Lentzsch reportedly picked to head CUSA operation

MT. KISKO, N.Y. — Craig Lentzsch, former president and CEO of Greyhound Lines, reportedly has been hired as chief executive of the newly formed company that is purchasing the Coach USA operations in nine western and southern central states.

Industry sources say a formal statement regarding Lentzsch’s hiring likely will be made in a matter of days, certainly weeks.

The new company being headed by Lentzsch, known as CUSA, will be the largest tour and charter bus operation in North America, with more than 1,350 coaches and annual revenue of more than $215 million.

The 54-year-old Lentzsch, a veteran of 25 years in the coach industry, officially left Greyhound on July 1. Six days earlier, Greyhound’s parent company, Laidlaw International, announced it was replacing Lentzsch with Stephen E. Gorman, a former senior executive with Krispy Kreme Doughnuts.

Lentzsch spent nine turbulent years at Greyhound, battling to keep the company growing, profitable and, at times, competitive with Coach USA.

In his new job, Lentzsch will head a brand new company that will manage the operations of at least two dozen mostly charter-bus companies that comprise the western and south central CUSA, will be the largest tour operation, headed by Lentzsch, known as CUSA, will be the largest tour and charter bus operation in North America, with more than 1,350 coaches and annual revenue of more than $215 million. The 54-year-old Lentzsch, a veteran of 25 years in the coach industry, officially left Greyhound on July 1. Six days earlier, Greyhound’s parent company, Laidlaw International, announced it was replacing Lentzsch with Stephen E. Gorman, a former senior executive with Krispy Kreme Doughnuts. Lentzsch spent nine turbulent years at Greyhound, battling to keep the company growing, profitable and, at times, competitive with Coach USA.

In his new job, Lentzsch will head a brand new company that will manage the operations of at least two dozen mostly charter-bus companies that comprise the western and south central states.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Transit Travesty

Industry threatened by bad FTA decision

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — In a sweeping decision with potentially disastrous consequences for the motorcoach industry, a regional office of the Federal Transit Administration has allowed a public transit system to usurp a shuttle service provided by a private bus company.

The decision is so conspicuous—yet bad—that a California Congressman immediately wrote to FTA Administrator Jennifer Dorn requesting she institute rulemaking proceedings that guarantee public transit systems integrate private bus operations into their programs.

“The Regional Administrator’s August 9th decision … reveals that both the Federal Transit Administration and Sacramento Regional Transit failed to meet Congressional intent, and did not demonstrate compliance with federal law governing public participation,” Congressman Doug Ose, R-Calif., writes in a letter he fired off to Dorn.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

Health agency targets industry

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Food and Drug Administration appears to be gearing up for an enforcement blitz aimed at motorcoach industry compliance with federal sanitation and communicable disease regulations.

One FDA investigator said a number of coach operators already have undergone “sanitary compliance audits,” and the United Motorcoach Association has been told the FDA has formed a new task force to increase its compliance program for over-the-road buses.

Norman Littler, UMA’s senior vice president for government and industry relations, said the FDA is eager to have voluntary compliance with its rules governing bus sanitation, but it has the authority to levy fines, shut down a company or seek criminal prosecution of egregious violators.

Littler said FDA officials want to meet with the association to discuss the enforcement initiative.

Frequently, when a regulatory agency launches a blitz of this sort, it will target a handful of companies, seeking to make an example of one or more of them. Such selective, high-profile enforcement is meant to “send a message” to others in the industry.

The FDA, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Justice Department have a memorandum of understanding to jointly cooperate in enforcement of sanitation rules applying to motorcoaches engaged in interstate travel.

The legal basis for what the FDA calls its Interstate Travel Sanitation Program is grounded in the Public Health Service Act, which was adopted by Congress nearly 60 years ago, and the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, which traces its roots back to 1938.

Random inspections

Several times a year, investigators from the FDA make what appear to be random inspections of coach operators from coast to coast. During the past two years, there have been known inspections in Malvern, N.J.; Fresno, San Francisco and Visalia, Calif.; Kingston, N.Y.; Edwardsville, Kan., and elsewhere.

Typically, the inspections focus on the management and disposal of waste from coach lavatories; cleaning and flushing of waste retention tanks; employee sanitation programs.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

High, Going Higher

Highway and road-use taxes are higher in Oregon than anywhere else. Guess what? They’re moving higher still.

On Hold

The FMCSA has put its touted new-entrant inspection program on hold.

Threat looming?

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has created a new category of school activity bus.
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Restroom.........................................................Yes
Parcels............................................................Open
Video...........................................................3 Monitor REI
Interior..................................................Gray Floor, Gray Sidewalls
Wheels..............................Some Aluminum, S/S Inserts & Few Steel
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Coach company founder sells Orlando firm

ORLANDO — Ed Dowling Jr., a former airline executive who helped start two Florida motorcoach companies during the past 30 years, has sold his company and is retiring.

Most recently, Dowling owned Florida Stage Lines, an Orlando-based charter firm he founded 15 years ago. In 1974, Dowling co-founded Orlando Tour Lines while completing a master’s degree at Rollins College. He sold his interest in that company in 1988.

On the first of this month, Dowling sold Florida Stage Lines to Travel Lynx, a charter-bus operator based in Cocoa, Fla. Karl Moberg is CEO of Travel Lynx.

Dowling worked 10 years for Eastern Air Lines, last serving as passenger services manager at Orlando International Airport. In that job, he developed an interest in motorcoach operations while working with groups flying into Orlando to visit Disney World.

“You never get bored and no two days are ever alike,” Dowling says of his coach industry experience. “As an owner-operator, one minute you’re turning a wrench to get a bus on the road and the next you’re at your desk doing an IPTA report.”

Dowling says he particularly values the friendships he has made in the industry. “The motorcoach industry is like an extended family,” he says.

One thing he won’t particularly miss, however, is the current business environment. “It goes without saying the last few years have been a demanding challenge for all of us in the industry.”

Dowling’s retirement won’t exactly be a retirement, initially. He still must dispose of a handful of late-model Prevost LeMirage XL coaches and parts for them. He has started Dowling Coach & Parts to market the equipment and parts.

Brake inspections are set for Sept. 4

WASHINGTON — For the second time this year, U.S. and Canadian safety inspectors will be out in force conducting roadside brake safety inspections across North America. Operation Air Brake will be conducted for 12 hours on Sept. 4. As its name implies, it focuses on the No. 1 problem commercial vehicle safety inspectors find during inspections.

The Operation Air Brake next month is an “announced” inspection. In May, an “unannounced” inspection was conducted. A total of 12,027 vehicles were inspected, resulting in 18 percent being put out of service for brake defects.

For more information, contact Steve Keppler of CVSA at stevek@cvsaa.org, or by calling (202) 775-1623.

SW coach association organizes

GRAND PRAIRIE, Texas — The Southwest Motorcoach Association, a newly formed association of coach operators and vendors in Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico, is conducting a search for an executive director.

