

Coach America issues call for hundreds of coaches

Will coordinate bus evacuations

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation has awarded a \$32.5 million contract to Coach America to coordinate federal emergency bus evacuation services for the next year. Hundreds of buses will be needed.

Under the contract, Dallas-based Coach America, the second-largest motorcoach operator in North America, will create an emergency passenger transportation system capable of evacuating thousands of people from designated areas along the Gulf Coast, including Louisiana, should state and local officials request federal assistance.

"The contract requires us to become operational in a very short time, so we want to hear from any companies that would like to work with us," said Coach America CEO Craig Lentzsch.

While the contract is primarily designed to handle hurricane evacuations in the southeastern U.S., its scope extends to providing emergency passenger transporta-

tion services anywhere in the nation during the next 12 months.

Coach America must be able to provide as many as 1,500 motorcoaches, plus drivers, maintenance personnel, dispatchers and support staff.

The first task, however, is to set up a 200-bus ready reserve that will be deployed full time at designated staging areas, starting this

month. The first 100 buses with drivers are to be in place by Aug. 15, with the second 100 to be positioned for quick response by the end of the month.

A Coach America spokesman says the company expects to beat both deadlines, though the exact locations of the staging areas have yet to be determined.

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The 2007 diesel engines: A primer

Everything that's new and different

In five months, all of the diesel engines produced in the U.S. for buses and motorcoaches must meet the most stringent emissions standards ever imposed in this country.

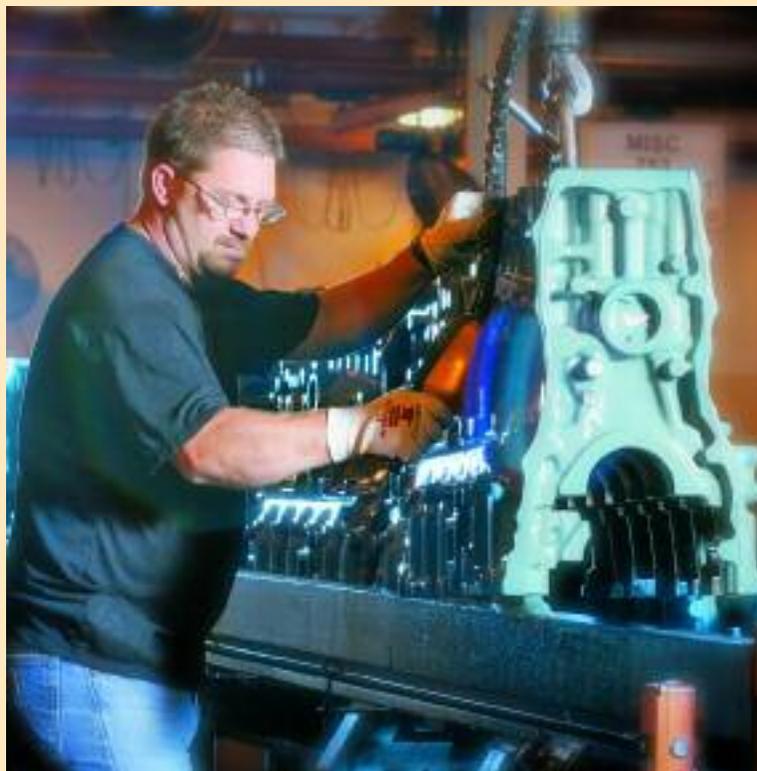
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency rules reduce nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions by more than 50 percent from the reduced levels imposed four years ago, and cut particulate matter emissions by 90 percent.

The engines that will meet those requirements have been under development for most of this decade and in testing for much of the past year, including over-the-road testing by coach manufacturers.

Detroit Diesel says its Series 60 engine, for years the most popular power plant in the motorcoach industry, is ready for 2007, having proven itself with more than 1.8 million in-service equivalent miles in the laboratory and upwards of 2 million miles on the road in fleet testing.

Caterpillar says its updated C-13 engine, the power plant it markets to coach operators, also will be ready with an improved version of Cat's proprietary ACERT technology.

This article will primarily focus on the new technologies and refinements that have been made



A Detroit Diesel technician prepares an engine block for assembly.

to the 2007 Detroit Diesel Series 60 to meet the new EPA standards. Changes Caterpillar has made to the C13 engine are highlighted on Page 10.

Additionally, this article will explain the new oil and fuel requirements for '07 engines and outline some of the differences drivers will sense when driving a coach with a 2007 engine.

Here's what's new and different about the '07 engines:

Exhaust after-treatment

First, '07 coaches will *not* have a muffler. Instead, they will have an "exhaust after-treatment device."

The ATD is principally designed to dramatically reduce the amount of particulate emissions released into the air. It consists of two pieces, a diesel oxidation catalyst (DOC) and a diesel particulate filter (DPF). Both are located in the exhaust system and will clean

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New analysis points to widespread federal charter rules violations

ARLINGTON, Va. — Charter rules violations by public transit agencies may be far more widespread than federal transit officials have previously acknowledged, information presented here last month suggests.

A Federal Transit Administration policy analyst told members of the Charter Bus Negotiated Rulemaking Advisory Committee at their July meeting that the agency's Triennial Review Program turned up instances of apparent charter rules violations at 55 transit agencies during the three-year peri-

od 2003-05.

In the past, FTA officials have insisted — based on the number of actual complaints filed by private bus operators — that charter rules violations were rare.

In fact, two years ago, the FTA sent a report to Congress repeating its contention that the charter service issue was not a big deal because "few complaints" are filed with the agency and its regional offices.

But while then-FTA Administrator Jenna Dorn was delivering that message to Congress, the FTA

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Slight progress made in charter rules' talks

ARLINGTON, Va. — The thorny negotiations to rewrite federal charter bus regulations made modest progress at the July meeting of the committee set up to advise the Federal Transit Administration on revamping the rules.

The first two meetings of the committee, in May and June, had trouble finding common ground and often bogged down in tussles, ranging from the committee's

makeup, to more critical issues like interpreting the rules governing charter bus service provided by public transit agencies.

FTA Chief Counsel David B. Horner, clearly impatient with the committee's pace and the members' propensity to exchange views rather than engage in negotiations, began taking a stronger hand at July sessions in an effort to move the process along.

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Development gives Branson spiffier image

BRANSON, Mo. — Decades before Branson became a center of live music and a major motorcoach-tour destination, people came to the Ozarks community for the fishing.

Now, a \$420 million development called Branson Landing is utilizing the area's water resources to draw new visitors to the mountain resort.

Branson is bordered on one side by Lake Taneycomo, a 22-mile-long lake that was formed when the White River was dammed at both ends, forming a deep, cold body of water that's perfect for trout fishing.

