

## Buses perform better in safety check this year

WASHINGTON — The out-of-service rate for motorcoaches inspected last month during the annual safety blitz conducted by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance declined for only the second time in this decade.

A record number of coaches — 1,238 — were inspected during Roadcheck 2006, and 9.2 percent were ordered off the road for safety violations.

That was down from last year's out-of-service rate of 11.7 percent and more in line with the rates in 2004, 9.6 percent, and 2003, 9.5 percent.

The last time there was a year-to-year decline in the Roadcheck motorcoach out-of-service rate was in 2001, when the rate dipped to 9 percent from an astronomical 20.2 percent rate in 2000.

While the out-of-service rate dropped this year for buses, the out-of-service rate for coach drivers increased.

When CVSA inspectors checked log books, CDLs, medical cards and other factors, 2.9 percent of the coach drivers were ordered off the road. That compares with a driver out-of-service rate of 2.7 percent in 2005 and 2004, and 1.7 percent in 2003. The out-of-service for truck drivers this year was 5.6 percent, also an increase.

The number of bus inspections performed in the United States during this year's three-day Roadcheck totaled 981, with an additional 257 coach inspections performed in Canada.

The number of coaches inspected has generally gone up in recent years. Last year, there were 860 coaches checked, up from 589

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## Operators seek ways to cope with brokers

It was a simple request: "Tell us about your experience with bus brokers."

The appeal ran at the end of an article about brokers in the June 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

The story clearly touched a raw nerve.

While executives at some coach companies say they've had good experiences with selected brokers, many others complain of a wide range of problems.

At the same time, operators say they are finding different ways of getting business without going through traditional brokers, including using a fledging Internet outlet that puts carriers in direct contact with potential customers.

Operators continue to complain, though, they are being swamped daily with calls from a

seemingly growing number of brokers asking for price quotes that seldom produce work.

And when an operator thinks he has landed a broker-initiated

*One operator became so concerned about the practices of brokers he began a brokerage of his own.*

job, the broker continues to pepper other carriers for quotes and will cancel a contract the minute it gets a lower price.

"My company receives several quote requests weekly from bus brokers, but transportation is very rarely booked," reports Ariane

Kelly of Mountain View Tours in Tucson, Ariz.

She said callers from brokers are sometimes disrespectful and demanding, especially those from

*Perhaps the best way to compete with bus brokers is to outdo them on their own turf — the Internet.*

one outfit — Metropolitan Shuttle of Wheaton, Md. — that she said makes her employees "shudder" whenever its name appears on the company caller ID.

"They call for quotes almost every day but we have never actually worked for them," she

explained. "Their employees are rude and bullying and do not respect my company's policies."

### Pestered to death

A number of other carriers say they have experienced similar problems with brokers being rude, arrogant and condescending over the telephone, and seldom returning calls when additional information is sought from a broker.

Michael A. Kraft of Krafttours Corp. in Tulsa, Okla., said he gets pestered regularly by brokers, but gets very little business when he provides them with quotes. "We've had countless quote requests from brokers and the business we've been able to win has been calculable on one hand," he said.

And even when he does get a

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## Security grants announced for '06; a change – of sorts

WASHINGTON — In a turn about, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has announced that charter operators will be eligible to apply for the bus security grants the agency will award this fall.

Last year, when the department announced its security grant program, it restricted those that could apply to a cobbled-together list of roughly 95 bus companies, all of which were supposedly fixed-route operators.

Charter companies were expressly forbidden from seeking grant money.

That prohibition touched off a firestorm of criticism from the United Motorcoach Association, the American Bus Association and others in the coach industry.

The associations and other crit-

ics said it made no sense to exclude 97 percent of the industry from the grant process, especially when many of those companies park tour buses next to the nation's most important landmarks and other potential targets in cities that are considered to be the most at risk of a terrorist attack. Or, those operators send coaches into vulnerable tunnels and over exposed bridges in high-risk cities.

The security bureaucrats at the department apparently got the message and opened the application process this year to both charter and fixed-route operators.

However, there is criterion this year that will once again eliminate most charter operators from being eligible to apply. Those seeking grants must have coaches that

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## Georgia requires security training for CDL holders

ATLANTA — A first-of-its-kind law in the nation now requires bus and motorcoach drivers in Georgia to get security and safety training before they renew their commercial driver license.

The training is part of the national Highway Watch program and it also applies to Georgia truckers and others who hold CDLs or are applying for a CDL for the first time.

Georgia bus drivers also are being impacted by another provision in the new state law. Drivers with a CDL endorsement to transport 15 or more passengers, and who are convicted of violating an out-of-service order, will be disqualified from driving for a period of not less than six months, nor more than two years.

The same violation within 10

years will result in a three- to five-year driver suspension.

The Highway Watch program was developed by the American Trucking Associations and is now operated by the ATA under the aegis of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Fundamentally, it teaches commercial vehicle drivers to watch for and report suspicious activity on state and federal highways.

Once trained, Highway Watch participants can contact emergency personnel through a special telephone hotline, providing emergency responders with precise location and incident information.

"There is no cost to the (Georgia Highway Watch) training," said Ed Crowell, president of

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## Landmark museum building is reopened by Smithsonian

WASHINGTON — Early this month, the Smithsonian Institution reopened the landmark Old Patent Office Building, one the capital's most-historic structures and home to the National Portrait Gallery. There was a gala reopening event.

Located half way between the Capitol and the White House in an area city designer Pierre L'Enfant designated for a national church or a pantheon for the country's heroes, the building has been closed for restoration for six years.

The contents of its two resident museums — The American Art Museum and the portrait gallery — have been returned to new exhibit halls that better integrate the collections.

While the building was being revamped, the surrounding neighborhood — known as Gallery Place — came alive through the efforts of the Downtown DC Business Improvement District. It has become a popular area for residents.

Now called the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture, the two museums and related facilities are expected to become popular stops for group

motorcoach tours.

Restoration of the Greek Revival building, the third-oldest continuously used edifice in Washington, included reopening the original skylights. There are plans to construct a glass canopy over the courtyard at the center of the building that covers two city blocks.

Since it opened in the 1830s, the Old Patent Office Building has performed a multitude of functions in American life. It was created to provide office space, as well as showcase patent models that displayed America's inventive genius, but it took on other roles over the years.

It has been the repository for national treasures, like the Declaration of Independence and George Washington's Revolutionary War tent. It served as both a barracks and an infirmary during the Civil War.

Abraham Lincoln held his second inaugural ball there. And it has housed the Civil Service Administration and the Interior Department, plus the Patent Office.

In the 1950s it was almost demolished to make room for a



The wide hallways in the Old Patent Office Building become exhibit spaces.

parking garage. President Dwight Eisenhower saved it, however, and the building is now a National Historic Landmark. In 1958, Congress gave it to the Smithsonian.

According to Marc Pachter, director of the National Portrait Gallery, "this has always been the right building for the National Portrait Gallery."

Images most Americans remember from their childhood history texts are there: the Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington, the cracked-plate photo of Abraham Lincoln and the image of Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin at Yalta.

But there also are icons of

American popular culture. Andy Warhol's Marilyn Monroe is there, along with a portrait of Warhol himself. Plus, contemporary images of Muhammad Ali, Thomas Wolfe, Gloria Steinham and basketball super star Shaquille O'Neal.

The American Art Museum contains the nation's first public art collection. Five new exhibits supplement the permanent collection. New programs open up the art conservation and storage processes to the public for the first time.

### How to get there

The Old Patent Office Building is between 7th and 9th Streets

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## Coach America buys Contactours

DALLAS — Coach America is expanding its presence in San Diego by acquiring Contactours, an established sightseeing, charter and tour bus operator that specializes in Southern California and Mexico's Baja peninsula.