The association, which was formed this summer, has adopted bylaws and a code of ethics, as well as appointed a seven-member board of directors that is guiding operations until a professional director is picked.

Mark Steelman of Anttour & Lone Star Coaches in Grand Prairie said the board hopes to have an executive director hired within the next 30 days.

The new executive will need to complete organization of the association, establish an office, recruit members, and begin building relationships and making contacts in the legislatures of the three states.

Steelman, who chaired the association’s steering committee, has been elected a board member along with:

• Jeff Polziien of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City
• Patrick Conner of Sierra Trailways in South Houston, Texas
• Robbie Morgan of Tyler Shuttle in Tyler, Texas
• June Bratcher of Daisy Tours/Conventions in San Antonio
• Gene Shields of Eagle Tours in Irvine, Texas
• Lannie Rogers of First Class Tours in Houston

Steelman expects the association to begin operations with at least 20 dues-paying members, but he sees that number growing to 40-50 operator members within months. “There is a lot of interest all across the state,” he said.

To apply for the executive director position, e-mail a resume to Steelman at marklsc@swbell.net.

Improved bus guide available for Washington

WASHINGTON — A vastly improved motorcoach/tour bus guide to Washington, D.C., has been published on the Web site of the District of Columbia Department of Transportation.

A Motorcoach Guide to Monuments, Museums ... and Beyond includes directions to several Washington neighborhoods, major attractions and Metrorail stops.

Plus, it has important information on bus parking, which for many attractions continues to be a challenge. The guide generally acknowledges the limitations and frequently includes alternatives.

Plus, it has phone numbers that operators can call to get updated or more detailed information.

To access the Motorcoach Guide, go to www.dot.dc.gov. Under the “Information” section of the Department of Transportation splash page, click on “Tour Bus Parking.” The complete guide, or sections of it, can be printed.

At the end of the guide is a map that provides more information.

The district Department of Transportation worked with the Tour Bus Management Initiative and others to develop the updated guide. The Tour Bus Management Initiative Technical Advisory Board recommends that operators pitch any previous versions of the guide they may have printed out.

Addresses in the guide are followed by a NW, SW, NE or SE designation. The U.S. Capitol serves as the point at which the District of Columbia is divided into these quadrants.

Questions about or comments on the guide should be directed to Rick Rybeck at the District Department of Transportation. His e-mail address is rick.rybeck@dc.gov. Discrepancies also should be called to Rybeck’s attention.

In announcing availability of the guide, the Tour Bus Management Initiative Technical Advisory Board said efforts will be made to keep it up to date.

Correction

An article in the Aug. 1 issue incorrectly implied that a para-transit bus that caught fire in Allentown, Pa., was operated and maintained by Easton Coach of Easton, Pa. Easton had no involvement with the bus.
SALEM, Ore. — Oregon, which has the highest highway taxes in the U.S., has further solidified its position by bumping its road taxes and fees even higher.

The state legislature adopted the governor's signed House Bill 2041 that increases Oregon's weight-distance tax by 10 percent and boosts registration fees by more than one-third. The higher taxes and fees go into effect Jan. 1.

The increases will boost state revenue for road and bridge repairs by upwards of $1.6 billion. Interestingly, the increases were not seriously opposed by Oregon's ground transportation industry. As one Oregon coach operator said: "We haven't seen much bridge and road improvement here in years."

The registration fee for a 40,001-46,000 pound motorcoach goes from $120 to $261, while the fee for a 46,001-48,000 pound coach jumps from $190 to $291. The weight-mile tax for a 40,000-42,000 pound coach moves from 4.95 cents to $5.44 cents per mile, and for a 46,001-48,000 pound coach its goes from 5.48 cents a mile to 6.02 cents.

Additionally, a number of other highway-related fees were increased, including those for licenses, registration transfers, out-of-state carrier fees and the like. The bill also includes a provision for a tax credit for buying a bus with one of the new clean diesel engines. There's a $925 credit for an EPA-certified engine that emits 2.5 grams of nitrogen oxide or less per brake horsepower per hour. The vehicle must weigh more than 26,000 pounds to be eligible for the tax credit.

To learn more about the new taxes and fees, the Oregon DOT publishes a quarterly newsletter. To get on the mailing list call Amy Sinclair or Jim Brock in the motor carrier division at (503) 378-5985.

Public agencies seek private charter firms

The following public transit providers have informed the United Motorcoach Association of their intent to provide charter service unless willing and able private charter operators step forward to offer their services, or to bid on contract opportunities.

The United Motorcoach Association urges operators to take the time to respond to these public notices. Here's where to write or call:


Floyd County, Ga./Rome, Ga. Deadline: Aug. 25, 2003. Write to: Kathy Shealy or Phyllis Gordon, City of Rome Transit Department, P.O. Box 1433, Rome, GA 30162-1433. Phone: (706) 236-4523.


Laketrans, P.O. Box 158, Grand River, OH 44045-0158. Phone: (517) 348-8215.

The governor shunned Senate Bill 150, which had been pushed by the Illinois State Police. The State Police had language inserted in the Senate version spelling out how the law's fingerprinting requirements are to be handled. Among other things, the police wanted to be reimbursed for the cost of processing fingerprint requests. The motorcoach industry didn't oppose the Senate bill.

It is highly doubtful that the new law would have made it through the Illinois legislature had not the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association stepped in and hired a lobbyist to run interference.

Tim Hennessey, the lobbyist hired by UMA and ABA, said it was a struggle at the end to get the governor's signature on the bill. "We had to fight for it," he said.

The new law provides that as long as motorcoach drivers have current, valid commercial driver's license before transporting school children on school trips.

Out-of-state operators that contract with Illinois schools must affirm their drivers have submitted to background checks and a medical examination.

The battle this spring to revise the school bus licensing bill was a major impetus for the formation of the Illinois Motorcoach Association. Hennessey's firm is managing the new association.

Information about the association can be obtained by calling (217) 525-3474.

FMCSA clarifies blood pressure standard

WASHINGTON — Last October, an advisory panel to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration recommended new guidelines for medical examinations of commercial vehicle drivers.

After the guidelines were posted on the FMCSA Web site they began creating confusion and controversy among industry safety officials and physicians who examine bus drivers.

Of particular concern were the advisory panel's guidelines for evaluating hypertension. They differed from the standards on blood pressure in the "Instructions for Performing and Recording Physical Examinations" and the "Advisory Criteria" appended to the medical examination form used by doctors performing exams of drivers.

To end the confusion, Judith Rutledge, acting chief counsel at the FMCSA, has written a concise, straightforward letter to William Mahomey, director of safety and regulatory programs at the American Bus Association.

In her letter, Ms. Rutledge says the advisory panel guidelines are "simply a report" prepared for the FMCSA. "They have no legal effect whatever."