A mega-size Bass Pro Shop anchors Branson Landing at one end, taking advantage of its location by allowing customers to try out boats and fishing equipment directly on the lake.

One and a half miles of boardwalk skirt the lakeshore adjacent to the 95-acre complex of shopping, dining and entertainment.



The daytime fountain show at Branson Landing draws a crowd.

The development's signature light-and-fire fountain shows, similar to those found in Las Vegas, entertain visitors hourly.

More than 100 restaurants and shops, plus a convention center, Hilton hotel, waterfront condominiums and town square that can accommodate 3,000 visitors complete the landing.

Famous for its down-home, family-centered entertainment and its bucolic scenery, Branson has long had a bond with entertainment centers like Las Vegas and Nashville, attracting many of the same big-name entertainers.

Now, with its new develop-

ment, the town is taking another step closer to the Las Vegas model, sans the gambling. Branson Landing is geared toward a younger and perhaps more affluent set than usually partakes of the Branson experience. Yet, "everyone is welcome," insists Linda Antus, director of marketing at Branson Landing.

For tour groups interested in giving Branson Landing a try there is a motorcoach drop-off spot near the management office, which is next to the Bass Pro Shop end of the complex. Coach parking also is near the Bass Pro Shop.

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Ontario operators to join UMA 20 Group program

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The United Motorcoach Association is expanding its popular 20 Group program to Canada.

Under the arrangement, members of the Ontario Motor Coach Association are being invited to take part in the business improvement program with UMA members.

"It is going to expose our members to new and interesting approaches to business development and understanding of how the Canadian market operates," noted Victor S. Parra, president and chief executive of UMA.

Additionally, it will allow more UMA members to participate in the program because of the expanded number of companies that can join, and give OMCA members an opportunity to become involved for the first time.

Brian Crow, president of OMCA, said his organization looked into starting a 20 Group program of its own earlier in the year, but there were not enough members of similar size and in noncompetitive situations to make

it work. "With the UMA 20 Group, this barrier will be removed for those who want to participate," said Crow.

Parra said there are a number of UMA members who also have been unable to become involved for the same reasons and they, too, will be able to join now.

UMA introduced the 20 Group program to its members earlier this year and already has three separate groups operating, each with about 20 members. Its goal is to have at least two more groups under way by the end of the year.

Developed several years ago for the International Motor Coach Group, the 20 Group program involves noncompeting coach operators getting together several times a year to review each other's financial statements, develop benchmarks for performance, and discuss and compare all aspects of their businesses. IMG members involved in the program say it has helped them improve their businesses immensely.

Mixing U.S. and Canadian

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THE DOCKET

FMCSA/USDOT delay reposting safety scores

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has decided to delay plans for reposting the safety scores of motorcoach companies and other motor carriers through its SafeStat system.

The agency and USDOT said the delay will continue until the completion of a pair of investigations.

“We have not changed positions,” an agency spokesman was quoted as saying. “We’ve just pushed back the timeline.”

In March, FMCSA said it was preparing to repost the scores on its Web site within a matter of weeks. (See April 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The agency has been under pressure, primarily from the trucking industry, to hold up on reposting SafeStat scores on the Internet. The American Trucking Associations said the Safestat system remained flawed.

Among other things, the truckers said SafeStat didn’t accurately identify truck and bus operators whose safety records need further scrutiny, and it often brought unnecessary attention to well-functioning fleets, while masking prob-

lems at troubled ones.

The FMCSA halted SafeStat postings two years ago after criticism of the system’s accuracy, led by findings from the DOT’s own inspector general, who found the information to be incomplete, out-of-date and misleading.

In March, the FMCSA said it had worked out the kinks and was ready to reactivate the system — which is designed to provide the public and industry a way to judge a carrier’s safety record and to help the agency target which operators need additional scrutiny.

After hearing from the ATA and others this spring, then-Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, who left the department last month, said USDOT had asked the inspector general to re-examine SafeStat and requested the Government Accountability Office to also look it over.

The ATA contends road accidents are still being significantly underreported by various state agencies, which skews SafeStat results. ATA also questions the reliability of the algorithm the FMCSA uses to determine which carriers are having safety issues.

Hearing set to explore coach fire

WASHINGTON — The National Transportation Safety Board will conduct a hearing next week on last year’s bus fire outside Dallas that killed 23 nursing home patients fleeing Hurricane Rita.

During the hearing, investigators will reveal details of their nearly yearlong investigation into how flames from the bus’s right-rear wheel spread to the passenger cabin, causing medical oxygen bottles to burst and killing more than half the patients onboard, many of them disabled.

The session, Aug. 8 and 9, will be the first public hearing on bus safety in more than six years. The tragedy is the deadliest U.S. transportation accident in five years.

In addition to focusing on the fire’s cause, board members will discuss transporting people with special needs, bus evacuations, fire detection and suppression, and oversight of bus companies and tour brokers, the NTSB said.

Jim Maples, whose company operated the bus, has been indicted on federal charges of failing to maintain his buses and falsifying logbooks. His trial is next month.

Ontario drops mandate for U.S. bus companies

TORONTO — Motor Coach Canada has announced that Ontario’s Ministry of Transportation has eliminated an eight-month requirement that U.S. bus operators traveling into Ontario must sign up for the province’s Commercial Vehicle Operator Registration system.

The CVOR is an automated system that tracks the safety performance of commercial vehicle operators. It has been around for about 20 years but until this year U.S. operators traveling in Ontario didn’t have to register. That changed Jan. 1, when the province adopted revised rules aimed at truckers but which “inadvertently subjected U.S. coach operators to the CVOR requirement,” according to the association.

Motor Coach Canada has been trying to convince provincial transportation officials to cease enforcing the requirement against U.S. operators. On July 18, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation issued a bulletin, saying it was halting enforcement of the requirement.

However, Motor Coach Canada, which represents coach operators in all provinces of Canada, says there are benefits to U.S. operators of voluntarily registering in the system.

“By registering, carrier safety performance within Ontario is evaluated on reported fleet size, which benefits the carrier. Carriers not registered are evaluated on a default fleet size of just one vehicle,” said the association. There is no fee to register.

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:

Kay, Osage, Creek and Pawnee counties, Okla. Deadline: Aug. 4, 2006. Write to: Johnny Bryant, Executive Director, United Community Action Program Inc., 501 Sixth St., Pawnee, OK 74058. Phone: (918) 762-3041.

Greater Danbury, Conn. Deadline: Aug. 10, 2006. Write to: Richard Schreiner, Director of Service Development, 62 Federal Rd., Danbury, CT 06810. Phone: (203) 744-4070.

Brownsville, Texas. Deadline: Aug. 11, 2006. Write to: Rodney Gomez, Assistant Director, Brownsville Urban System, 700 Jose Colunga Jr. St., Brownsville, Texas 78521. Phone: (956) 4881.

