

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY



Double-Decker Service Begins. megabus.com put the first of 17 double-decker Van Hool coaches into service on a run between Chicago and Minneapolis. megabus.com and its corporate parents, Coach USA and Stagecoach Group, are investing \$10 million in the high-profile coaches. See story Page 18.

Feds to conduct bus crash tests to probe safety of passengers

WASHINGTON — The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration quietly revealed last month it has embarked on an ambitious program to investigate the safety of motorcoaches, including conducting a series of crash tests and bus rollovers, to evaluate a variety of passenger safety factors.

The program and tests are likely to result in new federal safety standards for over-the-road buses.

Matthew Daecher, president of Daecher Consulting Group, a leading coach industry safety consulting firm, said the document issued by NHTSA is a sign the agency is finally going to start long-awaited research and testing.

“The concentration of multiple fatality crash events in the last few years has brought attention and political pressure for them to do some evaluation, which they have been reluctant to undertake historically due to the cost involved and

relatively small fatality counts,” said Daecher.

Robert J. Forman, retired safety director at Trailways and Greyhound, agrees. He says the federal government has never conducted bus crash tests because every bus it crashes will cost \$300,000-\$400,000 and because the number of motorcoach fatalities each year is minuscule when compared to the deaths resulting from auto and truck crashes.

NHTSA officials see 40,000 car-truck deaths annually, versus 8-12 in buses. “Where are they going to put their resources?” Forman asks. He says the only bus crash testing that has been done in the past 50 years was by General Motors of PD-4106s and by the Canadian government of school buses.

According to the program blue print issued by NHTSA, the federal agency will zero in on developing standards — if they are needed —

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Gulf Coast casinos going, growing

BILOXI, Miss. — While much of America’s Gulf Coast continues its slow recovery from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, two years later, casinos along the Biloxi beachfront are flourishing.

Of the 13 Mississippi coast casinos that were severely damaged or destroyed in 2005, 11 have reopened, and all have expanded and upgraded their properties.

Plus, the Hard Rock Hotel Casino, which was heavily damaged by Hurricane Katrina just days before it was to open in August 2005, (finally) opened its doors in July.

The company that owns the Hard Rock reportedly collected more than \$160 million in hurricane-related insurance proceeds.

Now, the Gulf Coast casinos are reporting higher revenue than before the hurricane — sometimes

with fewer customers — as the remaining army of construction and relief workers flow into the casinos seeking entertainment and diversion.

Many of the area’s movie theaters, bars and malls remain closed, leaving casinos as the principal form of entertainment and contributing to the casino boom.

Gulf Coast boosters also were buoyed this summer by the openings of Emeril’s Fish House, Ruth’s Chris Steak House and the Hard Rock Hotel Casino, plus the expansion of Treasure Bay Casino.

Emeril Lagasse, the nationally recognized New Orleans chef and television personality, opened his first Mississippi restaurant at the Island View Casino Hotel in Gulfport.

The Ruth’s Chris Steak House, which also started in New

Orleans, now has its first location in Mississippi and is part of the Hard Rock Hotel Casino’s dining choices.

The Hard Rock will have its own niche in the Mississippi market. The rock ‘n roll memorabilia, lounges and laid-back atmosphere of the property, as well as its headline entertainment, are targeted to a younger demographic.

“The dynamics of our market are accelerating,” says Stephen Richer, executive director of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The Mississippi casinos strong performance and large employee base has bolstered both local tax revenues and recovery efforts.

“There’s no doubt that (casinos) are the engine driving this train,” says Biloxi Mayor A.J. Hol-

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Nursing homes develop plan for responding to hurricanes

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — During Hurricane Katrina, at least 139 residents of nursing homes became storm fatalities, many because they were not evacuated.

Nursing home leaders from eight Southeastern states have issued a new report, vowing to avoid a repeat of the Katrina transportation debacle.

The primary finding of the report is that nursing homes must be incorporated into disaster response systems at all levels of society and government — national, state and local.

That would be in sharp contrast to the events of Hurricane Katrina when nursing homes did not

receive the same early calls to evacuate as hospitals.

And nursing home administrators found agreements with transportation providers worthless as emergency operations centers commandeered their buses for use in hospital evacuations.

The report is the result of two years of research and two planning summits where state, federal and local emergency planning teams, including representatives from key federal agencies, including FEMA, shared information and ideas with nursing home leaders.

The top two elected leaders of the United Motorcoach Associa-

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Fullington convinces transit to halt trolley service

INDIANA, Pa. — Another trolley bus charter service operated by a public transit agency has been pitched — kicking and screaming — into the trash heap.