On the other hand, the current "Instructions" and "Criteria" have rulemaking authority behind them and, therefore, constitute "the federal legal standards applicable to examination and qualification of commercial motor vehicle drivers," Rutledge wrote.

New or different standards will not be adopted unless routine rulemaking procedures are followed and completed, she added.

Illiinois gov signs licensing bill

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — Illinois motorcoach operators have won an eight-month battle to upend an Illinois law requiring motorcoach drivers to have state school bus licenses before transporting children on school trips.

On Aug. 8, Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed a bill that overhauls an Illinois law requiring coach driving to have school bus licenses if they are making a school-related trip. Blagojevich had two nearly identical bills to pick from and he chose House Bill 2840, which was backed by the state coach industry.

The governor shunned Senate Bill 150, which had been pushed through the Illinois legislature. It is highly doubtful that the new law would have made it through the Illinois legislature had not the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association stepped in and hired a lobbyist to run interference.

Tim Hennessey, the lobbyist hired by UMA and ABA, said it was a struggle at the end to get the governor's signature on the bill. "We had to fight for it," he said.

The new law provides that as long as motorcoach drivers have current, valid commercial driver's license they can transport children on school activity trips.

A law that had gone into effect last January required coach drivers to have a school bus driver's license before transporting school kids. The new law effectively nullifies that requirement.

The law does require schools that contract for bus service with Illinois-based operators to insert a clause in their contracts requiring that coach drivers providing transportation have:

• Been fingerprinted
• Had a criminal background check
• Submitted to a medical examination and drug testing.

Out-of-state operators that contract with Illinois schools must affirm their drivers have submitted to background checks and a medical examination.

The battle this spring to revise the school bus licensing bill was a major impetus for the formation of the Illinois Motorcoach Association. Hennessey's firm is managing the new association.
WASHINGTON — The Federal Transit Administration has issued a special safety bulletin about bus wraps, warning they could block emergency window exits.

The FTA said that vinyl film covering emergency exit windows may make it difficult for passengers to evacuate the bus through these windows in an emergency.

The agency's safety alert, which came from the FTA Office of Safety and Security, recommends operators test all emergency exit windows covered by vinyl film to assure their proper operation.

“In order to permit the exits to function, it is necessary to trim around the emergency exit window seals,” said Harry Saporta, director of the Office of Safety and Security at the FTA. “The window seals do not necessarily coincide with the window frame edge.”

Saporta said U.S. manufacturers of perforated vinyl window film — 3M, Avery Dennison, Clear Focus, MacTac, Oracal and Flexcon — have been advised of the problem and have issued revised application instructions to purchasers of vinyl film. Additionally, the manufacturers have published new instructions on their Web sites for correcting the problem.

“The FTA strongly recommends the testing of all emergency exit windows currently covered by vinyl film advertising, and the necessary corrective actions taken on those windows found to be inoperative,” said Saporta. “Additionally, emergency exit windows should be immediately retested after new applications to assure proper operation.”

Saporta noted that inoperative emergency exit windows would mean a bus is out of compliance with Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 217, “Bus emergency exits and window retention and release.” Meaning, of course, it could be put out of service.

Questions or comments about the warning should be directed to the FTA Office of Safety and Security at (202) 366-2896.

Safety alert issued for bus wraps

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Multifunctional school bus category is created by feds

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has issued a rule creating a new category of school buses for use in transporting children on trips other than to and from school.

The implication of the rule for the motorcoach industry isn’t totally clear and is being studied by both the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association.

It was fairly quickly determined that the rule does not require children making school activity trips to be transported in the new category of bus. Meaning schools can still contract with coach companies to have their children transported to school-related events in conventional motorcoaches.

However, if schools do their own transporting for these types of trips, or their contractors handle the transportation, then the new category of buses can be used. Should more schools opt to buy buses built to the new standards it could have significant implications for both coach operators and manufacturers.

The new category of school buses created by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is called the “multifunction school activity bus.”

It is defined as a vehicle that is sold for purposes that do not include transportation between home and school for students from kindergarten through grade 12. Under federal law, dealers cannot sell a vehicle that used to transport school-age students to or from school or related events unless it meets all federal motor vehicle safety standards for school buses. Among the requirements for school buses is that they be equipped with flashing lights and stop arms.

NHTSA said the new class of vehicles should serve as a safe choice for companies and institutions that have a need to transport groups of children. “A particular safety benefit exists for transporting 12-to-15 passengers, since school buses have a better safety record than 15-passenger vans for this purpose,” said NHTSA.

“This modification allows institutions to take advantage of the safety benefits associated with school buses, which are by far the safest means of transporting children,” said Dr. Jeffrey W. Runge, NHTSA administrator.

The new multifunction buses will be exempt from the flashing lights and stop-arm requirements since they are not to be used for picking up or discharging students on public roadways. While the new multifunction buses are exempt from some traffic control requirements, they are required to meet all other school bus safety standards.

The rule is available at http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/finals. It takes effect in less than 30 days.

Bus security bill passed by Senate

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate has approved the Max Cleland Over-the-Road Bus Security and Safety Act of 2003, which would establish a grant program for coach industry security improvements.

The legislation, known as Senate Bill 929, is sponsored by Senate Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain, R-Ariz., and ranking Democratic member Ernest Hollings of South Carolina. Among other things, the bill would require the Transportation Security Administration to set up a program that would help pay for modifying terminals and facilities, driver protection, communication systems, cameras and video surveillance, training, and passenger manifests.

The bill is being strongly pushed by the American Bus Association. ABA President and CEO Peter J. Pantuso said that “having the support of the Senate shows the commitment and dedication by Congress to better secure this industry. We applaud those in Congress for their leadership and are encouraged by their direction.”

The ABA has led the industry effort to win money from Congress to help coach companies make security improvements to their operations. Earlier this summer, the House Appropriations Committee approved $10 million for the industry.

“As a significant part of the transportation industry, it’s encouraging to see Congress continue to weave the coach industry into the larger fabric of this country’s transportation network,” said Pantuso.

The Senate bill would provide $25 million in security grants for fiscal 2003 and $99 million next year. The bill continues to face an uphill battle, however. While it authorizes the spending, Congress has not appropriated the dollars for the program have not been appropriated or identified.

New entrant safety audits are put on hold by FMCSA

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has slammed the brakes on its widely publicized and Congressionally mandated program to conduct safety audits of all new motorcoach and trucking companies.

In announcing the action, FMCSA Administrator Annette M. Sandberg acknowledged the decision will likely have an adverse impact on public safety.

The FMCSA said it was forced to extend the deadline for performing safety audits of new carriers, both foreign and domestic, because of a court ruling that prohibited Mexican-based buses and trucks from operating in the United States.

Back in January, the safety agency launched its new entrant safety audit program for U.S.-based carriers, and was supposed to start auditing Mexican carriers as the last step to allowing them to operate across the border.