Erie County, Pa. Deadline: Aug. 14, 2006. Write to: Dennis G. Solensky, Executive Director, Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority, P.O. Box 2057, Erie, PA 16512. Phone: (814) 459-4287.

Schuylkill County, Pa. Deadline: Aug. 15, 2006. Write to: Dennis Zahora, Vice President for Public Transportation Services, Schuylkill Transportation System, P.O. Box 67, St. Clair, PA 17970. Phone: (570) 429-2701.

Lancaster/Whitefield and Littleton, N.H. Deadline: Aug. 15, 2006. Write to: Beverly Raymond, Transit Director, North Country Transit, Berlin, NH 03570. Phone: (603) 752-1741.



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CoachAmerica

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The contract also says Coach America and its subcontractors must be able to provide hundreds more buses to designated locations within 48 hours of an emergency call.

Coach America plans to recruit operators from throughout the industry to fulfill the contract's requirements for buses, dispatching services, and a multitude of staffing needs. Upwards of 1,000 people could be recruited.

Under the new emergency evacuation procedures worked out between state and federal officials for the 2006-07 hurricane season, states will have the primary responsibility for providing evacuation services in the event of a storm or other disaster. The federal role will be to back-stop and support the state efforts if they become overwhelmed. It is the instant response and back-up role that the Coach America contract covers.

The arrangement also gives Coach America the responsibility for mobilizing equipment, facilities, personnel, materiel and other resources needed to respond to an evacuation order.

"First, we will talk with bus operators who can provide buses, drivers and management," said Lentzsch. "This could include transit (agencies) that also operate over-the-road motorcoaches."

The next step will be to set up a centralized dispatch, communication and vehicle tracking center to coordinate the evacuation activities assigned to it, and assure that maintenance, safety and personnel support are available throughout the operation.

Coach America has begun a nationwide search for buses and people who are willing to work temporarily in areas hit by an emergency at staging areas, pick-up points and drop-off points. (See notice on this page.)

The company's very first chore, though, is to create the fleet of 200 coaches that will be stationed around the clock at designated staging areas by the end of this month.

Coach America is working currently to establish the rates of payment for the various services it will be contracting for from other coach operators and individuals. It has a team drawing up the logistics and says it is trying to get the job finished as soon as possible.

Coach American spokesman George Gravley said the company also has asked USDOT for an expedited payment process. "If

we receive prompt payment, we will pay subcontractors promptly, too," said Gravley.

Coach America, which operates in most major markets across the southern half of the U.S., has divisions throughout the Gulf region. It has passed Greyhound as the second-largest coach operator in North America. Only Coach USA operates more buses.

Coach operators interested in

subcontracting with Coach America should send an e-mail to evacuation.info@coachamerica.com, go to www.coachamerica.com, or call (972) 354-3555. A recording device will answer calls to that number, so callers should be prepared to leave their name, phone number and a brief message, speaking clearly, of course. Gravley says calls will be returned promptly.

Highway Watch gets \$4.8 million

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has allocated \$4.8 million to the Highway Watch program for fiscal 2006.

The funding will be used to continue the program "as a sustainable national program to enhance security and overall preparedness on our nation's highways," the department said.

Highway Watch is managed by American Trucking Associations. It trains highway professionals to identify and report security and safety situations on the nation's roads.

A Highway Watch official said the money will be used for training and outreach activities, and to fund the call center where tips are filtered.



Bus Evacuation Services

Federal Bus and Driver Contracting Opportunities

Coach America (CA) is soliciting all qualified U.S. bus operators to provide intercity motor coaches and qualified drivers for evacuation services through July of 2007. CA has recently been awarded the DOT contract to provide federal bus evacuation services to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). While services could be required throughout the continental U.S. over the next twelve months, the majority of anticipated demand will occur between June and November in Louisiana and the Gulf Coast region. CA will perform under the direction of the DOT and will directly contract with equipment owners and operators. Up to 1500 buses and 2000-3000 drivers may be needed for major events, but 30-40 smaller events are anticipated over the period. Field support staff personnel (1000+ in major events) are also needed for dispatching, passenger loading and management and equipment support.

Interested parties who may be able to provide any or all resources needed should direct their initial inquiries to

Evacuation.Info@CoachAmerica.com

or call

972-356-3555

The operation will utilize 40-45' coaches with at least 47 seats and automatic transmission. Coaches must meet all Federal safety and operating requirements and the operator must have current proof of minimum insurance.

Drivers must have a Commercial Drivers License (Class B with passenger endorsement) for the state in which the driver is based, a valid and current medical card showing expiration date of physical examination, a current and verifiable drug and alcohol test from the employer, a record of road tests by model and a current and valid Driver Log Book.

Operators will contract to provide a minimum number of buses and a minimum number of drivers for specific periods of time. Operators will also commit to minimum "report to check-in location" times (e.g., 24 hours from email/voice notification) for their equipment and drivers. Individual agreements will be negotiated separately with the Carrier Relations staff at CA as soon as possible, beginning July 24, 2006. Detailed information will be posted on the CoachAmerica.com website as it becomes available.

Talks

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Among other things, Horner asked lawyers attending the meeting to begin drafting regulatory language and submitting it to his office for consideration.

The Charter Bus Negotiated Rulemaking Advisory Committee was created this past spring to come up with recommendations for overhauling the charter rules. The committee was called for in the five-year federal highway and public transit legislation adopted by Congress one year ago this month.

After meeting in May and June at the FTA offices in Washington, the committee decided to move its two-day a month sessions to a hotel in northern Virginia for convenience and to end the hassle of trying to get through security inside the FTA building.

At last month's meeting, the committee focused on several key issues, including:

- Defining charter bus service
- Enforcing charter bus regulations
- Improving the charter bus rules complaint and administrative appeals process
- Communicating charter bus rules to the public

No easy consensus

Since the committee began its work, it has had a tough time reaching consensus on the eight issues it agreed to tackle. Not only do the committee members hold strong views but there is a marked difference in the approach by the two "sides" — those representing public transit organizations and those representing private bus, motorcoach, taxi, limousine and school bus operators.

The committee members repre-

senting public transit interests are primarily intent on maintaining the status quo, while the members representing private operators are pushing for more clarity, better definitions, stronger enforcement, and tougher penalties. Both seem to agree, however, that public transit agencies need to be better educated on the issue of charter service.

The different approaches produce a sometimes testy meeting environment. At the start of Day 2 of the July session, a key public-sector member accused the private-sector representatives of "hijacking the discussions" and moving the session away from the agreed-upon process.

The session facilitator, Susan Podziba, refuted the charge, saying the group had agreed the previous day that there had to be "clarity of terms before we can have enforcement."