Coach America, the nation's largest charter-and-tour coach company, purchased Contactours from the Comartin family, owners of the 26-year-old company that operates out of the San Diego suburb of National City.

Ed Comartin, general manager of Contactours, has been named general manager of Coach America's San Diego operation.

"This acquisition will enable Coach America to build its sightseeing business in San Diego and further expand its charter business in southern California, as well as the Baja region of Mexico," said Craig Lentzsch, chief executive of Coach America.

Coach America, which conducts business under the Coach USA, American Coach Lines, Gray Line and other brand names, operates in 30 major markets in the U.S.

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## Industry takes big hit during casino closing

Things just keep getting tougher and tougher for motorcoach operators who send their buses to New Jersey.

Every day they face serious traffic congestion on the state's freeways, tough idling regulations when they stop, high taxes and an aggressive tax collection policy, and one of the most ambitious bus safety inspection programs around.

Even Mother Nature got after them a month ago with several days of heavy rains and dangerous flooding throughout the state, forcing trip cancellations and highway driving problems.

Then, early this month, they get caught up in a nasty and controversial budget fight between Gov. Jon Corzine and the state legislature, which forced the closure of Atlantic City's 12 casinos, a big money-making destination for the



The New Jersey government shutdown not only closed casinos but also motor vehicle offices, vehicle inspection stations and courts.

coach industry.

The failure to reach a compromise on the budget led to the governor shutting down nonessential state operations and sending home 45,000 workers, including the state's casino inspectors. According to New Jersey law, the casinos cannot operate without the auditors on the job.

The shutdown of the casinos, which began July 5, lasted three

days before an accord was reached on a budget that included raising the state sales tax to 7 percent from 6 percent, which was at the heart of the dispute between the Democratic governor and the Democratic-led legislature.

"It was a very ugly situation," said David Benedict, president of David Tours in Philadelphia, who was forced to shut down his two

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## Nevada operators blocked in effort to halt regulation

RENO, Nev. — A coalition of Nevada motorcoach operators has lost a second attempt to get state regulators off their backs.

Despite the setback, they may not be ready to give up.

The latest rejection came from the U.S. District Court in Reno, which dismissed a lawsuit the Nevada Transportation Coalition filed against the state over its regulation of motorcoaches, buses, taxis and tow trucks.

The coalition charged in its suit that the Nevada Transportation Services Authority was acting unconstitutionally by regulating the transportation industry beyond federal laws that preempt state authority.

While not deciding the merits of the coalition's claims against the state, the court ruled that the state agency is exempt from such legal action under the Eleventh Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which grants certain levels of immunity to the states.

The coalition filed the suit last

year after first failing to get the Nevada Legislature to rein in the TSA. Lawmakers put together four separate measures to address the issue, two of which passed and two of which stalled in committees and were never fully heard.

Of the measures that passed, one had been reworked so drastically that it ended up giving the TSA additional regulatory authority and fell out of favor with the coalition. That proposal originally would have required the TSA to become consistent with federal preemption laws.

The other, which would have eliminated the TSA and assigned its duties to other state agencies, was vetoed by Gov. Kenny C. Guinn because it contained a last-minute amendment that would have hurt the taxi industry. The governor said at the time he would have signed the legislation had it not been for the added language that would have prevented taxi drivers from accepting tips from

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# THE DOCKET



USDOT Secretary Norman Mineta was the lone Democrat in the Bush cabinet.

## Secretary Mineta departs USDOT after five years

WASHINGTON — The Bush Administration is seeking a replacement for Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta, who left the agency earlier this month.

In his resignation letter, Mineta said the decision to leave was difficult but that it is “time for me to move on to other challenges.” He did not elaborate.

Mineta, 74, has battled serious back problems for years, but his said health problems were not a factor in Mineta’s decision to leave.

“He’s in excellent condition,” said Robert Johnson. “He wants to pursue other challenges and believes this is a good time to do that.”

Deputy Transportation Secretary Maria Cino has become acting secretary of the 60,000-person department.

In a statement, Bush touted Mineta’s tenure and touched on the secretary’s compelling personal history.

Mineta and his family were

interred with other Japanese Americans during World War II.

He served in the Army, as mayor of San Jose and in the House, where he represented his California congressional district for two decades.

As the only Democrat tapped by Bush to join his Cabinet after the 2000 presidential election, Mineta was one of three original secretaries remaining. He served as commerce secretary under President Bill Clinton.

Mineta, who was known as a transportation policy wonk during his tenure in Congress, is credited with helping to create the Transportation Security Administration after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Michael P. Jackson, deputy secretary of homeland security and a former No. 2 official at the Transportation Department, said Mineta worked hard to create security systems that would mesh with the needs of airlines and passengers.

## 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:

**Hillsborough County (Tampa), Fla.** Deadline: July 21, 2006. Write to: Donna Chen, Special

Services & Business Development Liaison, Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority, 201 E. Kennedy Blvd., Ste. 900, Tampa, FL 33602. Phone: (813) 223-6831 Ext. 2206.

**Escambia County (Pensacola), Fla.** Deadline: July 31, 2006. Write to: Robert Mahan, Director of Finance, Escambia County Area Transit, 1515 W. Fairfield, Dr., Pensacola, FL 32501. Phone: (850) 595-3228 Ext. 12.

## Charter rules dispute in Charleston headed back to FTA for resolution

A federal charter rules complaint filed by the Motorcoach Association of South Carolina against the Charleston Area Regional Transit Authority is back in the hands of federal regulators.

The association said it has notified the Federal Transit Administration that it was unable to reach a settlement with the public transit agency, and asked it to move forward with a formal investigation of the complaint.

Such an investigation could lead to sanctions against CARTA, including paying the association the \$23,000 the transit agency received for providing charter service at a wildlife exposition in February. The association asserted in its complaint that the shuttle service violated federal charter regulations because it was open only to people who had tickets to the exposition and not the general public.

The FTA had directed the two parties in May to meet in an effort to settle the dispute and said it would open an investigation if they were unable to resolve their differences.

CARTA informed the association after the meeting that it continues to believe it followed federal regulations in providing the shuttle service and that it was an open-door service to the public.

“The board of directors of the association is very disappointed in

this response,” said Linda Morris, association executive director. “Clearly there is no conciliation.”

Howard Chapman, executive director of CARTA, told the association that his review of the service the agency provided to the exposition confirmed that it was available to the general public and not restricted to people attending the fair. “The service was marketed throughout the service area and there were boardings by (festival) participants who made trips throughout our service area,” he said.

*‘The board of directors of the association is very disappointed in this response.’*

Morris, however, contends that Chapman’s statement misrepresents the circumstances under which the transit agency offered the service. “It was not an open-door service,” she stressed, pointing out that two board members of the association attempted to ride the shuttle and were turned away because they did not have festival tickets.

Despite the failure to settle the dispute, there appeared to be at least two positive steps to come from the meeting between the association and CARTA.

Morris said CARTA offered to

include a link on its Web site to the association, and to instruct its fixed-route drivers not to block parking spaces in the city that are designated for private tour buses.

“The board does appreciate the gesture to provide a link on the CARTA Web site to the association,” she said. “By linking CARTA’s Web site to the association Web site, the public can be made aware of private passenger carriers that can provide charter service.”

The parking situation involved a claim by the association that CARTA drivers often park their buses in spots marked for tour coaches, preventing the private carriers from taking on or discharging passengers. “The board sincerely hopes this issue is now resolved,” said Morris.

The association and CARTA also argued over the city buses idling too long when they were parking in the tour bus spots.

Chapman contended that public transit buses are not subject to the city’s idling ordinance, as are private buses. Morris held that both the public and private buses should be subject to the same standard. “The board would ask that CARTA support changing the city of Charleston ordinance to allow motorcoaches the same idling time as CARTA fixed-route vehicles,” she added.

