic ocean inhabitants, a species experts say is dwindling in the wild.

King Midas, a 300-pound sea turtle, is on display in the Gulf of Mexico exhibit. Sharks and stingrays also are among the many species swimming in that exhibit. The jellyfish exhibit is hypnotic with its fluorescent inhabitants.

The aquarium also features a "Caribbean Reef" that is entered through a 30-foot-long, water-filled tunnel. On display are tropical fish of every description swimming in 132,000 gallons of water. Sharks are up close and personal.

We could go on but you get the idea. The aquarium is open Tuesday-Sunday.

# Industry revels in growth of gambling

The growth of gambling, a social phenomenon that has had a profound impact on the motorcoach industry during the past quarter century, apparently will continue to impact the industry for the foreseeable future.

New research shows that state governments are more addicted than ever to gambling as a means of generating seemingly easy money for schools, tax relief and public services.

This governmental addiction has led to an explosion of state-sanctioned slot machines at racetracks, lottery games and, of course, casinos that draw motorcoaches like Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt attract paparazzi.

Twenty-five years ago, gambling was legal in only three states. Now, every state except Utah and Hawaii rely on gambling to generate revenue.

Pennsylvania is about to become the 11th state to offer slot machines at racetracks and other venues when it finishes awarding contracts to operate 61,000 slot machines — more than any state but Nevada — to raise money for property tax relief.

In March, North Carolina became the 42nd state to launch a lottery and expects to raise \$425 million in its first year, mostly for education.

Today, bets can be placed in nearly 900 casinos — 455 privately run in 11 states, 406 on Indian reservations in 29 states, and 29 racetrack casinos — known as racinos — in 11 states.

And at least nine more states (Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Ohio and Texas) are considering opening their doors to casino or racetrack gambling.

The economic downturn early

this decade hammered state budgets but helped push gambling into a mainstream form of entertainment. Gambling now attracts more than twice as many dollars as Americans spend on movie tickets, CDs, sporting events and concerts, according to the CNHI News Service.

Gaming generates more than \$20 billion a year in taxes and lottery revenues for state budgets, according to industry estimates that don't include fees from Native American-run casinos.

While Americans are spending more money than ever on legal gambling, a new poll shows some softening in public approval of states' reliance on gambling money.

*'At least nine more states are considering opening their doors to casino or racetrack gambling.'*

The Pew Research Center found that 71 percent of the public approves of state lotteries. That is down from 78 percent approval in a 1989 survey by the Gallup organization. The new survey found just over half (51 percent) approve of legalizing casino gambling as a way for states to raise money, down from 54 percent in 1989.

Support for state legalization of bingo for cash prizes and off-track betting on horse racing also lost a few percentage points between the 1989 and 2006 surveys, though at least half of the public still approves. But only 42 percent — in both 1989 and today — said they approve of legalizing betting on professional sports.

Two-thirds (67 percent) of adults said they placed a bet of

some kind in the past year, down from 71 percent in 1989, but fewer than 23 percent said they enjoy making bets, down from 34 percent in 1989. According to the center, seven-in-ten Americans said legalized gambling leads people to wager more than they can afford, compared to 62 percent with that concern in 1989. The margin of sampling error for the survey was plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

"The negative turn in attitudes toward gambling appears to be driven by concerns that people are gambling too much rather than by any revival of the once common view that gambling is immoral," the report said.

Besides new gambling sites

ate racinos this year. Currently there are 29 racinos in 11 states: Delaware, Florida, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and West Virginia.

Delaware has been debating a proposal that would open the door to investors who want to build Las Vegas-style casinos to rival those in Atlantic City, N.J.

Many proposals to expand gaming have languished during this year's legislative season because the nation's rosier economy has put less pressure on states to seek new revenue sources, says Steve Rittvo, president of Innovation Group, a consulting firm that helps private companies and state and local governments look at gaming expansion.

"There has to be a real fiscal need, not necessarily a budget deficit, but new (gaming) proposals have to be tied directly to a need to raise money for services like education or elderly health care," Rittvo said.

But a lull in expansion of gambling is only temporary, predicted Florida state Sen. Steven A. Geller, the president of the National Council of Legislators from Gaming States, a nonprofit group that is not affiliated with the commercial gambling industry.