Much of the July meeting dealt with trying to develop a definition of charter bus service that would eliminate any confusion on the part of public transit agencies on what they can and cannot do.

Horner of the FTA wants the rules revised to clearly define charter service, and also to create incentives for transit agencies to err on the side of compliance. He thinks a better definition and tougher penalties will produce a substantial reduction in the number of complaints, which appears to be his No. 1 goal. Fewer complaints will mean the agency has the time and resources to deal with them more efficiently and consistently, he told the group.

Burkert proposal

Motorcoach industry safety consultant Jack Burkert, who represents the Trailways Transportation System on the committee, offered

three factors that could be used to determine whether bus service being considered by a public transit agency is charter or mass transportation. The following would be considered charter service if all of the conditions are met:

Control of the route, schedule

'The rules will undoubtedly give transit agencies some sort of power to blackball private operators who are flaky and vindictive.'

or itinerary is by a party other than the public transit agency.

- The group has an origin or destination in common.

- The fare or fee is pre-arranged and subsidized or paid, in whole or in part, by a single entity.

Between now and the committee's next meeting in September, members are to use Burkert's suggestion as the starting point for developing a definition that is acceptable to both sides.

Twice during the session, Daniel Duff, chief counsel and vice president of government affairs for the American Public Transportation Association, the major association representing public transit agencies, said there was no need to change the current definition of charter service.

The private sector representatives strongly disagree, contending the vagueness of the current definition is at the heart of the reason why the charter rules are being violated by transit agencies and cannot be enforced.

FTA's dual role

Horner, like many of the pri-

vate-sector representatives, is uncomfortable with the FTA's dual role in dealing with the charter service issue. The agency's primary mission is to dole out billions of taxpayer dollars to public transit agencies, but at the same time it's supposed to rein them in when they violate the charter service rules.

That duality or dichotomy of purpose gives the agency periodic heart burn.

"People are up in arms because of the closeness between the FTA and grantees (i.e. transit agencies)," said Horner, adding that he was "very concerned" about the issue of perception of fairness.

However, a public-sector member of the committee said transit agencies, especially small ones, must be able to freely seek advice from FTA.

Richard Schweitzer, general counsel of the American Bus Association, highlighted FTA's conflicted role during a presentation he made on the mechanics of filing a charter bus complaint.

Schweitzer's presentation identified nearly a dozen elements where the process needs improvement, and the committee spent considerable time attempting to reach consensus on how to fix the broken pieces.

Among other things, it's likely that any revised rules that come out of the FTA will contain a requirement that a private operator filing a charter rules complaint must send a copy of the complaint to the target transit agency.

Transit representatives grouched that they often learn of a complaint only after they are contacted by the FTA several weeks or months after the complaint has been filed.

Also, revised rules are likely to give the FTA deadlines for

responding to a complaint and making a decision. In the past, some charter service complaints have languished for years in the FTA bureaucracy.

Flaky operators

An area where there appeared to be consensus was in dealing with private operators who send letters to public transit agencies when they issue a notice for "willing and able" operators, but fail to follow up when they are notified about charter opportunities.

The revised rules will undoubtedly give transit agencies some sort of power to blackball private operators who are "flaky and vindictive."

At its meeting in June, the committee spent most of its time discussing three topics:

Issue No. 5: Setting up a new process for determining if there are private charter bus companies willing and able to provide charter service that would utilize electronic notification and response within 72 hours.

Issue No. 6: A new exception for transportation of government employees, elected officials and members of the transit industry to examine local operations, facilities and public works.

Issue No. 7: Review and clarify, as necessary, the definitions of regulatory terms.

Between Day 1 and Day 2 of the June session, several committee members tried to reach consensus on issue No. 6, but some larger public sector members rejected the tentative agreement that was reached, highlighting the challenges the committee faces in the months ahead. In the end, the committee wasn't able to reach consensus on any of the three issues it tackled.

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Violations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

program of transit agency reviews was turning up findings of charter rules violations at roughly 11 percent of the agencies it was examining.

But the incidences of violations may be far more common than those figures indicate. That's because the Triennial Review Program is not specifically designed to ferret out charter rules violations and violators. The program is primarily an examination of transit agency policies and practices; it is not an audit or investigation.

One transit executive attending the rulemaking committee meeting called the process the "What-me-worry review."

The program looks at 23 different areas of a transit agency's operations, ranging from legal and financial, to procurement, maintenance, Buy America, drug and alcohol enforcement, and safety and security. Charter bus rules are No. 16 on the list of 23.

The examination consists of what is called a "desk review" of hundreds of documents submitted by the transit agency and a "quick, in-and-out" visit by one of five contractors hired by the FTA to conduct the reviews. The in-and-out visit typically lasts no more than three days, often fewer.

During the review, the agency might be asked nine questions related to charter bus service. But it is question No. 1 that is the most critical and usually determines whether the other eight are asked. Question No. 1 goes like this: Does the transit agency or any sub-recipients of its funds, contractors or lessees operate charter service?

If the transit agency answers "no," then the examination generally goes no further and any charter rules violations go undiscovered.

And that may be happening more often than not. Here's why:

Despite the seemingly straightforward nature of the question, the fundamental flaw is that scores of transit agencies apparently do not understand what constitutes charter bus service; or they have deliberately chosen to define charter service to their own liking; or they have decided to ignore the charter rule because of local demands, or they have taken the position the FTA has no business determining whether they provide charter service because the federal agency provides only a small chunk of the agency's

funding.

So, when they're asked about charter service, they simply say "we don't do it." The reviewer moves on to item No. 17.

Based on statements made by transit members of the Charter Bus Negotiated Rulemaking Advisory Committee, many of their agencies appear to be violating the rules.

One transit agency represented on the committee offers monthly "getaways" throughout Southern California, including a casino run in October that's going 160 miles from the agency's base city. That trip and the other "getaways," including one this month to Santa Barbara, are clearly charters.

Another transit agency represented on the committee that gets the majority of its money from state and local subsidies, and a minority from the FTA, thinks because the FTA is a smaller contributor to its funding that makes it okay to offer charter service. Never mind that federal law says that if a public transit agency gets one dollar of what are called "5307" funds from the FTA, it cannot provide charter

service except under prescribed exceptions.

When a Triennial Review turns up a finding of charter rules violation, the information is forwarded to the FTA. The regional FTA administrator typically gives the offending agency 45-60 days to take corrective action. It is not clear what happens if the agency refuses to act.

Private operators interested in finding out whether the Triennial Review of the transit agency in their community has turned up evidence of charter rules violations can file a federal freedom of information request with the FTA and obtain a copy of the pertinent documents.