## Toll road lease completed, \$\$\$ flow

INDIANAPOLIS — A group of foreigners have taken control of the Indiana Toll Road and the state’s Republican governor and legislators couldn’t be happier.

A legal bid to block a 75-year lease of the roadway by a group of overseas investors was shot down late last month, and the governor and his allies in the legislature cheered when \$3.8 billion in lease revenue began hitting state bank accounts.

“Cha-ching,” said a smiling state Budget Director Chuck Schalliol after the second \$999 million was electronically deposited in a state account.

In case the situation ever arises in your personal or profes-

sional life, the Federal Reserve limits the amount that can be sent in a single wire transfer to \$999 million.

The path to leasing the 157-mile roadway across northern Indiana to the foreign consortium for \$3.8 billion was cleared when the Indiana Supreme Court ordered those suing to block the deal to pay a \$1.9 billion bond for their case to proceed. The plaintiffs said there was no way they could come up with the money, thus ending their legal challenge.

The roadway lease to the Spanish/Australian-owned Statewide Mobility Partners was approved earlier this year by the Indiana legislature and signed into

law by Gov. Mitch Daniels. (See May 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The state will use the money to help pay for a \$10.6 billion highway improvement program that was pushed by Daniels. The program proposes a slew of road projects across the state, including building Interstate 69 between Evansville and Indianapolis.

Meanwhile, until the highway spending begins, Indiana is earning roughly a \$1 million a day in interest on its new-found riches.

All revenue from the Indiana Toll Road now goes to Statewide Mobility Partners, including the money from a toll increase that went into effect last month. (See July 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

# Delay urged in dumping single-state registration plan

WASHINGTON — There's not likely to be an overhaul of the single-state registration system this year.

The highway and public transportation finance law passed by Congress in August repealed the system effective Jan. 1, and ordered it be replaced by a new plan, called the Unified Carrier Registration System.

However, the board of directors of the Unified Carrier Registration Plan, which got a late start, unanimously approved a resolution at its

first meeting last month, urging the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to support a 12-month extension of the current system.

The board took the action because its members quickly figured out that the daunting task facing them could not be completed by January. Among other things, they need to draft an agreement that follows Congress' mandate, plus come up with a fee schedule.

Once that's done, many states will have to adopt enabling legislation to participate in the new sys-

tem, and all states must develop and approve Unified Carrier Registration plans.

Thirty-eight states participate in the current single-state system.

If the unified system is not in place when the single-state system ceases, states could lose as much as

\$100 million in revenues used for motor carrier safety enforcement and related programs.

One of the hurdles facing the board is that the data needed to determine fee levels under the new system hasn't been collected.

When the unified registration

system board adopted its resolution calling for a year delay, there was concern among FMCSA legal counsel that the board resolution violated laws against federal agencies lobbying Congress.

Congress must approve any extension of the single-state system.

## California Senate panel OKs extending air quality powers

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — A drive to further tighten the air quality noose around the exhaust pipes of diesel engines in California continues to find success in the state legislature.

The Senate Transportation Committee has approved a controversial measure to reduce diesel emissions by authorizing local air districts to regulate emission sources.

The bill would require airports, ports and rail yards to submit plans for emissions reduction, which would then be monitored and approved by local air-quality districts.

"This is another piece of the puzzle to get us in full compliance with federal standards statewide," said Assemblywoman Jenny Oropeza, sponsor of the legislation that was approved by the state General Assembly earlier this year (see April 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*).

Those opposing the bill, including state and national trucking organizations, say that if regulatory authority is granted to local air districts to control mobile

diesel sources, a diverse set of local, facility-specific requirements will result, creating a patchwork of widely varied regulations.

Critics also contend the so-called magnet bill would dilute the authority of state and federal regulatory agencies over diesel-powered equipment operated at ports, airports and rail yards in the state.

The theory behind the bill is that because diesel-fueled trucks, trains, buses and ships are concentrated at major transportation centers in California, these facilities attract particulate matter emissions "like a magnet."

The bill would require the transportation centers — airports, ports and rail yards — to inventory and control emissions at their sites, subject to differing requirements by varied agencies.

Critics say the bill would require the facilities to take responsibility for emissions issues over which they have no legal authority or control. And it would be difficult, if not impossible, to determine responsible parties and enforce the requirements imposed under the bill.

## Safety brochures available

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has developed a group of brochures for passenger carriers and is making them available on its Web site and in limited printed quantities.

The six brochures address key Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations and operational topics:

- FMCSR Parts 365 and 387 (Licensing and Insurance Requirements)
- FMCSR Parts 390 and 391 (General Guidelines and Driver Qualifications)
- FMCSR Part 395 (Hours of Service)
- FMCSR Part 396 (Inspection, Repair and Maintenance)

- School Bus Operations
- Private Motor Carriers of Passengers

The brochures are readily available and downloadable online at: [www.fmcsa.dot.gov/about/outreach/bus/bus.htm](http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/about/outreach/bus/bus.htm).

Operators wanting a printed version can e-mail the FMCSA and request one or two copies (no more) of each brochure.

The e-mail requests should be sent to the FMCSA Commercial Passenger Carrier Safety Division at [mc-ecp@dot.gov](mailto:mc-ecp@dot.gov). Requests should include name, mailing address where the brochures should be sent, which specific brochures you want, and whether you want one or two copies of each brochure.

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## Security grants

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

make a minimum of 50 trips annually to one or more of the urban areas that Homeland Security officials have determined to be the most at risk, and service a facility or facilities in the high-risk areas.

The grant program guidelines and application kit identify the urban areas thought to be the most likely targets of terrorists.

For fiscal 2006, bus security grants totaling \$9.5 million will be awarded. This year's grant total is the smallest since the first such grants, totaling \$5 million, were given in 2003. Last year, the grant total was \$9.66 million and in fis-

cal 2004 it was \$10 million.

A total of 25 companies received grants last year, with the smallest being \$18,175, and the largest \$5.47 million and going to Greyhound Lines. Each year, since the grants began, Greyhound has typically received half or more of the money.

As has happened in the past, the department has set a very tight deadline — Aug. 4 — for the grant applications. That is less than a month from the date the program was announced, meaning companies that have not had experience applying will have a very short and steep learning curve.

The bus security grant application process is not for the faint of

heart because of the time and paperwork demands. Those companies that have applied in the past — and especially those that have been successful — clearly have a leg up.

Winning an Intercity Bus Security Grant, as the program is officially known, is a competitive process and it focuses on six priorities:

- Security enhancements to facilities that are located in what the feds consider high security risk areas
- Driver security enhancements
- Vehicle security improvements
- Emergency communication technology

- Coordinating with local police and emergency responders
- Training

Beyond those priorities, however, there is a "strong emphasis" this year on security upgrades that prevent the use of — or detect — improvised explosive devices, the "IEDs" that are widely used by insurgents in Iraq, plus bomb sensors and canine units.

Those companies eligible to apply for the grants can submit one application, but that application can seek money for up to three projects. Money may be awarded for all, some or none of the projects submitted.

Evaluating the applications will be staff from the Department of Homeland Security Office of Grants and Training, Transportation Security Administration, and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

Plus, the TSA will ask state homeland security officials to bless the selections in their areas.

Application forms and instructions are available at [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov).

To access the materials, go to [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov), select "Apply for Grants," and then select "Download Application Package." Enter the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number, which is:

97.057. Select "Download Application Package," and then follow the prompts to complete the download.

To download the instructions, go to "Download Application Package" and select "Instructions."

Note: You will not be able to download the application package unless you have installed *PureEdge Viewer* on your computer. That can be done from the [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov) Web site.

The application package must be submitted through [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov). Unless you have used [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov) before, federal officials urge potential applicants to visit the Web site early and often to gain an understanding of its processes and requirements.

There also is a [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov) Help Desk at (800) 518-4276.