However, a federal court upset the FMCSA’s plans for the Mexican carrier audits when it ruled in mid-January that the U.S. Transportation Department must do an environmental impact study before admitting Mexican trucks and buses. Besides requiring the environmental study, the court ruling also pulled the rug out from under the rules and procedures that were set up for conducting the new entrant audits.

Weeks and months went by while DOT mulled whether to appeal the court decision. Once it was decided not to press the appeal beyond the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, the FMCSA had to put off the start of all new entrant safety audits.

The audits were supposed to be given within 18 months of a new carrier commencing operations to help improve its safety performance. The audits, known as compliance reviews, were mandated by the 1999 Motor Carrier Safety Improvement Act.

The law gave the secretary of transportation some wiggle room, however, authorizing the secretary to extend the deadline for starting the program until Dec. 31, 2003. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta notified Congress last month that he is extending the deadline to the end of the year.

The FMCSA said the extension was necessary because the court ruling put a freeze on the rules for establishing procedures for certifying personnel to conduct the safety reviews.

Meanwhile, DOT is busy cranking out the environmental impact statement so it can begin again next year implementing procedures for certifying safety auditors.

More money for USDOT proposed

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation would receive $89.3 billion for fiscal 2004 under a spending plan approved by the House Appropriations Committee.

The amount is $3.4 billion more than the Bush Administration is recommending, and $2.7 billion more than DOT got for fiscal 2003. Included in the $89 billion is $473.7 million for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

The committee approved spending $4.5 billion more on highways than the Bush Administration wants, and $26 million more than Bush requested for the FMCSA.

The spending measure is for one year and may be designed to help the department should the six-year SAFETEA legislation not get passed by the end of the fiscal year, Sept. 30.

Transportation chief decries bridge safety in Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA CITY — Oklahoma Transportation Director Gary Ridley says that if the state does not get more money to repair its bridges during the next 10 years, it could be facing an unprecedented bridge disaster.

Ridley even went so far as to warn that the state could have a bridge failure larger than the Webbers Falls bridge collapse last year. Fourteen people died when a barge struck that bridge on May 26, 2002.

Oklahoma leads the nation in structurally inadequate bridges. Ridley was quoted as saying. At least 200 bridges in the state are 80 years old, and another 2,000 are over 50 years old.

The state could catch up on its bridge improvements if state lawmakers increase an additional $50 million a year toward replacing bridges, Ridley said.

More money for USDOT proposed
INDUSTRY NEWS

Greyhound reports losses

Self insurance problem looms

DALLAS — A decline in revenues, combined with higher costs in a number of operational areas, produced an increase in financial losses for Greyhound Lines during the quarter and nine months ended May 31.

In filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Greyhound’s parent company, Laidlaw International Inc., reported Greyhound lost more than $12 million during the quarter ended May 31, up from a year ago loss of $3.6 million.

For the nine months ended May 31, Greyhound lost $39.9 million, versus a loss of $19.8 million for the nine months ended May 31, 2002.

Revenue for both the quarter and nine months ended May 31, were below year-ago levels. Total revenue this year for the three and nine months ended May 31, was $291.4 million and $847.5 million, compared to same-period 2002 revenue of $297.5 million and $863.2 million.

In the filing, Laidlaw warned that Greyhound’s ability to self-insure against losses resulting from crashes is in jeopardy because its tangible net worth has fallen below levels required by the federal government.

The decrease in passenger revenues was attributed to a variety of factors, including the uncertain market, and a decline in revenue in Hispanic markets resulting from the shut-down of a company subsidiary last year.

Revenue increased from charter services and “meet-and-greet” services provided to cruise lines.

On the expenses side, transportation expenses, consisting primarily of fuel costs and driver wages, increased measurably this year, compared to 2002. Driver costs also are higher this year, due to increased hiring of new drivers and the expense of training them.

During the first quarter of 2003, Greyhound’s average cost for diesel fuel was 99 cents per gallon, compared to 64 cents a gallon during the same period last year. A difference that large adds more than $4 million to Greyhound’s costs in a single quarter.

The U.S. Department of Transportation does not allow Greyhound to self-insure its automobile liability exposure up to a maximum level of $5 million per occurrence. To maintain the self-insurance authority, Greyhound is required to jump through several hoops, including having a tangible net worth of $10 million and a $15 million trust fund. The trust fund is fully funded, but since the end of last year the company’s tangible net worth has been below the minimum required by the DOT.

Greyhound and the DOT are discussing possible modifications to the agreement.

Loss or modification of self-insurance authority “could have a material adverse effect on the company’s liquidity, financial condition and results of operations,” Laidlaw warns.

Greyhound Canada workers vote on new labor accord

CALGARY, Alberta — Votes cast by Greyhound Canada drivers and mechanics for a new, four-year labor agreement were being counted late this week.

Members of Local 1374 of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) are voting on a tentative contract reached late last month between their union and Greyhound Canada Transportation Corp.

The proposed agreement covers 1,423 active Greyhound employees in western, central and east central Canada, including the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and northern Ontario.

The drivers and mechanics have been working since the end of last year without a contract.

The proposed agreement calls for no salary increase this year and modest raises beginning next year. The increase will be 1 percent in 2004, and 2 percent in both 2005 and 2006.

Additionally, if the contract is approved, members will get a 2 percent lump sum payment, with 1 percent paid shortly after ratification and the rest before Christmas. The lump-sum payment will be based on 2002 wages.

Other major aspects of the agreement call for no changes in the health provisions and slight improvements in pension benefits, with employees helping pick up the tab for the pension gains.

“We wish to thank the membership for their support and the negotiating committees for their hard work. Without either we could not have reached an agreement,” said Len Munter, president business agent of ATU 1374. “I believe the membership will ratify the agreement.”
One less thing to worry about

It is truly one of the miracles and mysteries of our time: Why have there been no terrorist attacks against motorcoaches in the United States? Elsewhere in the world, buses are involved in nearly half of all terrorist incidents. It seems fairly obvious that the experts who are supposed weigh such threats have decided that buses in the U.S. are not high on terrorists' target lists. Otherwise, the federal government would be pumping billions of dollars into bus industry security measures, right? Like it's doing for the airlines.

A less generous reading of the industry's low priority would be that because federal decision-makers don't ride buses, they're less concerned about them. But that's being cynical, we won't go there. There are other explanations, of course. Like there's virtually no domestic airline industry for terrorists to target in the Middle East. Or, the U.S. is, as the experts say, a "target-rich environment," and buses seem pretty mundane by comparison. Why go after a bus when you can target a nuclear power plant?

Still, buses transport people, often very vulnerable people and a lot more people than the airlines, and the industry warrants greater attention and resources. Setting aside the moral issue for a moment and focusing strictly on dollars and cents, coach owners should be grateful that one of the things they hate most is largely off the radar. The USDOT's "field operational test" is designed to quantify the costs and benefits of transportation security technologies. The feds believe the test will assist truckers in their decisions to deploy technology applications "that are most appropriate for their businesses." Full-scale testing is to be completed late next year.