Following the 2001 economic downturn, states slashed spending and services and still are recovering from those cutbacks. Although most states are running surpluses this year, the uptick isn't enough to compensate for high expenditures in health care, education, transportation and infrastructure that states soon will face, Geller said.

"I expect states will start expanding gambling again as soon as they find their pocketbooks are empty again," he said.

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# Industry backs Interstate milestone

WASHINGTON — The 50th anniversary of the U.S. Interstate System is being celebrated this month and the motorcoach industry will be front and center in the activities.

Motor Coach Industries has signed on as a sponsor of the event and is providing two coaches for a cross-country convoy, leaving San Francisco on June 16 for a 2,800-mile trip to Washington, D.C.

The convoy and celebratory activities are being organized by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

A third MCI coach, the famous Madden Cruiser used by NFL broadcaster and MCI spokesman John Madden, will be on hand for the convoy kickoff in San Francisco.

Carrying participants all the way to Washington will be an MCI J4500 coach decked out in patriotic livery. Plus, there will be a wheelchair lift-equipped MCI Commuter Coach.

"We're proud to be a sponsor of AASHTO's celebration," said Tom Sorrells, MCI president and chief executive. "MCI has been making



coaches since 1933, and the birth of the interstate ushered in a golden age of motorcoach travel.

"This event provides an opportunity to spread the word that motorcoaches continue to offer an environmentally friendly, economical way to get from point to point," said Sorrells.

The convoy will travel Interstate 80, crossing 13 states and making 18 stops before arriving in Washington on June 29.

It was on June 29, 1956, that President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the law that started construction of the vast interstate system.

Eisenhower also is the man most responsible for creation of the interstate network. As a young lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army, Eisenhower joined a military convoy that took more than two months to cross the United States along the old "Lincoln Highway," which occupies roughly the same corridor as I-80.

That 1919 convoy crawled from Washington to San Francisco, destroying bridges and encountering obstacles all the way. The difficulty of the experience led Eisenhower to believe the U.S. needed an improved highway system.

Those views were reinforced during World War II, when, as supreme commander of allied forces in Europe, Eisenhower saw the autobahns of Germany and recognized the military, as well as civilian, utility of such a system of superhighways.

When he became president in 1952, getting an interstate system built became his domestic-policy focus.

AASHTO's 2006 convoy will feature 20 trucks, buses, recreational vehicles and cars. It will stop daily for public events sponsored by state departments of transportation as it crosses the U.S.

When the convoy reaches Nebraska, a breakaway group will travel south to Abilene, Kan., which is on I-70, to visit the Eisenhower Library and Museum. Another stop will be made at the Eisenhower farm in Gettysburg, Pa.

MCI is contacting operators along the convoy route to see if any of them have antique coaches they can bring to stops along the route, said Sorrells.

## Drivers' last trip is in motorcoach

HAMPDEN, Maine — Leslie H. Van Tassel, a driver who logged more than three million miles shuttling residents of Maine across North America, died last month and his remains were carried to a cemetery by motorcoach.

Mr. Van Tassel drove for four different companies over 40-plus years, finishing his career at Cyr Bus Lines in Old Town, Maine.

Van Tassel started driving coaches in 1960, for the now-defunct Bangor and Aroostook Railroad Bus Line. Cyr took over the B&A line in 1984, and Mr. Van Tassel had a new employer.

As a tribute to their longtime friend and colleague, a Cyr motorcoach carried Mr. Van Tassel's remains to Houlton, Maine, where he was buried in Evergreen Cemetery. He died in his home at the age of 70.

Mr. Van Tassel reached his three-million-mile milestone in a Cyr coach in 1999, just a few blocks from his home. He recorded the event in his log.



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# Captive insurance program unveiled

## Midsize operators targeted for plan

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Insurance Co. has announced the formation of a captive insurance program for midsize motorcoach and bus operators.

The program will have the same benefits as captive programs that previously were available only to large operators, said Michelle Silvestro, assistant vice president of National Interstate.

“Now, midsize fleet operators can enjoy the alternative risk-financial benefits that larger operators have been enjoying for years,” said Silvestro.

The program, called Destination, is most like a captive insurance program set up by National Interstate five years ago called Calypso in that it is a so-called rental captive.

With a rental captive, the member companies “rent” National Interstate to manage the program on their behalf.