Indiana County (Pa.) Transit Authority operated trolley buses for 11 years, violating federal charter rules the whole time. Finally, Fullington Trailways of Clearfield, Pa., had had enough and complained — courteously but resolutely — to the agency, demanding it stop the illegal service.

“You have to be firm with these people,” said Aerial Full-

ington Weisman, president and CEO of the coach company that was founded by her parents.

In seeking to halt the trolleys, Mrs. Weisman resisted pressure from tourism officials, lobbyists and others, pointing out to each of them that what the transit authority was doing was illegal — pure and simple.

The transit agency, known locally as IndiGO, primarily rented its trolley buses to local brides to cart their wedding parties from churches to receptions.

In grudgingly and reluctantly giving up the service, the executive

director of the transit agency, Jerry Blair, told a local newspaper his agency had been “forced” to halt the service by the actions of “the motorcoach industry,” and its two trade associations, working in league with the Federal Transit Administration.

Blair clearly implied that the FTA and the coach industry had propounded unreasonable rules that made trolley bus rental by public transit agencies illegal.

Then, in a bit of double speak, he suggested the federal rules were unclear. Yet, at the same time, he admitted his agency had been

resisting — for years — FTA efforts to get him to stop the service.

Of course, the FTA charter service rules are not new, are not ambiguous to most transit agencies, and have been part of the public transit regulatory landscape far longer than IndiGO has been operating its illegal service.

“The board and staff of IndiGO are extremely sad that we have been forced, permanently, to halt all trolley rentals immediately,” said Blair.

IndiGO would never have terminated the trolley rentals by its own decision, Blair said, but the

appropriateness of the trolley rentals was challenged by a “private transportation operator” (Fullington), and IndiGO received no support for its defense from the FTA.

“The Federal Transit Administration, as well as the motorcoach industry — represented by two major associations — has formulated regulations that make it impossible for us to legally provide any sort of private transportation,” Blair said. “For years there have been regulations that have caused issues about what is legal and not

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ▶

12 charged in Pennsylvania with fraud in bus ‘accident’

PHILADELPHIA — Ten people have been arrested on insurance-fraud charges in what the state attorney general says was a staged bus accident in April 2004.

Altogether, 12 people are charged in the case, Attorney General Tom Corbett announced. He said a chartered casino bus owned

by Wertz Motor Coaches of Marcus Hook, Pa., was rammed by a car in Germantown, Pa., shortly after it left for Atlantic City.

As it turned out, said Corbett, the car was owned by a cousin of one of the bus passengers, who later filed claims for treatment of injuries.

Corbett said 21 passengers were listed on the police report of the accident, but 29 filed claims with Lancer Insurance Co., which insured the Wertz coach.

“This alleged scheme was an elaborate attempt to scam Wertz Motor Coaches and Lancer Insurance out of thousands of dollars,”

Corbett said. “These are serious allegations that carry significant fines and jail time.”

Corbett said the Wertz bus was scheduled to depart from the pick-up location at 1:30 p.m., but was delayed by Arthur Brown III, the group’s leader. At approximately 2:40 p.m., Brown allegedly received

a cell phone call and then determined they were ready to leave.

The investigation revealed that approximately five minutes after departing from the pick-up location, the bus was struck in the right middle luggage bay doors by an uninsured vehicle. Both vehicles

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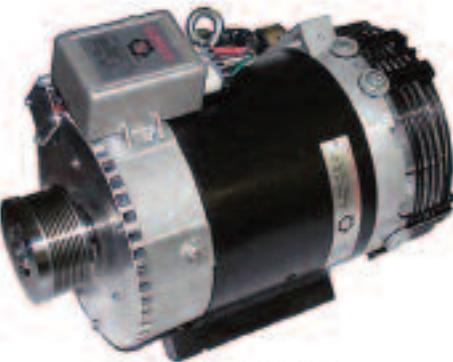
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Transits seek charter firms

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 provide the service.

Greater Lynchburg, Va. Deadline: Sept. 20, 2007. Write to: Michael J. Carroll, General Manager, Greater Lynchburg Transit Co., 1301 Kemper St./P.O. Box 797, Lynchburg, VA 24505.

Abilene, Texas. Deadline: Sept. 28, 2007. Write to: Brad Patrick, General Manager, City-Link Transit, 1189 S. 2nd St., Abilene, TX 79602.