Go to www.fta.dot.gov/legal/regulations/us_dot/5593_ENG_HTML.htm for information about how to file a freedom of information request, also known as a FOIA, with the FTA. The Web site instructs that the request be sent to the FTA in Washington, but filing it directly with the FTA regional office in the area where the transit agency is located could produce the

documents quicker.

At a minimum, a request should ask for the Charter Bus section of the agency's two most recent Triennial Reviews.

Private operators also can file FOIAs with the transit agency itself under state freedom of information laws. The request should be sent to the transit agency's director, requesting copies of contracts, letters, memorandums and other documents pertaining to bus service provided by the agency's special services and/or charter department.

Private operators who have evidence that their local transit agency is providing charter but who do not want to go through the hassle of filing a formal complaint with the FTA, should consider sending a letter outlining their allegations to the regional FTA administrator and regional FTA legal counsel, plus the transit agency.

At a minimum, the letter will surface during the transit agency's next Triennial Review and the FTA will ask questions.

Both the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association routinely help their members with federal charter service rules' questions and filings. And increasingly, organizations like Trailways, International Motor Coach Group and state associations are getting involved with the issue as well.

Van Hool names North American liaison officer

KONINGSHOOIKT, Belgium — Marc Marechal has been named liaison officer for the North American market by Van Hool N.V., manufacturer of Van Hool coaches.

A native of Belgium, where Van

Hool is headquartered, Marechal is joining the company from the insurance industry, where he developed a familiarity with Van Hool. He will be based in Bradford, Ont.

In his position, Marechal will

support Van Hool customers and its North American distributor, ABC Companies.

Marechal will report to key Van Hool executives Paul Jenne and Hugo De Roo.

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MCI re-engineers for '07 engines

SCHAUMBERG, Ill. — Motor Coach Industries has become the first North American coach builder to announce how next year's reduced-emissions engines will impact its 2007-model coaches.

MCI has re-engineered and redesigned several aspects of its coaches to accommodate the new engines, and it says it will offer more engine and transmission options for '07.

In all, MCI says it has spent more than \$8 million for new tooling, pilot-model and prototype coaches, and training related to the reduced-emissions engines. MCI is using eight pilot models and four prototypes for testing and manufacturing process verification.

Beginning next year, MCI will offer three engine and two transmission packages for its J4500, E4500, D4500, D4000, D4505 and D4005 models. In addition to Detroit Diesel Series 60 and Cat C-13 engines, MCI will add the Cummins ISM engine, initially available in D-series Commuter Coaches.

Transmissions will be the Allison B500, with Generation IV controls, and an updated ZF AS-Tronic 12-speed. The enhanced Allison controls, which are unrelated to the engine change, are



The redesigned rear of D-model MCI aids in cooling of '07 engines.

designed to improve shift quality. ZF is making changes to its software for '07.

To handle the updated engines, MCI has re-engineered its exhaust and fuel systems, engine cooling system, and airflow through the engine compartment.

MCI also is reducing the number of hardwired circuits and says it's improving reliability and diagnostics by increasing the use of SAE J1939 messaging. Special consideration also has been given to serviceability, and fuel and operational efficiencies, the company noted.

"We've made progress by managing and reducing both fan noise

and parasitic draw," said Bryan Couch, MCI vice president of product planning. "And, we're pleased to report that the new configurations do not intrude into the revenue-generating areas of the coach."

There had been fears the new particulate filter and other gear needed for the '07 engines might force coach builders to enlarge their engine compartments at the expense of coach interior space. That has not happened at MCI.

"While the engine changes do not impact the styling of the J and E models, MCI is altering the new-look D by restyling the rear and adding aerodynamic vents that en-



MCI conducts in-bus testing of an updated Caterpillar C-13 engine.

hance engine cooling," said Couch.

In its testing, MCI has found that particulate filter regeneration is occurring passively roughly 85 percent of the time. (For an explanation of regeneration, see story on pages 1 and 14.)

Paul Fazio, MCI's senior powertrain engineer, said that in one test, an MCI coach made a 5,700-mile, round-trip from the MCI plant in Winnipeg to Phoenix for hot-weather performance testing. During the entire trip, only passive regeneration was needed.

In those atypical situations where active or manual regeneration is required, MCI says it is incorpo-

rating multi-stage alerts. This will provide service technicians or drivers with sufficient notification to perform active regeneration and minimize interruption to trips, said Fazio.

"Each engine manufacturer differs in its strategy on active regeneration," he noted.

MCI sees the coming clean-diesel technology as an opportunity for the motorcoach industry to promote the positive impact coach travel has on the environment.

"Now, with cleaner diesel, the motorcoach is an even greener way to go," said Michael Melaniphy, vice president of public sector sales.



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Cat updates technology to meet new emission rules

PEORIA, Ill. — Caterpillar says it has refined its ACERT engine technology to meet the more stringent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency emissions regulations for 2007.

Cat says it has two major enhancements — an upgraded combustion process that Cat calls “clean gas induction” and a self-regenerating diesel particulate filter.

These systems assure Cat en-

gines will meet the '07 emissions requirements “without sacrificing reliability, durability and fuel economy,” says Greg Gauger, director of Caterpillar on-highway power systems.

For '07, Cat's motorcoach engine, the C13, will have higher torque, better response, improved driveability, automatic transmission compatibility, and higher compression braking, Gauger noted. “This allows Caterpillar to offer a version of the C13 that exceeds current vocational customer requirements while still meeting emissions regulations at a competitive price.”

Clean gas induction

This change for '07 is a refined combustion technology that reduces both oxides of nitrogen (NOx) and particulate matter in the cylinder. Cat says clean gas induction is a proprietary process that draws off a small amount of non-combustible gas after it passes through the engine after-treatment system. The gas is then cooled, blended with incoming cool, clean air and returned to the combustion chamber.

The difference between clean gas induction, says Cat, and the technology employed by competitive engines — cooled exhaust gas recirculation — is that cooled-EGR sends unfiltered exhaust back through the system, which exposes engine components to high levels of soot that contribute to shortened engine life.

“Rather than re-introducing dirty, sooty exhaust back into the system, CGI simply uses more cool, clean air to reduce combustion temperatures and achieve the necessary reduction in NOx and

particulate matter,” said Gauger.

Clean gas induction will enable Caterpillar '07 engines to provide the same level of fuel economy as today's engines, according to Gauger. Horsepower ratings and service intervals will remain unchanged.

Diesel particulate filter

Cat will use its own, Caterpillar-manufactured diesel particulate filter. Its design uses “wall-flow technology” — a ceramic brick substrate allowing the particulate matter, or soot, to be captured in cells in the wall. The exhaust gas then exits as clean exhaust consisting of carbon dioxide and water.

The Cat DPF employs active regeneration, which means that when the temperature of the engine isn't high enough to burn the soot that collects in the DPF, the exhaust gas is heated by auxiliary means.