There’s another form of captive insurance program where the

members form their own insurance company and own it. National Interstate was instrumental in helping a group of operators set up such a company in 1996, called TRAX.

“We expect Destination will be just as successful, if not more successful, than the other captives,” said Silvestro. ... “Midsize fleet operators will be able to participate in ... a program with low operating costs and economies of scale,” she added.

Here’s how the three captives will differ in size: Under the TRAX program, the large operator owner-members retain the first \$300,000 of any loss; with Calypso, the members retain the first \$150,000 (up recently from \$100,000) of any loss, and with Destination the operator members will retain the first \$50,000.

To qualify for Destination, an operator should currently be paying at least \$75,000 annually for all coverages that would be insured through the program.

With all captive programs, “the important factor is that there is enough premium to fund for the

losses in the layer the participants retain,” said Silvestro.

The Destination program will offer all traditional insurance coverage, including auto liability, general liability, physical damage, garage liability and worker compensation. Plus, operators can obtain the coverage through their existing insurance broker.

Silvestro said that having all of the traditional insurance coverages available from a single source reduces the potential for gaps in coverage and timing issues associated with multiple billing programs. The Destination program requires no capital contribution or long-term commitment.

“Destination has been designed with the successful, midsize fleet operator in mind,” said Silvestro. Alternative insurance programs like Destination, Calypso and TRAX “offer many advantages to qualified firms, most notably the return of unused premiums, investment income and long-term control of insurance costs,” she noted.

More information is available by calling (800) 595-2553.

# National Interstate reveals dividend, director, results

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Corp., parent company of National Interstate Insurance, has declared a dividend of four cents per share of common stock, payable June 16, to shareholders of record June 2.

Last month, National Interstate reported net income for the first quarter of 2006, of \$8.7 million, or 45 cents per diluted share, compared to \$7.2 million, or 39 cents per diluted share, for the first quarter last year.

The 22 percent gain in net earnings for the quarter this year came as gross premiums increased \$109.5 million, a 5.8 percent rise over the first quarter of last year.

Alan Spachman, chairman and president of National Interstate, said the company’s “continued strong profitability reflects our focus on risk selection, disciplined

underwriting and our growing investment portfolio. We are also pleased with our rate of premium growth given current market conditions.”

National Interstate also announced that Joseph E. ‘Jeff’ Consolino has been elected a company director, filling the unexpired term of K. Brent Somers.

Consolino is executive vice president and chief financial officer of Validus Holdings Ltd., a Bermuda-based reinsurance company. Previously, he was managing director in Merrill Lynch’s financial institutions group.

He will serve as chairman of the board’s audit committee and as a member of the compensation committee.

Somers left the National Interstate board to complete a mission for the Mormon Church.

## Corrections

The name of the organization that a group of Texas operators has affiliated with to form a new state association is the Texas Travel Industry Association. The name of

the TTIA was misstated in the May 15 issue.

The phone number for Washington attorney Garen E. Dodge is (202) 719-7388. The area code was incorrectly reported in the June 1 issue.

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## Collision

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

students with new technology.

A career in a motorcoach collision or repair center "is a challenging, technology-based job that commands individuals with diagnostic and problem solving skills, knowledge of electronics and a strong mechanical aptitude," Cignarella adds.

He emphasizes that skills in electronics are essential because more than 50 percent of the repairs being done on coaches at MCI facilities require a technology-based skill set with knowledge of electronics.

"Today's technician has to understand the theory of electronics," he adds.

The company's recruiting efforts involve partnering with area staffing resources as well as national advertising, including pitching to members of the military who are about to leave the service.

Cignarella says MCI works hard to retain its technicians, too, through training and a wage base that is aligned with the marketplace.

"For people that want a career in a skilled trade, becoming a motorcoach technician can be ful-

filling, offering avenues for professional growth and earning potential," adds Lauren Dauod, MCI staffing and human resources manager.

Technicians at CoachCrafters are trained both at home and at workshops sponsored by manufacturers and others. "We don't always get invited to the workshops because we're an independent shop, but we go to them as often as we can," says Wolf.

Some members of his team have become so good at the computer end of the business that they often are called on for extra duty. "Now days when we have a problem with a computer in our offices, we call in a mechanic from the shop to take care of it," he says.