Oh, one last hoop. To use [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov), grant applicants must have a DUNS Number and register in the Central Contractor Registry, a database of information for contractors that want to do business with the federal government. It typically takes a minimum of five days to complete the CCR registration.

Both UMA and ABA have designated key staffers to assist their members interested in applying for the grants.

## Georgia CDL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the Georgia Motor Trucking Association, which is coordinating the training program for the state. The Department of Homeland Security is picking up the tab.

"We are doing everything possible to facilitate convenient training and I encourage CDL drivers, especially those who need to renew their CDL this summer, to immediately contact us and order their training materials," said Crowell.

The training takes roughly an hour and can be taken at classes at technical schools, or training

materials — DVDs, VHS tapes, audio tapes — can be ordered on the Web site of the Georgia trucking association, [www.gmta.org](http://www.gmta.org).

Once the training is completed and the registration form processed, drivers receive a Highway Watch ID card, which they are required to carry. On-line registration also provides the ability to print an instant temporary highway ID receipt for those needing fast turnaround.

The Georgia Department of Driver Services requires anyone who comes in to renew a CDL or obtain a new one to show a Highway Watch ID card or temporary receipt.

## Roadcheck

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in 2004, 515 in 2003, 334 in 2002, 501 in 2001 and 433 in 2000.

This year, Roadcheck inspections occurred in 14 states, with a large number of the bus checks taking place at casinos. California performed the most inspections, followed by Connecticut and Florida. Other active states were New Jersey, Ohio, Utah and South Carolina.

State, federal and local inspectors, working with CVSA, which has sponsored Roadcheck for the past 18 years, inspected more than 60,000 commercial vehicles during this year's 72-hour program. The out-of-service rate for all

vehicles was 21.7 percent, meaning that a high percentage of trucks were parked for safety violations. Last year's overall rate was 22.5 percent.

The Roadcheck inspections occurred at 1,850 locations and 8,522 CVSA-certified inspectors participated.

Seat belt usage, a focus of Roadcheck for the past couple of years, continues to be a problem with commercial vehicle drivers, according to the CVSA. It's estimated that just over half of commercial vehicle drivers regularly use seat belts, compared to more than 80 percent of auto drivers.

More than 1,200 drivers checked during Roadcheck were cited for not wearing a seat belt.

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## New Orleans is 'jazzed' hosting large convention

NEW ORLEANS — New Orleans has passed another back-to-business milestone by successfully hosting an estimated 17,000 attendees and exhibitors at the American Library Association Annual Conference, the first major citywide exhibition since last year's devastating Hurricane Katrina.

Attendance at the library association meeting late last month was down from the record-breaking 27,800 last year when the event was in Chicago, but in line with what the association anticipated.

More than 1,600 exhibitors participated in the show.

Convention delegates were expected to spend \$27 million in the city's hotels and restaurants - a shot in the arm for the local economy.

The city welcomed the library executives with open arms. Hospitality workers sported "We're Jazzed You're Here" buttons to express gratitude to the librarians.

"The reception we got here in New Orleans was amazing," said attendee Vicky Schmarr, vice president of the Ohio Educational

Library Media Association in Columbus.

"Everyone has thanked us for being here. We'd go to a restaurant, and they'd thank us for coming. You'd go to buy something in a store, and the clerk would thank you for coming to New Orleans. Our being here meant a lot, and I'm glad we came," Schmarr added.

The library show also was a milestone for the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, as additional halls were opened for the first time to host the event. Currently, eight of the center's 12 halls are open.

The library exposition resulted in roughly 8,000 peak room nights at local hotels and used nearly 30 properties.

More than 900 librarians volunteered time to help rebuild and repair damaged libraries in the New Orleans area during the event.

Motorcoach Expo 2007 will be in New Orleans from Jan. 16-20 at the Morial Convention Center.

Motorcoach Expo is smaller than the library meeting, typically attracting upwards of 2,000 attendees and about 150 exhibitors.

## UMA seminar to be yearly

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The board of the United Motorcoach Association has voted to make its Safety Management Seminar an annual event.

The first seminar was in December 2004 and the second a year later. Both events were sold out.

Like the previous two, the next seminar will be at the National Transportation Safety Board Acad-

emy in Ashburn, Va., near Dulles International Airport.

However, this year's seminar will be earlier, Nov. 29-30, the week following Thanksgiving. The agenda for the seminar focuses on key motorcoach safety and security issues and features leading industry experts as speakers and presenters.

For more information, contact UMA at (800) 424-8262.



MCI drivers Dave Kane, left, and Bud Gilley made the 2,800-mile trip, celebrating the anniversary of the interstate system.

## Convoy marks interstate anniversary

WASHINGTON — The motorcoach industry helped mark the 50th anniversary of the legislation that created the nation's interstate highway system by participating in a 13-day cross country trek that ended here last month.

A convoy of 20 vehicles, sometimes more, made the 2,800+ mile trip from San Francisco to Washington. The caravan included two MCI coaches, a half-dozen over-the-road trucks, a 1951 Hudson driven by an interstate historian, plus RVs, vans and cars, many of them antique.

The trip and the celebration that occurred at its conclusion come at a time when much of the interstate system needs rebuilding or expanding.

In the years ahead, there will be an active debate in Washington, in Congress, in state capitals, in board rooms, at association conventions and around dinner tables about how to revitalize the road network — and pay for it.

Everywhere in Washington there is talk of tolls, and more tolls, variable toll pricing, higher fuel taxes, highway privatization, roadway leasing and other schemes to finance future infrastructure revitalization.

Dave Kane, the long-time corporate driver for MCI, drove a J4500 MCI in the across-the-country convoy. Kane said the highlight was the choreographed 44-motorcycle police escort on the way out of San Francisco.

Other than that, Kane said the trip was not unlike that made by hundreds of motorcoach drivers on a daily basis: loading and unloading baggage and making sure everyone on board has a safe journey.



MCI CEO Tom Sorrells, his wife Shari, and their three daughters joined the convoy in Chicago.

Piloting the second MCI coach in the convoy was Bud Gilley.

MCI President and CEO Tom Sorrells made the decision to include the two MCIs in the trip. He and his wife Shari, along with their three daughters, joined the caravan in Tinley Park, Ill., as it passed through Chicago, and rode into Washington.

Sorrells said the convoy was an opportunity to have the motorcoach noted for the role it has played in the growth of the interstate system and to be part of an historical event. He said he and his family appreciated the opportunity to represent the industry.

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ISSUE NO. 81

# Audio-video equipment makers keep new devices coming

The hottest trend in motorcoach interior upgrades this year is replacing outmoded CRT television monitors with flat-panel LCDs, using quick-and-easy upgrade kits.

According to Radio Engineering Industries, switching from a CRT monitor to a 10.4-inch LCD takes 30 minutes or less. The result is a 25 percent larger picture coming from a monitor that is slimmer, trimmer and lighter.

Audiovox Specialized Applications says that a No. 2 Phillips-head screwdriver is the only tool necessary for assembly and installation of its JE1029RFK CRT Replacement Kit.

ASA says it's a snap to upgrade from a boxy CRT monitor to a sleek 10.2-inch LCD flat-panel monitor. Its kit includes a cover that hides the monitor harness and 24-volt to 12-volt converter.

But monitor conversions aren't the only gee-whiz items motorcoach audio/visual equipment suppliers are touting these days.

## REI

One of the most-recent additions to REI's product line is a 15.4-inch LCD widescreen monitor. It's available as an option with REI's newly announced Elite Series A/V system or can be added to existing systems.

REI has long provided a full range of A/V monitors for buses, from 10- to 13-inch CRT models, to flat-panel LCD screens in a variety of sizes, to motorized flip-down units.

Also new from REI is a DVD player that's compatible with all REI systems. It operates from a controller in the driver area and is back-lit for convenient operation at night.