The Caterpillar design will automatically regenerate under all conditions without any driver involvement, the company says.

Cat regeneration system

When an '07 Cat engine's electronic controls detect soot buildup, the CRS will automatically use the amount of fuel necessary to heat and oxidize the soot. “We wanted a product that would be able to regenerate under all conditions,” Gauger said. “We designed a process to allow our product to accomplish this safely, without the risks created by dosing.”

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Laidlaw buys-in shares; Greyhound posts profit gain

NAPERVILLE, Ill. — Laidlaw International, parent company of Greyhound Lines, is buying back 15 million shares of its common stock as part of a strategy to make the company more attractive to investors.

The buyback, which is scheduled to expire Aug. 7, is costing the company \$500 million, which it is borrowing. Laidlaw is paying between \$25.50 and \$28.50 for each of the shares it is purchasing in the open market.

In announcing the buyback, Laidlaw told its stockholders that “lenders require lower returns — usually in the form of interest payments — than those required by equity or shareholders.

“By borrowing money to fund a share buyback and using a portion of the company’s cash flow to make the interest payments on the debt, a company is able to reduce the amount of shares outstanding and spread the earnings of the company over a smaller shareholder base.” The net effect will be to raise earnings per share, making the company a more appealing investment, driving up the price of shares.

Laidlaw also noted that its corporate debt will be roughly \$800 million once it has completed the share repurchase. That debt is less than two times the combined cash flow of its business units.

The Laidlaw announcement came at the same time the company posted its earnings and those of Greyhound for the quarter and nine months ended May 31.

Earnings at Greyhound, which are reported in the form of operating income plus depreciation and amortization, or EBITDA, were \$22.9 million for the three months ended May 31, 2006, more than double the EBITDA of \$9.6 million for the same period a year earlier.

EBITDA for the nine months ended May 31, 2006, was \$84.1 million, up from \$46.5 million in the prior year.

The nine-month period was impacted by a one-time gain resulting from a \$5 million business-interruption insurance settlement stemming from the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

EBITDA margins for the three- and nine-month periods improved by 250 and 270 basis points, respectively, largely as a result of increased revenue per bus mile.

Revenue at Greyhound during the three months ended May 31 was \$297.9 million, an increase of \$3.4 million from a year ago. For the nine months ended May 31, revenue rose to \$896.3 million from \$856 million, or an increase of \$32.3 million.

While revenues were up for both periods, how they reached those levels was a mixed bag. For the quarter, the company benefited

from the increasing value of the Canadian dollar, which boosted Greyhound revenue by \$5.4 million. For the nine-month period this year, the rising Canadian dollar boosted revenue \$13.2 million.

During the period, Greyhound boosted ticket prices but passenger

volume fell because of the higher prices and cutbacks in the Greyhound system during the past year.

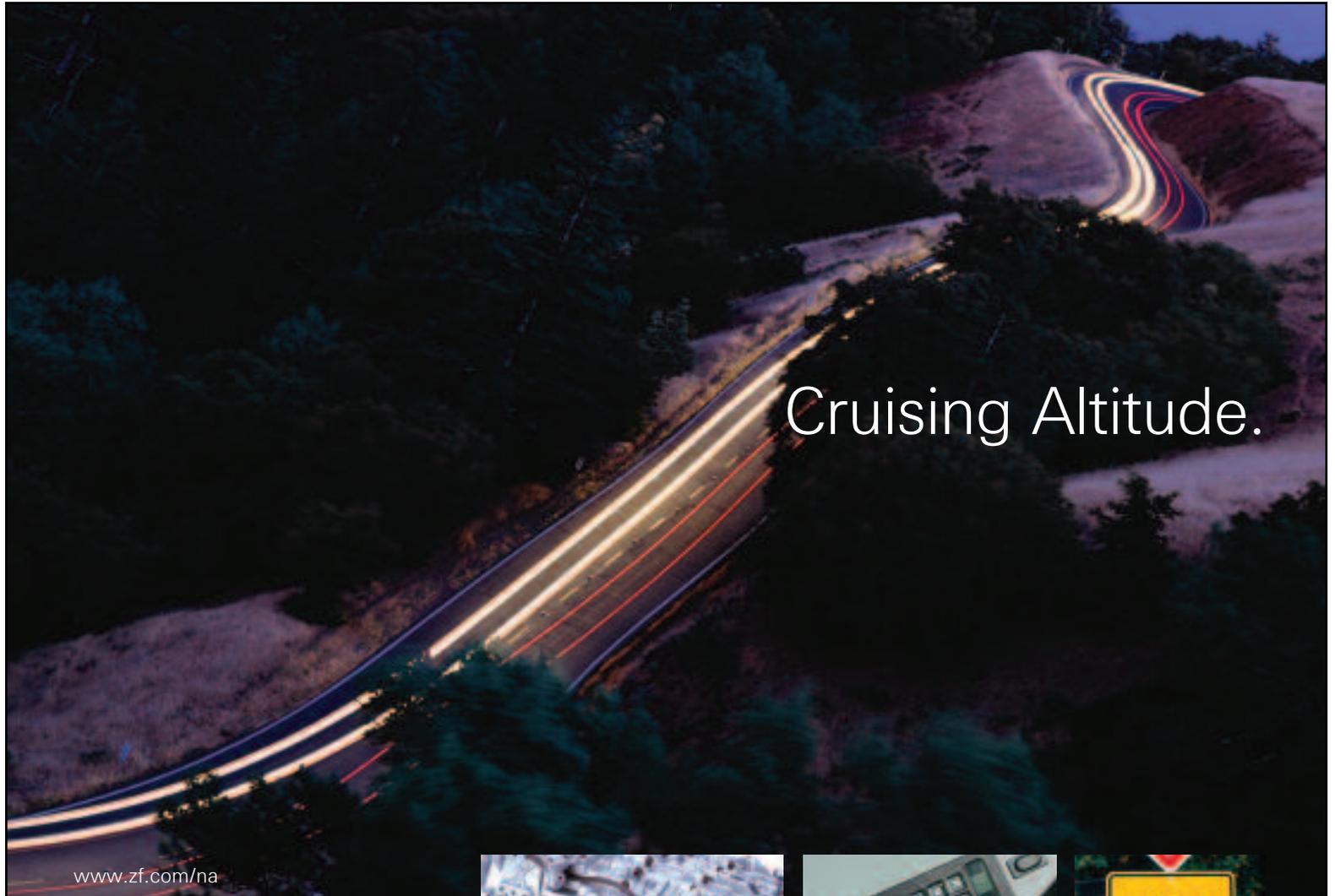
The 2006 nine-month figure also reflects a revenue bump Greyhound received during the last few months of 2005 when hurricane victims were traveling heavily in

the aftermath of last year’s storms.