Jefferson City, Mo. Deadline: Sept. 28, 2007. Write to: Richard Turner, Transit Division Director, City of Jefferson, Department of Community Development, 320 E. McCarty St., Jefferson City, MO 65101.

Mexican trucks begin roaming U.S. roads

NUEVO LAREDO, Mexico — For 14 years, the United States government failed to live up to an agreement it signed with Canada and Mexico that seemingly gave the green light for over-the-road trucks from Mexico to travel anywhere in the U.S.

That ended, somewhat, early this month when the U.S. began a year-long demonstration program that allows about 1,000 Mexican trucks on U.S. roadways. Mexican buses are not included in the plan.

However, a similar number of U.S. trucks will have access to

Mexican highways.

Even though President Bush made opening the border an early priority, it has taken his administration nearly seven years to run a gauntlet of legal, environmental, safety and Congressional challenges to get the pilot program on the road.

In adopting the plan, Bush was carrying out a portion of the North American Free Trade Agreement that was negotiated by the first President Bush, ratified by Congress, and then endorsed and implemented by President Clinton in 1993.

Given the unrelenting opposi-

tion to the program by the Teamsters union, one would have thought the limited reintroduction of Mexican trucks to U.S. highways was one of the most daunting transportation challenges the nation faces.

In most respects it's a minor matter. The program will allow a few hundred Mexican trucks. More than 7 million trucks roll down U.S. roads every day. Will anyone but disgruntled Teamsters even notice the Mexican rigs?

Twenty-five years ago, over-the-road trucks from Mexico and Canada traveled at will throughout

the U.S. Then a moratorium banned new Mexican carriers (but not Canadian truckers) from sending trucks beyond certain commercial zones just inside our borders.

The U.S. Department of Transportation says it has spent \$500 million since 1995 to modernize border safety facilities and hire and train the more than 500 federal and state inspectors who check trucks crossing the border every day.

There are plenty of skeptics out there who insist that still isn't enough.

We're about to find out.

USDOT says Mexican trucks safer than U.S. big rigs

SAN FRANCISCO — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration says the Mexican big rigs that have been coming into the United States for years and operating, until now, in narrow commercial zones along the

border, are safer than U.S.-owned over-the-road trucks.

U.S. attorneys representing the FMCSA and the U.S. Department of Transportation made the assertion in a legal motion filed with the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Ap-

peals in San Francisco.

The motion was against the Teamsters union which was making a last-gasp effort to block the Bush Administration from allowing Mexican big rigs to cross the border and travel anywhere in

the U.S.

The administration motion said Mexican trucks make 4.5 million trips across the border every year and have a safety record that meets or exceeds the safety record of U.S. trucks.

New carrier registration system quickly adopted by many states

WASHINGTON — The new Unified Carrier Registration Agreement that replaces the Single State Registration System went online last week, and states began rushing to adopt the new system and collect its fees.

Under procedures approved by the UCRA board of directors, states could begin collecting registration fees as of Sept. 10 and enforcing the system as of Nov. 15.

The Indiana Department of Revenue is hosting the national online UCRA registration and payment system for all 36 states participating in the program.

All UCRA-member states are required to use the Indiana system, although they may run parallel systems of their own. For that reason, any coach operator or trucker, no matter where it is based, could register and pay UCRA fees as early as Sept. 10.

The system is at www.ucr.in.gov.

However, one coach industry executive urged caution by operators in jumping in and registering right away.

"I have concerns that some operators will simply complete the online form and make the payment before receiving notice (from their home state).

"Potentially, the payment may never get posted correctly. Meanwhile, the state sends the operator a notice. If operators wait until they receive a notice from their home state that means they are in the system," said the executive.

He also expressed concern that information from MCS 150 forms in the USDOT database may be incorrect or outdated. He predicted states will be looking at the MCS 150 information closely because Unified Carrier Registration Agreement fees are based on fleet size.

"It is imperative that the message gets out that operators make sure the MCS 150 is correct and that it matches their UCR submissions."

For most operators, the UCRA fees are less than the old system and the program less burdensome.

New Texas laws could impact operators

AUSTIN, Texas — A new law that went into effect this month in Texas could prove to be a nuisance to coach operators.

Senate Bill 545, and House Bills 1638 and 2077 added more than 40 municipal Texas police departments to those police agencies eligible to have the state Department of Public Safety train their officers to become certified to enforce commercial motor vehicle safety standards.

Sheriffs or deputy sheriffs meeting certain conditions also are eligible to apply for certification.

Separately, Senate Bill 332 authorizes the state to prohibit a motor carrier from operating in intrastate commerce if the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has prohibited the carrier from operating in interstate commerce because it is deemed unfit or unsafe.