REI's digital Seat-Back Audio System gives passengers the choice of up to eight stereo channels. Passengers can control the volume and choose audio from a variety of sources, including the video system.

The REI Narration System can be added to the Seat-Back Audio System, allowing pre-recorded tour narration in as many as eight languages simultaneously.

The REI BUS-WATCH surveillance system offers views from up to six cameras and is an easy-to-operate, non-PC-based system. It is GPS ready, includes infrared capability for low-light situations, and is available in both digital and analog camera modes.

## ASA

ASA says its Jensen VR187 Satellite Radio Ready Stereo system hosts 100 channels of commercial-free satellite radio, plus a seven-channel weather band. It includes a seven-inch motorized screen that also can be used for GPS navigation or for rear/side

camera observation.

The Jensen DWR52 Optional Wire Remote Control that utilizes a 19-foot extension cable allows the driver or guide to conveniently operate the DVD. This safety feature includes a fully lit LED read-out that is easy to use at night. The control can be installed with the

Jensen DVD player or purchased separately.

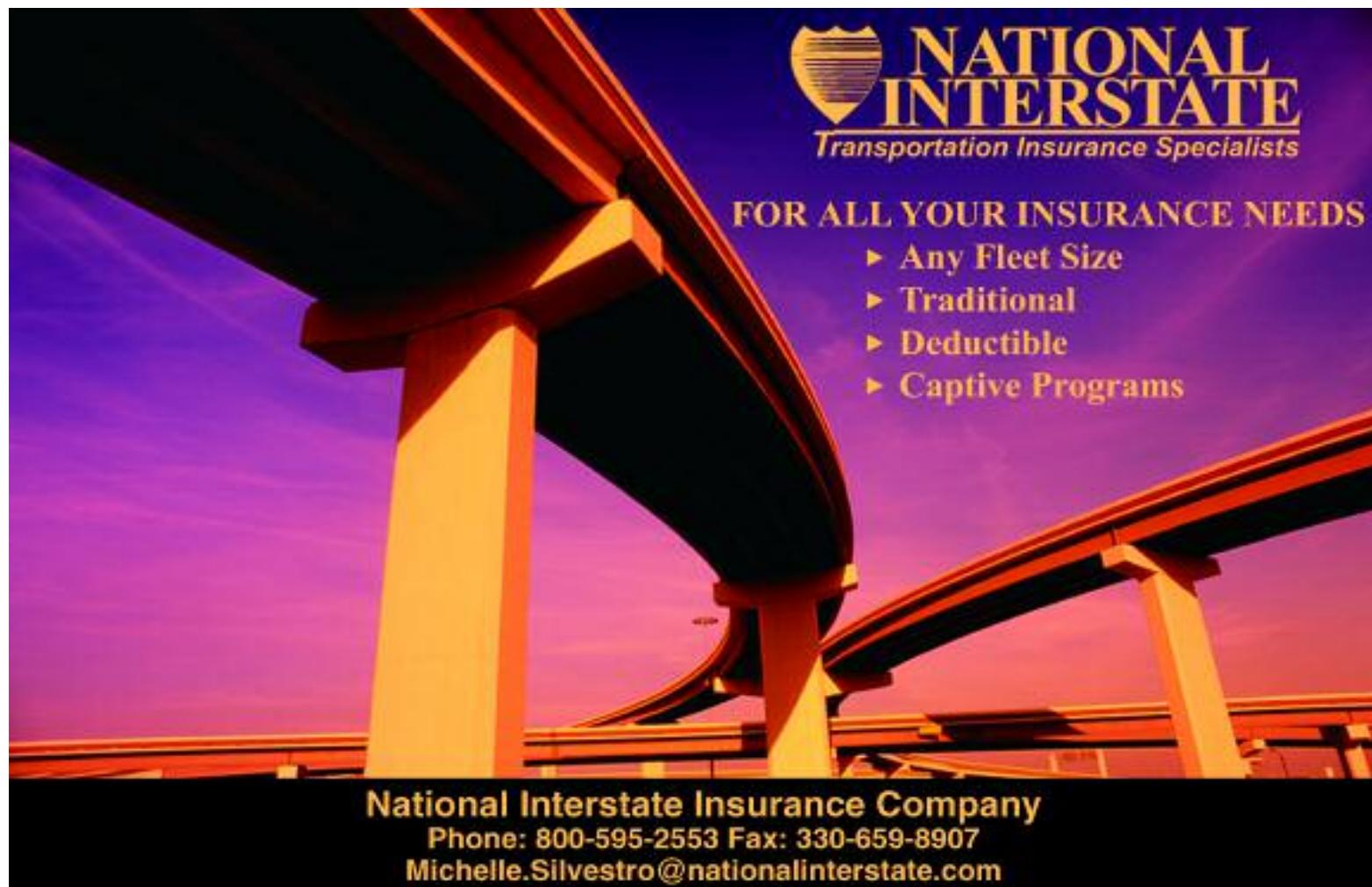
Other new entertainment equipment from ASA includes televisions by FlexVision and Jensen, with flip-down monitors ranging from 10.4- to 17-inches and a 26-inch LCD monitor.

ASA also offers three Voyager

Observation Monitors: the AOM562 5.6-inch color LCD two-Camera Observation Monitor that can be mounted on a pedestal or overhead; the AOM703 7-inch Heavy Duty Color LCD Flat Panel Observation Monitor with three camera inputs and triggers that allow the monitor to be tied to turning blinkers or

reverse gear, and the AOM7694 7-inch Split-Screen LCD Observation Monitor that allows for full-screen, split-screen, tri-screen or quad-screen viewing. The system includes an audio speaker and is GPS ready.

Available later this year will be a new public address system.



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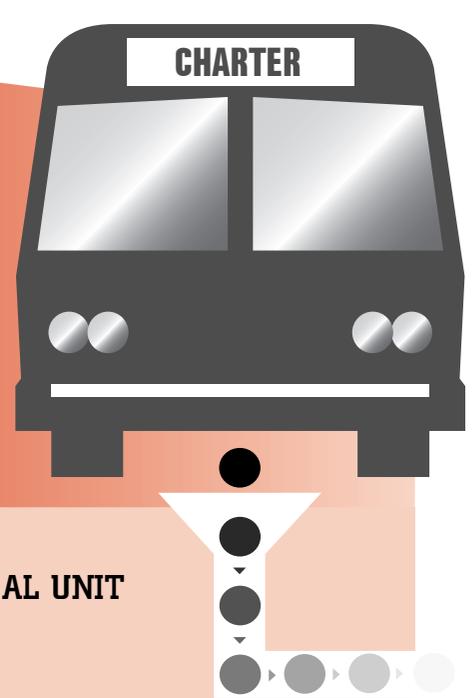
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## Coach USA, Coach Canada post strong '06 financial results

PERTH, Scotland — Stagecoach Group PLC, parent company of Coach USA and Coach Canada, said its two North American bus operations posted strong results for fiscal 2006.

Sales at Coach USA and Coach Canada rose 9.7 percent in the 12 months ended April 30, climbing to \$439.5 million, from \$409 million in fiscal 2005.

Fiscal 2006 operating profit for the combined North American bus operation was \$31.4 million, up

from \$28.7 million the year before. The fiscal '06 operating profit margin was 7.1 percent, up slightly from the fiscal 2005 margin of 7 percent.

In its preliminary annual financial report, Stagecoach said business at Coach USA and Coach Canada "continues to be encouraging, despite ongoing cost pressures in relation to fuel and insurance.

"Cost pressures have resulted in the closure of a number of smaller competitors and in some areas we have been able to absorb the addi-

tional customer base," the company noted.

Stagecoach said Coach USA's sightseeing business continues to experience strong revenue growth, helped by the introduction of double-decker buses in New York and elsewhere. Other areas of growth

include express, commuter and scheduled airport services and charter revenues.