Meanwhile, earnings at Laidlaw International from continuing operations for the quarter ending May 31, 2006, grew 43 percent, to \$44 million, on revenue of \$861 million, an increase of 3 percent.

“I am pleased with our overall

performance for the quarter,” said Kevin E. Benson, CEO of Laidlaw. “The strong performer was clearly Greyhound, which has benefited from the completion of (its) network overhaul, fare increases, and the focus on improving the quality of (its) service.”



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NTA extends invite to UMA members

LEXINGTON, Ky. — The National Tour Association is extending a “special invitation” to members of the United Motorcoach Association to attend NTA’s annual convention in Salt Lake City on Nov. 3-7.

NTA President Hank Phillips said the convention will be a perfect forum for UMA members to acquire new tour supplier, destination and receptive tour operator services.

“Any UMA members who do not already hold a membership in NTA, and who agree to participate in NTA’s Tour & Travel Exchange as a buyer, will be provided with a complimentary convention regis-

tration,” said Phillips.

NTA’s annual convention typically attracts 1,200 tour suppliers, which includes hotels, attractions, restaurants, receptive operators and upwards of 600 destinations.

“It is a power-packed venue for motorcoach companies to engage in tour product development,” Phillips added.

In addition to the convention’s business opportunities, Phillips said the host city, Salt Lake City, promises to be an exciting venue, beginning with the opening Ice-breaker (pun seemingly intended) at the Olympic Ice Oval, site of the 2002 Winter Olympics speed skating competition, plus a perform-

ance by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and other activities.

UMA members interested in taking advantage of the opportunity should contact the NTA’s Christy Stigall at (800) 682-8886, ext. 3579, or e-mail christy.stigall@NTA.travel.

She can provide details and assist with registration.

Last fall, NTA and UMA announced they were taking steps to work closer together, and that an annual convention exchange program would be part of the arrangement. (See Oct. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Information about NTA can be found at www.nta.travel.

Prevost lending arm expands

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Volvo Financial Services, the finance unit that supports Prevost Car, is marking its 10th anniversary in North America by expanding operations.

The company has launched a national employee recruitment campaign, saying the additional staff will allow it to provide greater customer support as the company loan portfolio continues to grow.

Martin Weissburg, CEO of Volvo Financial Services North

America, said: “Our team has made great strides in growing a good operation into a great captive finance company. ... The result has been an increased market demand in our service offerings.”

In addition to supporting Prevost Car, Volvo Financial also provides financing for such company brands as Mack and Volvo trucks, Volvo construction equipment and Volvo Penta.

For more information, go to www.vfsc.com.

20 Group

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

operators and their different money values is not expected to be a problem because the financials discussed at the meetings usually are based on percentages, ratios and margins — not dollar amounts.

“A 15 percent margin in the United States is a 15 percent margin in Canada,” said Parra, adding that some Canadian operators have been involved in IMG 20 Groups in the past without problems.

He said the 20 Group program is likely to raise the financial bar in the industry by boosting price points and revenues. “Establishing these ratios so companies know what they need to be generating in terms of revenues to make sure they have sufficient dollars to cover the cost structure will benefit everyone,” he suggested.

Parra stressed that the program and its expansion will not only help those operators taking part, but everyone in the industry. “That’s what so great about this,”

he said. “Even though you may not be in a 20 Group, you may benefit because you will get operators establishing a pricing structure that is really going to be a profitable structure,” he said.

The 20 Group program was packaged by business consultant Duane Spader of Spader Business Management in Sioux Falls, S.D. Spader, who has worked with the program for more than 30 years, has partnered with UMA to bring the program to more coach operators.

Branson

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Tour group leaders are requested to call the management office in advance, at (417) 239-3002, so discount coupon books can be set aside for the group.

Visitors can investigate the complex on foot or by catching the Branson Landing trolleys. The trolleys run from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and from 9-to-9 Sundays.

Meanwhile, traditional Branson shows show little sign of slowing down. There are at least a dozen more music and comedy

shows scheduled this year over last year.

“Almost every week we hear of a new show or an announcement in the works,” said Ross Summers, executive vice president of the Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce. The high season for tourism in Branson extends through Christmas, slowing down from January through March.

For information on Branson Landing, go to www.bransonlanding.com, or call (417)239-3002. For information on shows and events in Branson, go to www.bran-sontourismcenter.com, or call (800) 785-1550.

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'07 engines

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the air and perform the muffler function of reducing exhaust noise. During normal operation, exhaust heat and the catalyst will work to oxidize soot.

In cases where the exhaust is not hot enough to oxidize soot, the engine control system — i.e. the DDEC unit — will intervene to increase exhaust temperature using the intake throttle and the “hydrocarbon doser” system.

The role of the intake throttle in this process is to limit the amount of air entering the intake manifold to increase exhaust temperature. The hydrocarbon doser is a device that injects diesel fuel into the exhaust stream to heat the exhaust so the diesel particulate filter can oxidize soot. This process is called regeneration.

More on regeneration

There will be three types of regeneration — passive, active and stationary — possible with the '07

engines. Passive regeneration takes place when exhaust temperatures exceed approximately 300-degrees Celsius. This process does not affect engine performance and is transparent to the driver.

Active regeneration takes place when exhaust temperature is insufficient to achieve passive regeneration. DDEC VI electronics automatically activate the intake throttle and/or the fuel doser to raise exhaust temperature and initiate regeneration while the vehicle is in motion.

Stationary regeneration is expected to be necessary in very few situations. This process will require the vehicle to be parked while a driver or maintenance technician initiates the regeneration process.

A small amount of residual ash will remain after regeneration that must be cleaned periodically. Detroit Diesel says the ash will need to be cleaned from the particulate filter every 200,000 to 400,000 miles, depending on duty cycle and application.

Monotherm piston

One of the little-known facts about the '07 engines is that they will conserve oil. Detroit Diesel says oil consumption by its 2007 Series 60 will be reduced by up to 40 percent due to an “enhanced monotherm piston” design, changes in oil-control ring geometry, and a smoother bore finish on the cylinder liner.

The new pistons also are supposed to improve combustion. That factor and the reduced oil consumption, will substantially reduce the amount of make-up oil required between oil changes.

Crankcase oil separator

This device, a centrifugal oil separator powered by oil pressure, also will help reduce oil consumption. The spinning separator sends oil droplets back to the sump where they can continue to circulate in the engine. None is released into the environment. No maintenance is required on the separator.

Turbocharger performance

The water-cooled electronic actuation variable geometry turbocharger has been upgraded to automatically adjust its boost across the operating range, delivering quicker and punchier lift on the low end, where turbo lag would otherwise occur.