The company also gets a hand at recruiting by participating in the Automotive Youth Educational Systems program, which allows high school students interested in the business to share their school day between the classroom and the garage.

"The program gives young people who have an interest in transportation technology a chance to participate to see if this may be a career they will pursue," offers Tom Quay, vice president of CoachCrafters. "In a time when

good techs are in demand, this program helps bring good people into this field."

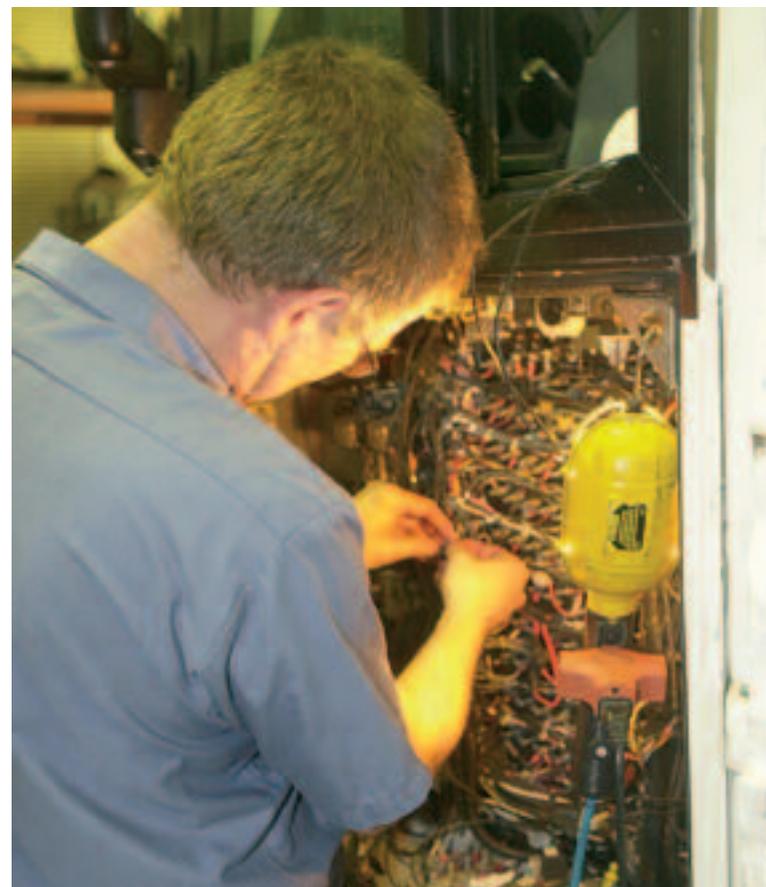
Other shops have developed other methods of driving their technicians to become more educated on the complex vehicles and systems they see daily.

At Setra's CoachWorld center in Winter Garden, Fla., technicians can earn 50 cents more an hour for each certification they add to their resume, according to Jack Farrell, general manager. He says the program not only makes technicians eager to become more educated, but serves as an incentive for them to stay with the company.

Wolf says the emphasis on new technology has created a cultural change in the industry that has forced some interesting workplace adjustments.

Old school mechanics, he says, believe employees should be thankful they have a job and they should just grab their tools and go to work, while new technicians want to be more connected with the business.

"To the new school people, money is important, but they also want to be more involved in the company and be more a part of business decisions," says Wolf. "They want to help decide things like their work schedules and what



Keeping experienced technicians is critical, say collision center managers.

needs to be done."

While the new technology has created challenges for collision and repair shops, it also is expected to bring many of the larger shops more business.

"A lot of small operators with

older buses are still servicing their own, but as their fleets get newer, they will be turning to outside repair shops," suggests Dotseth. "You just won't be able to operate without highly skilled technicians and laptop computers."

## Louisiana

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Yet, with all the planning that has taken place so far, there still is no definitive agreement on handling the evacuation of household pets.

In the wake of last year's Hurricane Katrina, many residents of New Orleans refused to leave because they didn't want to abandon their pets, and they wouldn't budge if they weren't allowed to bring their pets along.

Jerry Sneed, a planner with the New Orleans Office of Homeland Security, says: "We are putting pets in our plan (this year). We do not want to give any person a reason to stay in the city. The plan is not fully defined. The state will determine where pet shelters will be. Everybody is in agreement that it's a huge concern. Lessons learned."