In Canada, sales grew by more than 25 percent "despite a very competitive environment."

For its entire operation, Stagecoach said it had its fourth consec-

utive year of earnings growth, and that it was increasing its dividend by 12 percent. Earnings per share for the fiscal year were up 11.6 percent (before exceptional items and amortization of intangible assets). The company also substantially reduced its debt.

## Setra expands, revamps service support network

GREENSBORO, N.C. — The customer-support program for Setra S 417 motorcoaches and Dodge Sprinter shuttle buses is getting a major upgrade.

Setra, the motorcoach brand of DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses, said it is re-energizing and expanding its customer assistance network, which is called Setra CAN.<sup>SM</sup>

The service initiative is designed to assure that customers maintain maximum up-time, said Patrick Scully, chief commercial officer for DCCB North America.

"Setra has long been committed to the North America motorcoach market," said Scully. "When we introduced the Setra S 417 in 2003, we bolstered our service network and now we are continuing this with other service initiatives to provide peace-of-mind product support to our growing customer base."

Key elements of the Setra CAN program to be rolled out this

year are:

- A technical call center
- More Setra CoachWorld service centers
- Mobile repair service in select markets
- A customer-helping-customer service-referral program
- Improved Setra training academy

Scully said Setra's call center, which opened this month, is staffed with factory-trained personnel whose primary objective is to provide assistance and/or resources to ensure Setra motorcoach and Dodge Sprinter shuttle bus operators can quickly and easily troubleshoot issues and reduce vehicle downtime.

New certified Setra CoachWorld service centers are to be located in major markets, along with mobile repair services.

Information about Setra CAN's programs and services can be found at [www.setra-coaches.com](http://www.setra-coaches.com) or [www.dcbusna.com](http://www.dcbusna.com).

## American Seating wins money in patent battle

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — American Seating Co. says a federal jury has awarded it "significant monetary damages" in its four-year patent infringement fight with USSC Group over wheelchair-restraint systems.

A federal judge ruled just over a year ago that USSC's VPROI wheelchair-restraint system violated the patent held by American Seating on its A.R.M. wheelchair tie-down system.

Early in 2003, a federal judge had ruled in favor of USSC on three patent infringement claims brought by American Seating. However, the case was appealed to a federal circuit court which ruled a year later, reversing parts of the decision, affirming others and remanding the case for reconsideration.

When the case went back to the federal district court, the judge ruled that USSC's wheelchair tie-down system infringed on American Seating's patent.

The wheelchair-restraint system marketed by American Seating was invented in the mid-1990s by Jim Ditch, the long-time bus maintenance director at Long Beach (Calif.) Transit. Ditch licensed the system to American Seating, which obtained the patent.

American Seating declined to specify the amount of money the jury awarded it in the case.

The company did note that it has another patent infringement suit pending against USSC. The trial in that case, which covers vandal-resistant seat inserts, is set for October.



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## Atlantic City

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

daily casino runs and several charters at a cost of about \$3,000 in daily revenue.

He and other operators were particularly upset because the shutdown came during the July 4 holiday, which is typically the busiest week of the two busiest months — July and August — for Atlantic City trips.

“It was at a time our buses are full and our profit margins are the highest,” noted Benedict. “Had it happened in December it probably would not have been as bad because of the lower margins.”

Rich Tisone, vice president of Lion Tours in Levittown, Pa., which operates 10 daily trips to Atlantic City and lost between \$8,000 and \$10,000 a day, said the first of the month is when hundreds of seniors and retirees take trips to the casinos because that’s when they receive their Social Security and pension checks.

The Atlantic City runs make up about 70 percent of Lion’s business and about 80 to 90 percent of its riders are seniors and retirees, many of whom ride monthly. “Their trips were booked and paid for,” Tisone said. “Now they’ll be back next month and it’ll be like a freebie trip for them.”

Wayne Klein, president of Klein Transportation in Douglassville, Pa., said the week of the shutdown also was a big week for workers who took vacation time

from their jobs. “This was to have been a very big time for us because some of the plants were shut down here and people were taking vacation and planning to hop the bus to go down to Atlantic City,” he said.

Klein Transportation has four runs daily to Atlantic City and lost about \$4,000 a day because of the closing of the casinos, he said.

Tom Meredith, president of Conestoga Tours in Lancaster, Pa., reported his company lost about \$1,200 a day from the cancellation of the company’s four trips it takes to Atlantic City every week. “It won’t put us out of business, but it certainly won’t help our case flow either,” he noted.

Some operators tried to divert some of their idle buses to other gambling sites, but the response was far from overwhelming.

Steve Haddad, president of Carl R. Bieber Tourways of Kutztown, Pa., which lost several daily trips to Atlantic City during the casino shutdown, offered its customers replacement trips to casinos in Connecticut where the company also has regular trips. Some people accepted, he said, but others didn’t.

Benedict said he would have liked to have diverted customers who booked Atlantic City trips to other casinos, too, but it was too difficult to do on short notice. “People already were set as to where they wanted to go,” he observed.

The sudden closure of the casinos angered operators who said the governor and lawmakers were playing politics with workers, and

apparently did not consider the broad impact that their actions would have on others, including the motorcoach industry.

“I don’t think they thought about the trickle-down effect,” suggested Tisone. “It not only hurt the state and the city, but it hurt us, too.”

In addition to the losses suffered by the motorcoach companies, their drivers and other employees, the state lost \$1.3–\$2 million a day in revenues from the casinos and 36,000 casino workers who were put out of work

Harlan Simonson, operations manager of Harran Transportation Co. in West Babylon, N.Y., which has eight to 10 daily trips to Atlantic City and lost between \$7,000 and \$8,000 each day the casinos were shut down blamed the politicians, too.

“I think it was a political thing because they really didn’t have to let the inspectors go,” he said. “The casinos reimburse the state for all of the commission (New Jersey Casino Control Commission) employees so they could have stayed on the job and the casinos could have stayed open.”

Simonson pointed out, too, that although the casino closure was short lived, it had an extended impact on motorcoach operations. “Some people who planned to go to Atlantic City over the weekend canceled their plans because they were not sure when the budget issue would be resolved and the casinos reopened,” he said. “So money was lost over those days, too.”

## Minority operator group has meeting next month

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — The National Association of Motorcoach Operators (NAMO), a group of small and minority motorcoach operators, will conduct its annual conference here next month, offering sessions on key issues impacting coach companies.

The meeting at the University of Maryland will be Aug. 17-20.

“The members of NAMO are committed to uniting small and minority operators from all across the country,” said Marcia Fields Milton of First Priority Trailways and co-chair of the conference.

An opening reception will kick-off the event Aug. 17. The general meeting will start the next day, featuring discussions of pertinent issues affecting the industry.

“Invited speakers will highlight grant opportunities, market-

ing opportunities, insurance issues and regulations that affect our operations,” said Frank Smith of Yankee Line of New York and co-chair of the conference.

Registration and most conference sessions will be at the University of Maryland Marriott Inn and Conference Center in Adelphi, Md. Prince George’s County (Md.) merchants will host a familiarization tour and other activities during the conference.

Coach manufacturers will provide transportation for conference events and have their equipment on display.

For additional information or to register, call Milton at (301) 568-3500, or e-mail [mymilton@aol.com](mailto:mymilton@aol.com), or call Smith at (201) 319-8989. A reservation fee is charged and on-site registration will be available.

## Museum

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

on F Street. It is easily accessible from the National Mall, which is four blocks south. Hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day but Christmas.

Motorcoach parking is available at the RFK Stadium Parking Facility, at Union Station and at the Washington Convention Center. The Metro Red Line stops directly in front of the building on 9th

Street. Additionally, the DC Circulator opened a Smithsonian National Gallery Loop this year. It veers off the mall at 7th Street and stops at the Reynolds Center and the Washington Convention Center before heading back to the mall museums.