The test will involve 100 trucks equipped with a variety of technologies. The technologies will be packaged in several different cost tiers, and will be tested "across different transportation scenarios." Among the technologies to be tested are:

- Driver verification using password logos, fingerprint biometrics and smart cards.
- Vehicle and load tracking, using satellites.
- Off-route and stolen vehicle alerts, using "geo-fencing."
- Cargo tampering alerts, using electronic seals.
- Driver distress alerts, using driver panic buttons.
- Remote vehicle disabling in instances of terrorist attacks.

Can you imagine the cost of all that stuff? And what it would add to the cost of a motorcoach if it were required equipment? Or, what a nuisance it would be to maintain?

And, can you imagine what it is costing to test it?

Just look who all is involved. The ITS field operational deployment team is led by Battelle Memorial Institute. "Deployment team" members include QUALCOMM Inc., the American Transportation Research Institute, Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance, Total-Security US, and Savi Technology and Information Systems Support.

A half-dozen state transportation and safety agencies also are participating. Original equipment and engine manufacturers include Caterpillar, Cummins, Detroit Diesel, Freightliner Truck Group and International Truck and Engine Corporation.

Plus, a dozen or more trucking companies are offering their rigs.

So, when you go to bed tonight, be grateful that one of the things that won't keep you from getting to sleep is fretting about whether the geo-fencing receiver is working on that coach headed to Orlando.

‘Coach operators should be grateful the industry is largely off the radar screen of federal security officials.’

The industry could be facing transportation security technologies. The technologies will be packaged in several different cost tiers, and will be tested “across different transportation scenarios.” Among the technologies to be tested are:

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Delaware River tolls continue to draw fire

MORRISVILLE, Pa. — Huge toll increases on bridges that cross the Delaware River between Pennsylvania and New Jersey continue to draw protests.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reports that late last month people lined up at a meeting of the Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission to protest increases that went into effect last year and more slated for next year.

The commission manages seven toll bridges and 13 free bridges spanning the Delaware River. Bus operators and truckers have been hard hit by the toll increases that began on Nov. 30 and end next January.

Thomas Smedley Jr., terminal manager for Roadway Express in Stroudsburg, Pa., said his terminal had a profit of $1.6 million last year, but the toll increases would eat up $600,000 if they go into full effect.

The toll for a three-axle coach using most of the bridges went from $3 to $6.75 on Nov. 30, and will go to $9.75 on Jan. 1. For all of the bridges, the current per-axle fee is $2.25, increasing to $3.25 in January.

The toll increases for buses, autos and trucks will eventually boost total annual revenue for the seven bridges from $30 million to $100 million. The additional money is to be used for bridge repairs and improvements, self-insurance against terrorist attacks, and economic development projects. The average age of the bridges managed by the commission is 70 years.

Since the bridge commission unveiled its controversial toll plan last year, charges of political shenanigans have surfaced. One newspaper charged that the commission “secretly” earmarked $248 million from the toll increases for economic development, while telling the public the money is only for self-insurance against terrorism and bridge repairs.

The economic development plan, called the “Delaware River Heritage Initiative,” would use money raised by the higher tolls to buy land to secure open space, build new ports and airports, and help private businesses develop waterfront property along the river.

Staffers of the commission have been quoted anonymously as saying the self-insurance fund is a ruse to hide the commission’s real motives. And a state senator in Pennsylvania has called the need for terrorism self-insurance “far-fetched.”

Other state legislators in Pennsylvania have called for an investigation of the bridge commission.

As advertised on billboards, $526 million of the $800 million toll increase will go to rehabilitate the commission’s 20 bridges along the Delaware between Milford and Morrisville.
FTA decision

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Association against Sacramento Regional Transit District.

The CBA complained that Regional Transit violated several federal transit laws and rules when it instituted a service in April called the Downtown Circulator. The circulator summarily displaced a shuttle service that had been provided by Amador Stage Lines and other private Sacramento bus companies for 25 years. (The FTA didn’t even bother to get the company’s name correct in its ruling, calling it Amador Bus Lines.)

Amador held a contract with the State of California to shuttle state workers back and forth from their offices in the capital complex to parking lots across town.

The service represented roughly $1.7 million in annual revenue for Amador. By all accounts, the company was providing exceptional service with five-minute headways during rush hours. In fact, when belated hearings were conducted on whether the service was worth its cost federal taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars.

This case could easily turn out to be a litmus test of the FTA’s commitment to its own regulations governing private-sector involvement in public transit decision-making.

Who to write...
The following members of the House of Representatives should be targeted for letters supporting Congressman Doug Ose’s effort to convince the FTA to follow its own rules.

Republicans Members
Thomase M. Davis II (CA), Don Burton (CA)
Christopher Shays (CT)
Nanis Kucinich (OH)
John M. McHugh (NY)
John C. Mica (FL)
Mark E. Souder (IN)
Steven C. LaTourette (OH)
Doug Chabot (OH)
Ron Lewis (KY)
Jo Ann Davis (WV)
Todd Russell Platts (PA)
Chris Cannon (UT)
Adam H. Putnam (FL)
Edward L. Schrock (VA)
John L. Mica (FL)
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL)
Thomas M. Davis III (VA), Republicans Members
William Janklow (SD)
John Carter (TX)
Michael Turner (OH)
Tim Murphy (PA)
Candice S. Miller (MI)
John Sullivan (OK)
John J. Duncan, Jr. (TN)
Edward L. Schrock (VA)
Adam H. Putnam (FL)
Chris Cannon (UT)
Ron Lewis (KY)
Doug Ose (CA)
Steven C. LaTourette (OH)
Mark E. Souder (IN)
John L. Mica (FL)
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL)

Democrats Members
Henry A. Waxman, (CA), Tom Lantos (CA)
Maj. John C. Mica (FL)
Eliot Engel (NY)
Paul 1. Kourikos (PA)
Bernie B. Maloney (OH)
Elijah E. Cummings (MD)
Eisen J. Sincich (OH)
Danny K. Davis (IL)
John F. Tierney (MA)
Jim, Lazy Chay (PA)
Edward E. Madden (CT)
Stephen F. Lynch (MA)
Chris Van Hollen (MD)
Linda T. Sanchez (CA)
C. A. Ralston Happenberger (MD)
Eleazar Holnes Norton (DC)
Jim Cooper (TN)
Chris Bell (TX)

Independent Members
Bennet R. Sanders (WI)
Indy News

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Freeze out

Related to this issue, Regional Transit appears to have done its best to freeze Amador or any other private-sector company out of the process by essentially hiding its plans or doing the minimum to let anyone know what it was up to.

In the only tacit acknowledgement that Regional Transit did anything the least bit wrong, FTA Regional Administration Leslie T. Rogers wrote in his transmittal letter that “while Regional Transit District could have done more to explore the use of private-sector providers, RT has met the minimum requirements under the law.” CBA, of course, contends Regional Transit didn’t even meet the minimum requirements.