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N. Kentucky police to target aggressive drivers on I-75/71

CRITTENDEN, Ky. — Law enforcement agencies in Kentucky have received a federal grant to crack down on speeding and aggressive driving on Interstate 75/71 in northern Kentucky.

The \$1 million federal Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program grant also will be used to address problems on portions of Interstate 65 between Louisville and Lebanon Junction, Ky.

The Department of Kentucky Vehicle Enforcement considers the two stretches of interstate to be the most dangerous sections of highway in the state.

"We want to use the grant to address aggressive driving behavior on I-75 as well as increase proper driving behavior," said a spokesman for the vehicle enforcement department. "In the end, obviously, our goal is to reduce the rate of serious injury and fatal collisions."

The effort will include a number of organizations that regularly patrol the stretch of I-75/71, including the Kentucky State Police and the Boone County

Sheriff's Department.

The stretch of I-75 known as the Cut-in-the-Hill — from Covington to Fort Wright, Ky. — has been particularly dangerous. Law officers say the major problem has been speeding.

Last year, the state installed signs over the northbound lanes warning of the steep grade. That was followed in January with yellow warning lights that were positioned at the top of the hill in an effort to slow traffic.

The state also announced plans this year to place solar-powered speed monitoring signs along the stretch of road in hopes drivers would heed the message and slow down.

And in March, the Kentucky State police assigned a trooper to patrol the interstate between I-275 and the Ohio River. That was the first time the state police has had such a detail in more than 10 years.

The crackdown on excessive speeding, improper lane changing, reckless driving and driving too close to another vehicle is expected to start this month.

Dallas highway getting higher tolls

DALLAS — Tolls are increasing later this month on the Dallas North Tollway.

The North Texas Tollway Authority adopted the higher tolls along with a plan to begin converting its toll roads, including the President George Bush Turnpike, to all-electronic collection next year.

On the Dallas North Tollway, a three-axle motorcoach currently

pays \$1.20 cash, or 95 cents via TollTag, to drive the main plazas north from Wycliff Avenue to Keller Springs, or south from Parker Road to Keller Springs.

After the increase on Sept. 29, a three-axle coach will pay \$2 cash, or \$1.40 via TollTag.

The increase is to cover inflation costs and to maintain, repair and expand the system, the author-

ity said.

The last systemwide increase was in 1999.

The North Texas Tollway Authority voted last month to begin converting its roads to all-electronic collection by May 2010.

The Dallas tollway will become all-electronic in 2009 and the President George Bush Turnpike in 2010.

Quicker e-ticketing spreads to Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana has become the latest state to adopt e-ticketing for state law enforcement agencies.

The system, which will be available later this year to police and sheriff departments statewide, is expected to save time and money, reduce errors, and free court employees from having to type information into computers.

It also will move citation writing from a sometimes barely legible handwritten affair into the computer age.

Called electronic Citation and Warning System, or eCWS, the system will allow police officers to scan a driver license and registration using laptop computers in their patrol cars. The driver's name,

address, license number and other information are transferred to a ticket form.

Drivers will still receive paper citations, but they will be printouts produced on the spot.

Once implemented, the system also will allow police to get real-time information about driver records, including whether they had been stopped earlier the same day by another officer and issued a warning.

According to one court official, traffic tickets represent almost half of all documents that launch court proceedings in Indiana.

Indiana State Police Superintendent Paul Whitesell said it takes about 15 minutes for an officer to write a ticket. With the electronic

system, that time will be cut to five to seven minutes. Indiana troopers issue about 750,000 warnings and tickets annually.

Whitesell also said the system could help keep troopers safer by reducing the amount of time they spend outside their patrol vehicles. He noted four troopers had been injured this summer when they were struck by cars after stopping vehicles along the roadway.

The cost of testing and implementing the system is \$2.4 million. Funding is from several federal agencies, including the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and U.S. Department of Homeland Security. About two dozen states are putting similar systems into place.

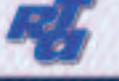
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A lesson in customer service?

There may be a lesson or two in bus-operator customer service and better company planning to be gained from this exchange found on a travel Website.

Question: On a recent visit to Las Vegas, we purchased a round-trip shuttle bus ticket from the airport to our hotel through Gray Line. We followed all their instructions, calling to schedule our return well in advance of our departure as we had done many times before.

But this time our shuttle didn't show up. When I called Gray Line to say we were about to miss our flight, an agent told me our bus was running behind schedule and suggested we arrange another ride to the airport.