Fuel system

Developed specifically for the 2007 Series 60, a new injector features two internal solenoids for precise pressuring and delivery, as well as high injector pressure rate control for multiple injection functioning. This results in both particulate and NOx reduction, says Detroit. Plus, it delivers fuel economy advantages.

The new injector uses two injection events during certain modes

Bus Bash heads to Michigan

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — The 48th Bus Bash will be hosted by Gail Andrus Travel of Grand Rapids over Labor Day Weekend, Sept. 1-3.

The affair for conversion bus owners and other bus aficionados has been operating since 1978. It features a reception, day-long tour, evening banquet, entertainment, flea market, and Open House Sunday.

The \$50 registration fee covers the Friday evening reception and buffet dinner, Saturday morning buffet breakfast, choice of one of two all-day bus tours (with admis-

sions and lunch included), and dinner and entertainment at the Coopersville Farm Museum that evening.

Open House Sunday features a bus show, with many coaches open for inspection. The show fleet will include new, antique, conversion and demonstrator coaches. Bus owners are invited to bring their coaches and display them free and make them available for trophy awards.

For more information and registration forms, go to www.busmag.com/busbash.

of operation which will result in a slightly different sound from the current Series 60.

DDEC VI in '07

Detroit Diesel's engine management system has gone to a two-box arrangement for '07 — the motor control module (MCM) and the common power train controller (CPC). It has a more powerful microprocessor, increased memory and upgraded diagnostics.

Exhaust gas recirculation

For '07, the Series 60 engine features an improved EGR that includes: Electronic EGR control valve and flow measurement — for active EGR management. There also is an increased capacity EGR cooler — 30 percent larger for improved heat displacement. And there is an increased output water pump, which supplies increased coolant flow to the EGR cooler.

Operating the '07 engine

Detroit Diesel says drivers may notice slight differences in engine responsiveness between the 2007 Series 60 and previous models. Here are some of the variances drivers can expect:

Starting the engine

Similar to DDEC V engines equipped with automatic transmissions, the '07 electronic system requires initialization by turning the ignition to the run position and pausing momentarily prior to continuing on to the cranking position.

Cold weather/Altitude

No changes in start-ability. However, the engine may automatically idle at 950 rpm to warm up. Routine idling will resume after normal operating temperatures are reached.

Performance

Low rpm performance will feel improved due to the '07 Series 60's variable nozzle turbocharger. Engine response should be almost instantaneous at below peak torque engine speeds.

Instrument panel displays

When the ignition is turned to the ON position, the following

lamps will illuminate on the instrument panel. These lights will stay on for several seconds during start-up. However, if they re-light during operation, the drive should take action.

Amber WARNING Lamp. As in previous models, this lamp indicates that the engine is malfunctioning and requires service at the earliest possible time

Red STOP Lamp. This lamp signals that something may be wrong that can damage the engine. If this lamp illuminates, the engine may reduce horsepower or shut down. If necessary, the system can be overridden by activating the “OVERRIDE” switch.

Malfunction Indicator Lamp. This new lamp indicates that an emissions-control component is malfunctioning and requires service at the earliest possible convenience

Diesel Particulate Filter Lamp. This indicator has two modes — steady and blinking. Steady illumination warns that oxidation of soot must occur. Blinking illumination in a one-three-one blinking code communicates that oxidation of soot is occurring during forced regeneration

High Exhaust Temperature Lamp. This lamp will illuminate when exhaust temperature is above 750 degrees Fahrenheit and the vehicle speed is below 30 mph.

Fuel and oil

All '07 diesel engines require a different kind of oil and fuel than current models. Engine makers warn that straying from the fuel and oil requirements may cause the new engines and their after-treatment systems to require premature service.

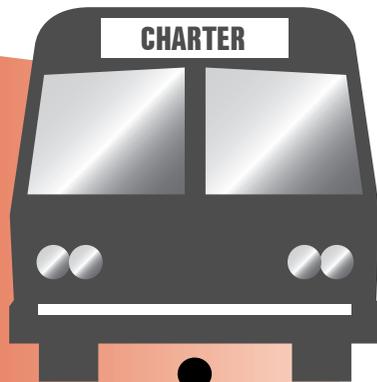
Ultra-low-sulfur diesel fuel

The '07 engines are specifically designed to work with ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel. Using fuel with higher sulfur content may cause the after-treatment system to malfunction.

CJ-4 oil

A new, “low ash” oil for '07 engines, known as CJ-4, is specifically formulated to optimize cleaning intervals of the diesel particulate filter.

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Wickkiser sells Airporter Shuttle, Bellair Charters

FERNDALE, Wash. — One of the Pacific Northwest's best-known bus operators, Larry Wickkiser, has sold his company to one of his employees, Richard Johnson.

For the past dozen years, Wickkiser has owned and operated Bellair Charters and Airporter Shuttle, which provides daily shuttle service from northwest Washington to Seattle's SeaTac International Airport.

Wickkiser bought the companies from his father, E.M. 'Red' Wickkiser, in 1993. The senior Wickkiser, a former Northwest Orient Airlines pilot, bought the business in 1985. At the time, the operation consisted of one 10-passenger van that made twice-daily runs to SeaTac Airport. The Wickkisers shared driving duties.

Today, the company employs 100 people and operates a fleet of 45 vehicles, transporting more than 100,000 passengers annually back and forth to SeaTac, and to other destinations in the Pacific Northwest and western Canada.

The charter business was begun 16 years ago, and it specializes in service to British Columbia and the northwestern U.S. The company has branches in Yakima and Oak Harbor, Wash.

Eight years ago, Johnson joined the company as chief financial officer. Eventually, Johnson became Wickkiser's exit strategy.

"The timing was right for him ... and me," said Wickkiser. "He had gained everything I had to teach him. He came to us with a lot of his own and CFO skills. And he picked up the bus knowledge and people skills. It was time for a deal."

Also motivating Wickkiser to sell was the constant frustration of trying to operate in a state political environment that is hostile to private passenger transportation providers, and public transit agencies that flaunt federal charter rules.

This summer, he filed a charter rules complaint against a transit agency in a nearby community and

was able to get the situation resolved. However, the agency may have committed another violation within the past month. Johnson is tackling that issue.

"Fighting with government and

transit has gotten tiring," said Wickkiser.

He plans to take a month off and then go back to work for Johnson. He wants to sell for the company, assist with safety and

security programs, and perhaps represent the company with local business and economic development organizations.

As long as there are no politicians or know-it-all college profes-

sors on their committees, said Wickkiser. He has had enough of both.

Wickkiser also served three years as president of the Northwest Motorcoach Association.

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12-15 Alabama Motorcoach Association Annual Meeting and Marketplace, Riverview Plaza Hotel, Mobile. Info: Go to www.alabamamotorcoach.org.

14-17 Family Motor Coach Association International Convention, Charlotte, N.C. Info: Go to 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.

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