Helping drive Regional Transit’s zeal to take over the state shuttle was the fact the agency used a pile of federal taxpayer money to buy a bunch of new compressed natural gas-fueled buses. It did this despite having no place to use them. In fact, in one document, Regional Transit acknowledged it “did not have a specific plan for deploying these new buses, other than to meet growing demand for service in the region.”

This startling admission by Regional Transit also represents a clear violation of federal statutes covering mandatory requirements for recipients of federal transit dollars.

Not much sense

Throughout the FTA decision, the logic and reasoning applied to the facts and circumstances is so tortured and mind-bending that one has to wonder what the San Francisco FTA officials were smoking when they considered the case.

If allowed to stand, the decision represents a huge set back to coach industry efforts to stave off the onslaught of desperate public transit systems to grab new services.

The CBA plans to appeal the case to FTA Administrator Jennifer Dom in Washington.

Congressman Ose needs strong and aggressive support in his effort to convince Ms. Dom and the FTA that agency rules and laws need to be interpreted and enforced in a straightforward manner.

Write to your congressman and ask him or her to support Ose.

Regional Transit is being attacked by the California Bus Association.
People In The News

Brenda Tidwell, co-owner of Leisure Time Charters and Tours in Emerson, Ga., has been named 2003 Operator of the Year by the Georgia Motorcoach Operators Association. The award was presented last month at the association’s annual meeting and marketplace in Atlanta. Ms. Tidwell, along with her mother, Joye Darwin, and sister, Patricia Burton, own Leisure Time Charters and Tours. The 11-year-old company operates nine motorcoaches, and provided tours for 7,000 students last year. Ms. Tidwell was recognized for her efforts on behalf of the association.

We Care Group, a diversified passenger-transportation company based in Buffalo, N.Y., has appointed Kristin Kocick convention and tour associate. Ms. Kocick brings more than 14 years of tourism experience to We Care. Previously, she worked for Bucham Tours of Buffalo. Ms. Kocick is a graduate of the Niagra University School of Travel and Tourism.

Jeff Madura has been named as vice president/customer finance for ARAM, a diversified passenger-transportation company based in Buffalo, N.Y. Mr. Madura will develop and oversee the hotel, railroad, and Rhode Island light-rail transit properties. Mr. Madura has more than 17 years of experience in the medium- and heavy-duty trucking industry. He will be responsible for the sales and marketing of DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses, manufacturer of transit and shuttle buses, has added Jeff Madura as regional sales manager—Great Lakes region. With more than a decade of experience in engineering and sales in the transportation industry, Madura most recently worked for bus suppliers Trans/Air Manufacturing Corp. and Sure-Lok Inc. In his new job he will oversee sales in 13 states.

Richard Sherrer has been hired as OEM account manager for the North American bus and motorcoach market. He will be responsible for the sales and marketing of Webasto products to all OEM, major school bus, motorcoach and transit properties. Mr. Sherrer has more than 15 years experience in the medium- and heavy-duty truck, trailer and bus market. Most recently he was with Prevost Car/Prevost Parts and ABC Companies.

Workhorse introduces bus chassis

UNION CITY, Ind. — Workhorse Custom Chassis has introduced the first model in a series of new chassis for the bus and coach industry.

The rear-engine, diesel-powered RE-Series chassis from Workhorse is specifically designed for the shuttle, over-the-road coach and transit markets. It is available in three wheelbase lengths and either I-beam or independent front suspension.

Workhorse, a leading North American manufacturer of stripped chassis, partnered with Cummins and ArvinMeritor to develop the chassis, which features integrated chassis electronics.

Richard Fish, vice president of sales and marketing for Workhorse, said the chassis is ideally suited to meet the rigorous requirements of the bus and coach segment.

“The RE-Series chassis is just the start of what Workhorse will offer to the bus industry,” said Fish. “Other new chassis will be introduced to the market place for the next 12 to 18 months … positioning Workhorse in the bus industry as a major manufacturer in a very short period of time,” Fish added.

The RE-Series chassis is powered by either a Cummins ISC or ISL engine. The ISC is available in either 250 or 280 horsepower. The ISL is available in either 250 or 280 horsepower. The

Blue Bird joins with bank to offer financial services

WYOMISSING, Pa. — A division of one of the nation’s largest banks will provide financing to purchasers of Blue Bird buses under a new agreement.

Network Capital Alliance, a unit of Sovereign Bank of Philadelphia, will provide a finance program, called Blue Bird Finance Advantage, to distributors and customers of Blue Bird’s motorcoach- es, commercial buses, recreational vehicles and school buses.

The arrangement calls for Network Capital Alliance to support the Blue Bird finance program with a variety of services. Among other things, it will provide an easy application process, competitive loan rates, fast turnaround on credit decisions, and terms specifically designed for the bus industry.

“Utilizing Network Capital Alliance’s expertise enables us to create customized and flexible financing programs that fit each client’s unique needs,” said Jeff Dwyer, leasing manager for Blue Bird Financial Services.

Alliance’s expertise enables us to create customized and flexible financing programs that fit each client’s unique needs,” said Jeff Dwyer, leasing manager for Blue Bird Financial Services.

Prevost Car completes summer training forums

QUEBEC CITY — Prevost Car has completed a series of maintenance training seminars at locations ranging from Colorado to Virginia.

More than 50 technicians attended the two- and three-day courses conducted by Prevost trainers Robert Buchwalter and Robert Hitt, who share almost 50 years of experience in the coach industry. A total of four workshops were conducted in June and July at Indian Trails Inc. in Romulus, Mich.; James River Bus Lines in Richmond, Va.; Lamers Bus Lines in Milwaukee, and Peoples Choice Transportation in Commerce City, Colo.

The training included sessions on reading electrical schematics, critical circuits, including battery, engine, transmission and ignition; starters; headlights; turn signals; radiator fan clutch; kneeler; door; multiplexing and logic circuits; HVAC; Knorr-Bremse brakes; Mentor/WABCO antilock brake system; and pneumatic systems.

Annually, more than 150 technicians from companies across North America attend Prevost training seminars. "In today’s market, technicians must be up-to-date on new technologies … to reduce operating costs and increase maintenance efficiency," said Maurice Gagne, Prevost national service manager. "Prevost wants to make sure its customers are ready to face these challenges with skilled technicians that are professionally trained and fully qualified to diagnose and repair any type of problem that may arise.”

Here’s a schedule of future training sessions with telephone numbers to obtain additional information or register.

Sept. 7, Mira Loma, Calif., call (800) 82-PREVO

Sept. 21, Fort Worth, Texas, call (800) 82-PREVO

Oct. 12, Ephrata, Pa., call (800) 65-PREVO

Oct. 19, Trenton, N.J., call (800) 65-PREVO

Jan. 11, Quebec City, call (877) 520-7386

Feb. 1, Quebec, call (877) 520-7386

The training courses are free. Attendees must pay for transportation, lodging and meals.
Herrera School Buses and Coaches
Albuquerque, N.M.