At the same time, Mark Lambert, director of communications for the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, said in a phone interview: "We will not put pets on buses and coaches. It's not a good idea to put a bunch of animals in an enclosed place. People are scared any way and the bus driver will have enough on his mind."

Lambert said his agency is

working with the state Department of Agriculture on a pet solution. "Number one," he says, "we encourage people to take care of their pets."

Sneed, however, contradicts Lambert's comments. Sneed says if the owners of motorcoaches recruited for an evacuation balk at allowing pets on their vehicles, "we're thinking the federal government will step in and say you will do it."

The city has received a promise of approximately 500 donated pet cages, according to Sneed. "Our main concern is dogs and cats," he says, "but we worry about exotic pets."

Louis Sanders, immediate past president of the Louisiana Motorcoach Association, says he was contacted by the North American Pet Alliance last year and agreed to evacuate a half-dozen pets. Sanders, who has 22 buses at Louisiana Trailways in Metairie, La., doesn't have a problem with small pets being held in their owners' arms.

"God forbid if people have snakes," he says. "It will look like Noah's Ark."

Sanders also isn't too concerned about cleaning up after pets. "It'll be no worse than evacuating a nursing home," he says. "We spent

\$500 to clean two coaches from a nursing home last year. That's the way it is."

Lambert says the state has an agreement with Landstar Express America, a subsidiary of Landstar System Inc. of Jacksonville, Fla., to provide up to 300 private motorcoaches for evacuations.

Lambert said Landstar will make arrangements with private carriers. "It's a lot easier than having us go to 12 different companies," he said. Reimbursement for the charters most likely would come from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, according to Lambert. "Them (charter bus operators) getting paid is not an issue," Lambert says.

Obviously, Lambert has never submitted an invoice to FEMA.

Landstar is the same trucking logistics company that was responsible for the ill-starred evacuation of New Orleans last year, and whose payment policies, and those of its subcontractors, angered and nearly bankrupted scores of motorcoach operators that participated in the evacuation.

Additionally, the state Department of Education will have 300 school buses available and, according to Lambert, the U.S. Department of Transportation has lined up more buses to be staged outside the

impact zone.

The National Guard will provide as many drivers as necessary, Lambert says.

The plan also calls for New Orleans to send approximately 100 transit buses into neighborhoods to pick up residents without transportation and take them to the New Orleans Convention Center. From there, evacuees will board larger private motorcoaches for journeys to shelters away from the danger area.

"Our first priority is nursing home patients and those who are hospital bound but can be transported," says Lambert. "If any assets (buses) are left, that will be for the general population."

"We will try to work with Amtrak, but that's complicated. It's much simpler to do it with buses. Buses can go to more than one point."

Sneed of the New Orleans Office of Homeland Security says the use of bar coding technology will enable officials to know who has been evacuated on which bus and where they are located.

"We tested a bar coding system," he says. "When a person comes in they will get a bar code specific to their information, which is loaded into our system. When they get to a shelter we will use

the same bar code to verify where they are."

Louisiana staged an evacuation drill May 23-24, which Lambert says produced no glitches as far as the motorcoach aspects were concerned. "We didn't really take anyone to a shelter, but it gave us an opportunity to visualize the whole process — what works and what doesn't."

"Until you go through an evacuation you can't fully appreciate the mechanics of all the bad things that can break down. Obviously we hope we don't have to put this plan in effect."

Lambert acknowledged that no one from the Louisiana Motorcoach Association was involved in the drill. "I'm not sure their participation was necessary for the drill," he says. "We chose to get into an agreement with a broker with access to assets."

It rankles Sanders of the Louisiana coach association that his organization was not involved in the planning or drill.

"I was curious about that," he said. "It's funny but not surprising. I've been in the charter business in New Orleans for 12 years and I've been to two hurricane preparedness meetings. But to my knowledge, no one in the private charter business was asked to participate this time."