For additional information, go to [www.reynoldscenter.org](http://www.reynoldscenter.org) or call (202) 633-1000. For information on attractions in the Gallery Place neighborhood go to [www.downtowndc.org](http://www.downtowndc.org), or call (202) 638-3232.

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## Nevada

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

nightclub owners for taking passengers to their businesses.

While coalition leader Bob Fairman, owner of No Stress Express in Carson City, was not available to comment on the group’s next move, there were indications that the group is considering making another run at state lawmakers when they convene in January.

The operators initially wanted the legislature to resolve the problem and only turned to the courts because Nevada lawmakers only meet every two years and they did not want to wait until 2007 to raise the issue again.

The coalition has contended that the federal government in 1998 preempted state regulation of motor carriers in areas other than safety and insurance and that the TSA illegally regulates the industry by requiring certification, financial filings, nonsafety procedures, document verifications and other measures.

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## Bus brokers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

job from a broker, the troubles are far from over.

"Brokers frequently confirm with us, but don't pay until the last minute if they can't find a cheaper carrier," he said. "They seem to take the attitude they have us on the hook and then can cancel after they find a better price."

Other operators complain that some brokers are very slow paying for the charter work they book, while others have been known to dispute the payments they've made with credit cards, which can tie up a settlement for months.

Thomas Bazow of Excursions Trailways in Fort Wayne, Ind., said he signed up with Bus Bank, a Chicago-based bus broker on the promise he would be paid in advance for two charters. "Both trips were paid approximately 30 days after the trips," he said. "Phone calls to Bus Bank went unanswered."

### US Coachways again

Antoine Legrant of Silhouette Tours & Travel in Brooklyn, N.Y., is headed to court to try to collect \$1,400 he said is owed by US Coachways of Staten Island, N.Y., a broker whose name pops up regularly among complaining operators. A hearing on his filing in small claims court is scheduled July 18.

Legrant said Coachways hired his company in May to transport two bus loads of students from a camp to their school. However, when he arrived for the job, the students had already left on other buses.

"They said they did not know if they had overbooked or what was going on, but they promised to pay me the next day anyway because we made the run," he said. "But we still haven't gotten any money from them and they keep giving

me the run around over the telephone."

Legrant said he's hopeful he will win the suit because he not only has a contract from the broker, but also five letters from other operators who contend they have had similar problems with US Coachways. "I think I have a pretty good case," he said.

US Coachways was invited to respond — in this issue — to complaints about its practices but no letter or e-mail was received.

Bazow complained, too, about brokers — Bus Bank among them — bypassing local companies in favor of carriers that are several states away from where the work is to be done. "These companies then deadhead hundreds of miles to do the Bus Bank work," he said.

### Fighting back

Despite the headaches bad brokers can give operators, the carriers also have developed ways to fight back short of going to court.

Tops among them is demanding payment in advance, a practice that few brokers like to do because it prevents them from contracting with another carrier if they find one offering a lower price.

"As soon as we request payment in advance, they're off looking for another carrier," noted Kraft.

A Florida operator, who accepted two last-minute jobs from brokers in which payment could not be collected in advance and for which he was paid late, suggests the industry develop an on-line payment system similar to that used by Internet auction services.

George Childers of Magic Carpet Ride in Vero Beach said he was promised payment immediately after working the two jobs, but in both cases the money did not arrive for 30 days. "Perhaps the American Bus Association and United Motorcoach Association can come up with a strategy to cre-

ate an on-line payment system similar to those used by sites such as eBay," he offered. "With such a system there could be no excuses for an operator not getting paid before the coach is moved."

More than one operator expressed the opinion that bus brokers use the "last-minute trip" as a ruse for not paying in advance.

### Be bold, have no fear

Like other operators, Kelly said Mountain View has had difficulty in the past getting payment from brokers and as a result recently initiated a policy of collecting in advance to avoid further problems.

She said the company also insists that the particulars of a trip be presented in writing — either by fax or e-mail — because brokers have revised their jobs after receiving a quote and then try to hold the company to the original price. "We get it all in writing now," she said.

Kraft suggested that operators be bold and discuss pricing with passengers who have gone through a broker to book their charter. "Ask the travelers what they paid for their transportation and simply be honest with them and tell them what was charged for the transportation," he said. "Don't be afraid to tell the passengers they could have saved hundreds or thousands by dealing directly with the coach operator."

At least one operator became so concerned about the business practices of brokers that he decided to begin a brokerage business of his own. "Instead of having others feed me business, I figure I could do it myself," said Efraim Fixler of Gold Coach Tours of Miami who formed Bus Reserve late last year.

Bus Reserve, which offers an extensive Web site for bookings, serves Florida and metropolitan New York City, and sometime early next year plans to expand to Washington, D.C., Atlanta and

## Calendar

### JULY 2006

**20-23 National Motorcoach Network 2006 Invitational 100**, Stonewall Jackson Hotel & Conference Center, Staunton, Va. Info: (540) 477-3323 or go to [www.motorcoach.com](http://www.motorcoach.com).

**29-Aug. 3 International Motor Coach Group, 2006 Strategic Alliance Meeting**, Carnival Cruise Lines' ship Carnival Victory, New York City. Info: Go to [www.imgcoach.com](http://www.imgcoach.com).

### AUGUST 2006

**12-15 Alabama Motorcoach Association Annual Meeting and Marketplace**, Riverview

Plaza Hotel, Mobile. Info: Go to [www.alabamamotorcoach.org](http://www.alabamamotorcoach.org).

**14-17 Family Motor Coach Association International Convention**, Charlotte, N.C. Info: Go to [www.fmca.com](http://www.fmca.com).

**17-20 National Association of Motorcoach Operators Annual Conference**, University of Maryland Marriott Inn and Conference Center, College Park. Info: Call (301) 568-3500 or (201) 319-8989.

**20-24 Motorcoach Association of South Carolina Annual Meeting and Marketplace**, Embassy Suites Airport Convention Center, Charleston, S.C. Info: Go to [www.scmotorcoach.org](http://www.scmotorcoach.org).

Boston.

Fixler said he uses his broker Web site to book the coaches he has in Florida and New York, but he also uses a network of about two dozen other motorcoach companies he funnels business to when his own buses are booked.

"The only way you can be a good broker is if you own your own fleet and you know the business inside and out," he said.

Fixler, who gets a 10 percent commission when he passes work on to other companies, said the carriers he uses are ones he knows well and has worked closely with for many years, which helps assure his customers they will receive excellent service.

### Considering options

Some operators also are turning to alternatives to bus brokers, including a fledging Internet company that cuts out the middle company and puts travelers directly in touch with motorcoach carriers.

"I wanted to help Internet customers know they did not have to go through a broker who charges high rates and does not do the research of the carriers they usual-

ly say they do," said Mark Greer, a consumer advocate and marketing and sales professional who founded *BusRates.com* in late 2004.

The BusRates site offers suggestions on how to book a charter based on a variety of critical elements — general rates, company history, age and type of equipment, specialties and amenities — and provides telephone, e-mail and Web site contacts for the companies on its network.

"This just seemed like the logical way to do it, giving customers the opportunity to work directly with the company," he said.

Greer, who worked for a bus broker for a short time before starting his Michigan-based company, said motorcoach operators pay a \$20-a-month fee to be on his Web site. Operators can try out the service for free for the first month.

One operator suggested that perhaps the best way to compete with bus brokers is to outdo them on their own turf — the Internet. Since the net is where their customers find them, the key to battling brokers is to develop an attractive and functional Web site and, most importantly, effective search engine and electronic Yellow Pages' connections.

While complaints about traditional bus brokers continue to mount, some of the problems may be the fault of the motorcoach operators themselves, suggested Kraft. He said operators often are so busy with their day-to-day operations they allow brokers a foothold in the industry.