Herrera School Buses and Coaches Inc. has placed five new DaimlerChrysler CL 100 shuttle buses into service. The vehicles comprise most of the fleet of the Santa Fe Shuttle service, which transports travelers from Santa Fe International Airport to connecting flights at Albuquerque International Airport, about 60 miles away. The six-vehicle Santa Fe Shuttle fleet carries more than 120 passengers daily, completing a total of 17, 116-mile round trips between the two airports.

“We needed a high performance bus that was capable of accommo-
dating our demanding shuttle schedule,” said Martin Herrera, president of the company bearing his family name. “The CLUs sturdy design fit our needs perfectly and its smaller frame permits it to travel the narrow streets of Santa Fe more efficiently and effectively than a larger transit vehicle.”

The CL 100 is built on a Ford chassis and is Altoona tested for 7 years and 200,000 miles. It has a 42-inch wide, dual-panel entry door and features an all aluminum skin. The CL 100 buses were purchased through Coach & Transit of Phoenix.

Krapf’s Coaches
Exton, Pa.

Krapf’s Coaches Inc., which serves greater Philadelphia, has taken delivery of two new MCI J4500 coaches from Motor Coach Industries. Krapf’s J4500s feature a six-monitor entertainment system by REI; 54 seats from American Industries.

Montgomery Area Transit System
Montgomery, Ala.

Montgomery Area Transit System is taking delivery this month of six more SFL 200 buses from DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses. MATS introduced eight SFL 200s to its fleet last year.

Since MATS beginning adding the SLFs, ridership is up 10 percent, meaning more than 2,100 passengers each day. “The new, modern, attractive buses are certainly having an impact on ridership,” said Tim Omick, general manager of MATS. Additionally, Omick says MATS is saving on both maintenance and fuel. “We’re saving 1,000 gallons of fuel a month and getting nearly seven miles to the gallon,” Omick said. The SLFs have 42-inch-wide front and rear air-operated doors, full air-ride suspensions that kneel as low as nine inches, and a ramp for paratransit needs.

Lodestar Bus Lines
Johnstown, Pa.

Four new Setra S417 motor-coaches are joining the fleet of Lodestar Bus Lines, whose five different business units run 150 vehicles daily. Its tour and charter fleet has 13 Setra coaches. “The new coach(es)...really stand out on the road,” Lodestar President Harry Oppy said of his new coaches.

The new Setras feature luxury seating, an ergonomic driver cockpit, multiplex electronics and onboard diagnostics. They have Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines and Allison B500R transmissions. Lodestar started its tour business with Eagle coaches but switched to Setras about six years ago. Eagles and Setras have the same Kassbohmer heritage.

Young Transportation
Asheville, N.C.

Young Transportation has taken delivery of a new ABC-brand M1035 midsize coach. The bus is configured for 29 passengers and equipped with a Cummins 205-horsepower engine, Allison 2400 transmission, parcel racks with individual reading lights and A/C vents, multiple-monitor video system and a restroom.

Young Transportation is a third-generation, family-owned business specializing in charter services, tour and convention planning, as well as receptive services.

Toledo University
Toledo, Ohio

The University of Toledo has taken delivery of a 2003 Blue Bird XCEL 102 bus. The 43-foot, 102-inch wide XCEL is the first of its kind to be delivered with a Caterpillar 3126, 250-horsepower diesel engine and Allison B300R transmission. Other equipment includes Hendrickson front and rear air-ride suspension, Meritor axles and brakes, and Carrier RM 35 deck-mounted air conditioning. The bus seats 45 with an option for two wheelchairs.

The unit also is configured with a two-step entrance stepwell, front and center air-powered entrance/exit doors, American perimeter seating and 72-inch center luggage racks.

The University of Toledo is the fourth largest university in Ohio with 21,000 students.
Sanitation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

dues and facilities, and handling of potable water.

The most common problem FDA investigators find is the absence of a device to prevent backflow on the water line or hose used for flushing and washing waste tanks. Seemingly, many companies either don’t have the device or the one they have isn’t stout enough to prevent backflow.

When an investigator finds problems, he or she will talk them over with the company being inspected and solicit a promise to get them fixed. The company is required to send a letter to the FDA documenting that the problems have been corrected.

Failure to send the letter results in a nasty gram from the FDA, called a “Warning Letter,” that ups the ante for the offending company. The warning letter also is likely to be posted on the FDA’s Web site for all the world to stumble across.

Out of the mouths...

The following are sentences taken from a cross section of FDA warning letters sent to operators:

“Your operations at this site are in violation of the federal regulations for control of communicable diseases, which are established in Title 21, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1240 (21 CFR 1240), and for interstate conveyance service area sanitation which are established in Part 1250 (21 CFR 1250), under authority granted in Section 361 of the Public Health Service Act.”

“The lack of adequate sanitary practices and conditions was demonstrated by the following deficiencies:

“There is no backflow prevention device attached to the potable water line that’s connected to a hose in the bus lavatory service area. A Y-connector was observed attached to the potable water line. One hose attached to the Y-connector is used for bus waste dumping and the other hose attached to the Y-connector is used for providing potable water to the buses. The ends of the hoses are stored in direct contact with the ground.

“Brown standing water was observed around the bus waste dumpsite and the potable water line. Grass was observed growing around the bus waste dumpsite, and empty chemical bottles and plastic containers were observed stored on the ground.

“There is no soap available at the employee hand-washing sink. Towels used for hand-drying are greasy and dirty. There is no sign posted instructing employees to use the hand-washing facilities.

“The potable water outlets for the buses are uncapped.

“There is no backflow prevention device attached to the potable water line, which is used for cleaning the bus waste service area. A backflow prevention device is required because the potable water line is also connected to the potable water line of the restaurant located next to the bus station. The end hose of the potable water line was observed stored directly on the ground while not in use.

“Two of four lids, which cover the bus waste dumpsters, were observed bearing cracks and holes, approximately three inches in diameter.

“The surface area around the hopper was not sloped to drain and was not kept clean.

“The unsanitary conditions and practices may result in adulteration of the potable water within the meaning of… the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act. The unsanitary conditions and practices in the waste service area may cause the introduction, transmission or spread of communicable diseases from one state into another state.

“The findings were discussed with you after the inspection. Form FDA 483, Inspectional Observations, and Form FDA 2589, Inspection Summary-Bus Service Area Sanitation, were issued to you. Copies are attached for your ready reference.

“Based on the findings of our inspection, your facility has been assessed a ‘Provisional’ classification. A ‘Provisional’ classification means that if the deficiencies are not corrected within thirty (30) working days from receipt of this notification, your facility will be placed on ‘Not Approved’ status. A ‘Not Approved’ status means that food and waste service will be prohibited from use by interstate conveyances at your facility.