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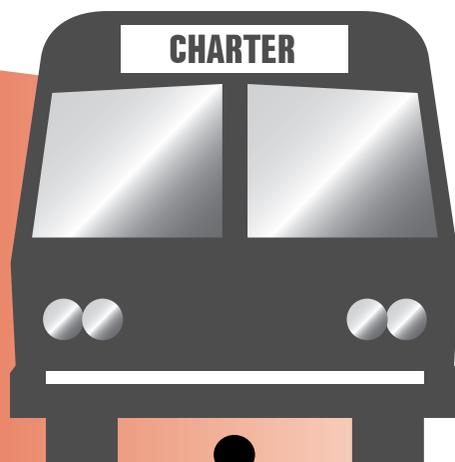
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## Bus brokers

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and a long-time industry executive. "If you don't have your money, then your bus isn't going to show up."

Thirty-year industry veteran Mike Waters of Coach America and president of the California Bus Association, agrees, noting that airlines have always operated with up-front payments and the motorcoach industry should too. "I don't fly unless I pay for the ticket," he said.

Twice burned McCreary endorses the idea and said he won't be offering brokers credit any time soon. "I did it twice, but I won't be doing it again," he said, adding that he still is receiving requests

for rate quotes from brokers, including the one that has not settled with him yet.

Pat Bernal of Colonial Coach Lines in Chicago said she, too, will be asking for payment in advance in the future after losing \$3,000 to a broker for a charter her company did in October. "We're down to a point where if we do any more business with them, they'll have to pay in advance," she said.

Some operators even have trouble getting their money when the broker agrees to pay up front.

### Shoddy practices

Jim Weber of Personalized Coaches north of Milwaukee said he accepted a charter from a broker in May and was told he would receive a check a week in advance

of the assignment. When it didn't arrive, he called the broker, who promised to overnight it to him.

However, when the check came, it was unsigned. A second overnight check was promised, but it never showed. The broker finally offered a credit-card number the day before the scheduled charter, and the payment went through.

"I appreciate the business, but we need the money up front," he said. "I didn't know those people and I was afraid I could have a problem if I didn't ask for the money in advance."

Other operators have gone further, ignoring the e-mails and faxes from brokers and refusing to do business with them.

"We don't like dealing with them because they're a middle man and most of them are just trying to get a price so they can jack up their own prices," said Dennis Prigge of Discovery Coach Lines north of Milwaukee. "Then we don't get the job anyway."

Motorcoach companies that respond to rate requests from brokers often don't hear back and that's become another concern among carriers.

### Radio silence

"I think our biggest complaint from small companies is that they take the time to provide the quotes and then they don't hear anything from them," said Elaine Johnson of Cross Country Tours and president of the Motorcoach Association of South Carolina. "Many of them would like to know why they didn't get the business."

Personally, she said she isn't bothered by the deluge of requests for rate quotes because she knows brokers are just shopping around looking for the lowest prices. "If someone is seriously looking for a quote I believe they'll call on the telephone," she said. "Most professionals call."

Gwen Elmore of Fun Tours Inc. and president of the Virginia Motorcoach Association, said she receives numerous requests for bids from brokers, but never gets booked when she responds with quotes. "They always go with the cheapest operator not knowing what their equipment or reputation is like," she said.

Most members of her state association said they don't do much business with brokers, and those that do insist on getting paid first.

Bob O'Brien of Time Lines in Oklahoma City and president of the Oklahoma Motorcoach Association steers away from using brokers because they prevent him from doing something he says is critical to sustaining and building a good business — engaging in conversation with customers.

"We don't get to tell them about what our coaches are like, the amenities we offer, our drivers, our safety record, anything about our company," he said. "The broker ends up selling our company and we don't know if they're doing a good job or not."

O'Brien added that brokers contribute very little — if anything — to the business and organizations that use them would get a better deal in most cases if they went directly to individual companies.

"They are the parasites of the industry and I don't think they belong in our business."

### Attention needed

While collecting payments up front might be the immediate answer to the problem, the industry needs to address the issue of brokers with the idea of reaching a long-term solution, says Victor Parra, president and chief executive of the United Motorcoach Association.

"This is an area of our industry that needs some attention," he said. "It is an emerging business and we need to find out what type of relationship we can have with them that works for everyone."

He noted that brokers can pretty much free wheel their deals and work because, unlike carriers, they are not regulated in any manner. "They might not have insurance or follow Department of Transportation rules," he said. "Maybe we need something like a code of ethics or code of performance."

In the meantime, he said collecting payment up front appears to be the best way to address the problem today. "Tell them before you will move your equipment, you need to be paid," he urged.