"Unfortunately, we have frequently become bogged down in these operational details and simply invited middlemen to stick their toes in between a business relationship that should begin with the passengers and end with the coach company — without meddling intermediaries," he stressed.

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# Louisiana association forms regional organization

NEW ORLEANS — A five-state motorcoach association has been created by the board of directors of the Louisiana Motorcoach Association.

The new South Central Motorcoach Association is seeking to attract coach operator members from Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Mississippi, as well as Louisiana. The Louisiana association becomes part of the new group.

The first South Central Motorcoach Association Annual Meeting and Market Place will be Sept. 16-19 at the Hilton in Lafayette, La.

The board of the Louisiana association began the process of creating the regional group more than a year ago when Mississippi operators were invited to join the Louisiana association. Two operators, Bus Supply Charters of McComb and Starkville Trailways, signed up. Karen Sanders of Bus Supply Charters was elected a director of the Louisiana association.

Now, operators from the other states will be invited to join the regional organization.

"We want to provide operators in neighboring states... the benefits of a collective voice, of unity for the purposes of education and

networking, of coming together for an annual meeting to create good business relationships with associate or vendor members, and of promoting good business relationships among the operators in the five-state region," said Callen Hotard, president of the South Central Motorcoach Association and Calco Travel in Geismar, La.

Linda Morris, executive director of the organization, said each state will be independent within the organization to respond to individual state interests and issues, and to collect dues through an individual state committee structure.

The structure also provides for the five states to be represented on the South Central board with no

less than two representatives from each state.

"By combining the industry knowledge of operators in the five states, each state will benefit from the strength of the SCMA as a whole," said Hotard. "The major focus of the SCMA will be to provide advocacy, education and training, marketing, networking and

industry awareness within the five states."

Operators in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Mississippi are being notified about the new organization and membership applications will be mailed within a short time.

For more information, call Hotard at (225) 869-9490 or Morris at (434) 376-1150.

## UMA board election is scheduled for fall

WASHINGTON — The United Motorcoach Association is seeking nominations from its members to fill a half-dozen three-year elected seats on its board of directors.

Sept. 1 is the deadline for letters of nomination for the director positions.

Two directors will be elected from each of UMA's three membership regions for three-year terms. Maps showing the regions are printed in the 2006-07 *UMA Membership Directory*.

All of the UMA director seats to be contested are the result of expiring terms of incumbent regional coach-operator directors, who may seek re-election.

The directors whose seats are

expiring are: Region I (The West): Bill Allen, Amador Stage Lines in Sacramento, Calif., and Todd Holland of Ramblin Express in Colorado Springs/Denver, Colo.; Region II (The Midwest): David Brown of Holiday Tours in Randleman, N.C., and Brian Scott of Escot Lines in Largo, Fla., and Region III (The Northeast): Dale Krapf of Krapf Coaches in West Chester, Pa., and Steve Haddad of Bieber Tourways in Kutztown, Pa.

Of UMA's 20-member board, 18 are regional directors who must be coach operators. In addition, it has one non-coachbuilder associate representative and one coachbuilder associate.

Qualification standards for

UMA directors can be found in Article VI of the UMA Bylaws printed in the back of the membership directory.

Nominations for the regional board directorships must come from active UMA members who are motorcoach operators. Candidates nominated for the board must represent an active UMA-member company in good standing. Directors serve without pay, but the association generally reimburses directors for travel and accommodations while performing UMA business and/or attending committee meetings and the mid-year board meeting.

Written letters of nomination must state the candidate's name,

company affiliation and home-base location. Nomination letters also must be postmarked no later than Sept. 1. Regional UMA Nominating Committees will certify the eligibility of all candidates to produce a list of nominees in each region no later than Oct. 1.

Ballots will be mailed to UMA members by Oct. 15, and must be returned no later than Nov. 15. Winners will be announced in the Dec. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

UMA members with questions about nominations should contact the association at (800) 424-8262. Mail nomination letters to: UMA Nominations, 113 S. West St., 4th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314-2824.

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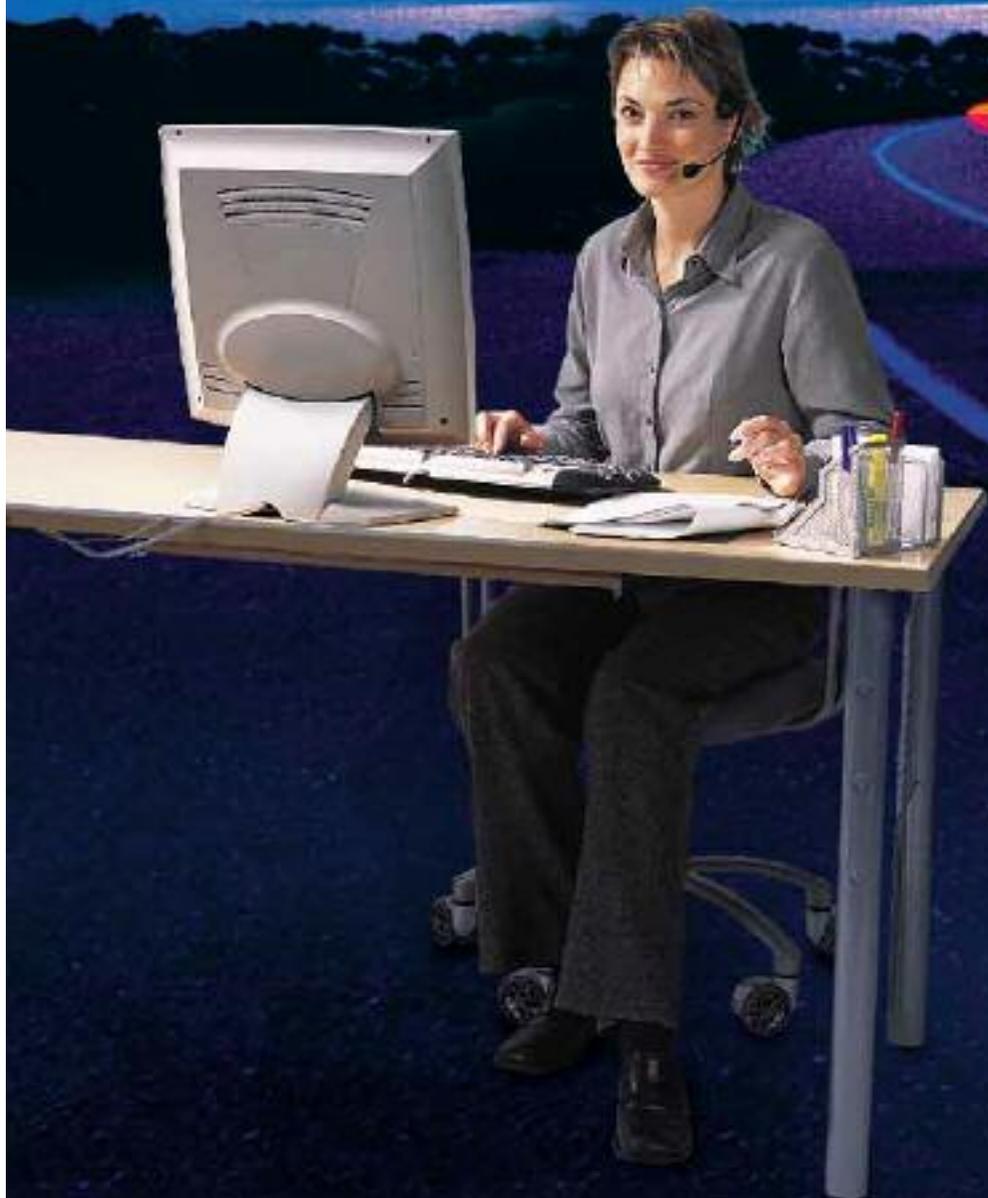


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