“Failure to take prompt corrective action may result in appropriate regulatory action, such as injunction without further notice. You should notify this office within fifteen (15) working days of receipt of this letter of the specific steps you have taken to correct the violations, including an explanation of preventive measures taken to preclude recurrence of similar violations. If corrective action cannot be completed within fifteen (15) working days, cite the reason for the delay and the time by which the corrections will be completed.”

Anything is fair game

While the FDA tends to focus its inspection program on the handling of waste and drinking water, it has the authority to inspect any food, water or waste facilities connected with any interstate coach operation.

That means if an interstate coach operator offers any sort of food service in connection with its service; or has coaches equipped with refrigerators, stoves, sinks, showers, food storage or preparation areas, or food utensils and tableware, or has a company lunch room or cafeteria, the FDA can come in and inspect everything to assure it is sanitary and safe.

A Virginia coach operator who underwent a sanitation compliance review earlier this month made out pretty well. The only deficiency was the company’s backflow prevention device. It wasn’t strong enough.

Lentzsch

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

regions of Coach USA.

A Mr. Kisko-based investment firm, Kohlberg & Co., formed the company, called KBUS Holdings LLC, to buy the Coach USA operations in California, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, Wyoming, Texas, Tennessee, Arkansas and Louisiana. Kohlberg is one of the foremost acquisition and recapitalization companies in the U.S.

KBUS Holdings will have two divisions, CUSA LLC, which will operate the former Coach USA companies, and a leasing company that will own all of the buses operated by CUSA. Lentzsch likely will head KBUS and the two divisions.

The West region of CUSA will operate at least 1,150 vehicles and employ 2,200 people, while the South Central region will run roughly 400 vehicles and employ more than 800 people.

Those two regions produced total revenues of $215.9 million during the year ended April 30, and had an operating profit, before goodwill amortization, of $14.6 million, or an operating margin of more than 6.5 percent. Net earnings are not available.

By comparison, Greyhound has 12,000 employees, operates nearly 2,400 buses, and has annual revenues of more than $1 billion.

The right choice?

One veteran West Coast bus executive said the choice of Lentzsch to run the sprawling former Coach USA regions is a smart decision. “With Craig Lentzsch you have someone who understands the charter business, line haul and contract services.… He also understands how charter bus revenues on the West Coast can fluctuate.”

That last factor is important, said this executive. Senior executives of Stagecoach Group PLC, the parent company of Coach USA, never could quite come to grips with the wide revenue swings of charter bus services, according to this executive.

Lentzsch also has a reputation for surrounding himself “with very good people, very strong people.”

Coach USA has a number of seasoned managers at many of its West Coast operations, led by Western Region Vice President John Buskohl, an energetic executive who was born into the coach business. His father, Charles Buskohl, founded Arrow Stage Lines of Phoenix, one of the original companies that formed Coach USA. The South Central region is managed by Regional Vice President Greg Rogers.

Talk borne out

Prior to joining Greyhound, Lentzsch was chief financial officer of Motor Coach Industries, which was once owned by Greyhound. He also co-founded a company called BusLease, which owned and leased coaches to charter and tour companies and Greyhound. Bus-Lease was merged with Greyhound in 1987, and eventually became MCI Financial Services, which specializes in coach financing.

The minute Lentzsch walked out the door at Greyhound, there was wide spread industry speculation he would be the leading candidate to manage the companies being acquired by Kohlberg. For once, an industry rumor appears to have been borne out.

Before Lentzsch can take over management of KBUS/CUSA, the sale must be completed and the transfer must be blessed by the U.S. Department of Transportation Surface Transportation Board. The board already has given preliminary approval to the deal pending the filing of comments opposing the plan. Opposing comments could trigger formal procedures and more critical consideration of the deal by the Surface Transportation Board.

When Stagecoach Group announced it was selling the West and South Central regions of Coach USA, it said the deal involved 18 “businesses.” However, in its application seeking approval of the transfer, Kohlberg revealed that at least 24 Coach USA units were involved. Stagecoach has yet to explain the discrepancy between the 18 businesses and the 24+ companies listed on the Surface Transportation Board application of Kohlberg.

Kohlberg & Co. declined comment for this article and efforts to reach Lentzsch were unsuccessful.

Sandberg

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Before coming to Washington, Sandberg held law enforcement, supervisory and administrative posts with the Washington State Patrol, where she became the first woman in the U.S. to lead a state police agency. She was chief for six years.

Sandberg has a law degree from the University of Puget Sound School of Law, and a MBA from the City University, Bellevue, Wash, where she graduated magna cum laude.
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Operators in Ontario fight tourism slump

TORONTO — Bus tour operators are being invited to attend a trade show this fall that will promote tourist attractions in Ontario.

The Ontario Motor Coach Association is teaming up with the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership and Attractions Ontario to conduct the Ontario Attractions Trade Show.

The early November show is being billed as the best opportunity in Canada to get new tour ideas, see unique attractions in Ontario and create extraordinary tour experiences.

The show is part of OMCA’s effort to respond to the devastating impact the SARS epidemic has had on tourism in Toronto this year.

The goal is to help rebuild tourism in Toronto and Ontario.

OMCA has been working aggressively this summer to initiate and develop new partnerships that will help lead the recovery of group travel in Canada.

The Ontario Attractions trade show is being positioned to reach tour operators specializing in group packaged tour business.

The wide variety of attractions in Ontario and Toronto will be showcased at the event, and Toronto will be marketed as a city “open for business,” offering value. The show also will provide new tour ideas, and work to create tour experiences in one location.

For the one-time event, planners are estimating 100 attractions will participate, along with 100-plus tour operators. “These are challenging times for the tourism sector,” said Bill Kenny, president and CEO of the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership. “This new marketplace with OMCA and Attractions Ontario will help to show tour operators that Ontario has a multitude of excellent opportunities for the group tour market.”

OMCA Chairman Greg Hammond added: “Our industry needs to be aggressive. We are proposing this initiative to bring attention to the group market.”

The Ontario Attractions trade show will be Nov. 2 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Westin Harbour Castle Hotel in Toronto.

For information, contact the OMCA at (416) 229-6622 or e-mail ann@omca.com.

Illinois debates highway speeds

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — Gov. Rod Blagojevich has vetoed a bill that would increase speed limits for over-the-road buses and trucks to 65 mph on rural interstates.

But proponents of the bill vow they’ll work to override the veto.

Blagojevich reportedly said he blocked the bill because the severity of a crash involving a large truck increases dramatically with a rise in speed.

Commercial vehicle operators argue that uniform limits are safer. Having different speed limits — one for autos and another for large commercial vehicles — causes the slower-moving trucks and buses to clog the roadway and make car drivers more impatient.

Congress lifted the maximum limit states can impose on Interstates in 1995. Since then, 39 states have increased speed limits for both cars and trucks to the same level.

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