Kirchner buys that advice. "I don't favor government involvement because when you have government intervention, you run some legitimate carriers out of business," he said. "The best thing is 100 percent payment up front and then there would be no need for government intervention."

## Nova Bus gains corporate award

ST-EUSTACHE, Quebec — For the second consecutive year, Nova Bus has received Volvo Bus Executive Committee Awards in the categories of "operational excellence" and "lead time."

Winners of the awards, which are given to the best subsidiary companies of Volvo Bus Corporation, are selected by the Volvo Bus executive committee. They recognize the subsidiaries of Volvo Bus that strive to implement and maintain improvements in customer satisfaction and excellence.

Gilles Dion, president and chief executive of Nova Bus, said the award was a testament to Nova Bus employees' commitment to operational excellence.

Nova Bus is a division of Prevost Car Inc., which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Volvo Bus.

During the first quarter of this year, Volvo sold 1,252 buses in North America, a 41 percent increase over last year's 885 buses.

## Texas

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

limit in West Texas is believed to be the highest in the U.S.

The Kansas Turnpike had an 80-mph speed limit after it opened 50 years ago but that ended in the early 1970s when Congress adopted a national 55-mph limit in the wake of the Arab oil embargo. That restriction was lifted 11 years ago.

Texas and 11 other states permit drivers on some highways to travel up to 75 mph, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. But Texas transportation engineers determined that 85 percent of drivers on the two segments of I-10 and I-20 were averaging 80 mph, 5 mph above the previous 75-mph limit. So, officials reasoned that raising the limit would simply be a bow to reality.

In traffic engineering circles, 85 percent is something of a magic number. On virtually any highway, it's the speed at which 85 percent of drivers are traveling, regardless of the posted speed limit, and is considered to be the optimum "natural" speed for any given stretch of roadway.

Driving 80 mph, instead of 75, for the 432-mile stretch of I-10 will shave roughly 20 minutes off the nearly six-hour trip.

Signs posting the new speed limit are going up.

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# Trailways back in San Francisco with El Camino Lines

SAN FRANCISCO — El Camino Lines, one of Northern California's best-known charter operators, has become the newest member of the Trailways system and, at the same time, returned the Trailways brand to San Francisco for the first time in 20 years.

Trailways lost its presence in San Francisco in 1987, when Greyhound Lines purchased and absorbed the nation's largest Trailways operator at the time, Continental Trailways.

To mark its "return" to San Francisco, Trailways conducted a ceremony early this month at a picturesque former military post, Fort Baker, on the north end of the Golden Gate Bridge.

On hand were Gale Ellsworth, president and chief executive of the Trailways system; Dr. Andreas Strecker, president and chief executive of DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses North America; Patrick Scully, chief commercial officer of DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses North America; Kumar Shah, chairman of the renamed El Camino Trailways; Michael Watson, managing director of El Camino, and Robert Graf, vice president of operations at El Camino.

Strecker and Scully's attendance was occasioned by El Camino Trailways' purchase of two Setra S 417s. Scully presented keys

to the coaches to Shah. Setra is a brand of DaimlerChrysler.

The El Camino Trailways' S 417s feature Blaupunkt A/V systems with seven LCD flat-panel

video monitors, WiFi Internet access, Direct TV, and a GPS navigation system.

"El Camino Trailways has a rich history in providing luxury

motorcoach transportation in the Bay Area," said Scully. "We are pleased that Setra ... motorcoaches

is part of this historic moment when the Trailways brand returns to San Francisco."



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## New partnership for ABA, MCC

NIAGARA FALLS, Ont. — Motor Coach Canada and the American Bus Association have announced a new working arrangement designed to promote the motorcoach industry.

Dubbed the North American Motorcoach Alliance, the arrangement will have three core elements: advocacy; technical education/training; and marketing/networking/industry awareness.

The associations made clear the partnership is not a merger.

"By pooling the collective knowledge of each association, members of both organizations will benefit from the strength that each organization brings to the alliance and from expanded opportunities that the alliance will foster," said ABA President and CEO Peter J. Pantuso.

"By working in tandem and as partners, and speaking jointly whenever possible, the alliance will carry greater strength with policy makers, legislators, regulators and with the media," said Brian Crow, president of Motor Coach Canada.

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