She promised to reimburse us if we mailed our receipt to Gray Line.

The cab ride from our hotel to the airport cost about \$20, and when I got back home, I mailed the receipt to the company. I haven't heard a word from Gray Line since then. I've even followed up with a second letter and e-mail, but both have been ignored.

The money isn't what bothers me. I wonder if they do this often and how they get away with it. Thanks for your help.

Signed: Joan Cole, Andover, Minn.

Response: A Gray Line shuttle should have been there when you

checked out of your hotel, of course. After all, the company's Website leaves you with the impression that a ride is never far away.

"We operate shuttle transportation continuously," it says. "You can always count on Gray Line Las Vegas to be on time — with courteous and professional drivers, we get you there with flare!"

Well, the only thing that was probably flaring was your temper after Gray Line left you rideless and late arriving to the airport. It could have smoothed things over by mailing you a prompt refund.

Maybe the check was in the shuttle that never arrived. Oh, well.

I couldn't find any kind of contract language on the Gray Line Las Vegas Website. The Website of its parent company, Dallas-based Coach America, wasn't much more helpful. The site was long on promotional language — promising "safe and convenient" transportation that "takes the worry out of your travel plans" — without any kind of legal agreement that defines its obligations to you, the passenger.

Sorry for being such a stickler about fine print but it's unclear what Gray Line is obligated to do when it confirms your reservation. Obviously, it honors a vast majority of its reservations — otherwise it

wouldn't stay in business.

But does it have to? Based on the information it offers customers online, the answer is "No."

Now, there are some things that Gray Line can't control. Shuttles sometimes break down. Traffic happens. But it can control what happens next. Why not notify customers so they can make alternate arrangements? A representative could easily have called your cell phone when the van failed to show up.

Instead, Gray Line waited for you to call.

Here's what you should have done. Instead of waiting for the shuttle to be late, you could have called Gray Line a half-hour before your scheduled pick-up, just to be sure everything was running on time. I do that now, after having missed more than a few flights because of a late bus, van or car service. It shouldn't be necessary but, unfortunately, it is.

I contacted Coach America on your behalf. A short while later, you received a letter from Ryan Emison, a general manager in Las Vegas, apologizing for the no-show and assuring you "this is not our usual way of doing business."

Gray Line refunded your \$20 and offered two free round-trip transfers on your next visit to Vegas.

Good customer service begins with good people

What's the best way to improve the customer service your company provides?

Improve the people providing it. Customer service consultant and trainer Liz Tahir says there is no way that the quality of customer service can exceed the quality of people who provide it.

"Think you can get by paying

the lowest wage, giving the fewest benefits, doing the least training for your employees? It will show. Companies don't help customers... people do.

"Realize that your people will treat your customer the way they are treated," says Tahir.

"Employees take their cue from management.

"Consistent rude customer service is a reflection not as much on the employee as on management," Tahir asserts.

"If a customer makes a request for something special, do everything you can to say yes.

"Mr. Marshall Field was right on in his famous statement: "Give the lady what she wants."

More filling station pumps get hot-fuel warning labels

PHOENIX — More fuel pumps in California and Arizona are getting labels warning that the energy content of fuel varies with temperature.

ExxonMobil is now posting small informational decals at all of its company operated and company owned-dealer operated stations in Arizona and California to advise customers of the measurement basis, said Prem Nair, a company spokeswoman.

"It is simply a reminder that the dispenser sells motor fuel by volume," Nair says.

The decals on the pumps are called a "Motor Fuel Measurement Notice." It reads: "This device dispenses motor fuel by volume measured in gallons. It does not adjust the volume for variations in the temperature of the fuel. The temperature of motor fuel affects the energy content of each gallon dispensed."

Oil refiner Tesoro initiated the sticker effort at its California stations, including the USA Petroleum chain and more than 250 Shell stations recently acquired by the company. (See Aug. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Meanwhile, a U.S. senator has introduced a bill that would require fuel pumps to have automatic temperature-compensation devices.

Fuel expands as its temperature rises, but it is sold by volume at the retail pump at a benchmark of 60 degrees. Elsewhere in the supply chain, fuel is sold temperature-adjusted, meaning slightly more gasoline and diesel are provided at higher temperatures.

U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., proposed legislation last month that would require the installation of automatic temperature-compensating equipment in new and upgraded retail pumps within six years.

The Future Accountability in Retail Fuel Act would provide assistance for retailers to comply — \$1,000 per pump, but no more than \$10,000 per retailer — and impose penalties on those that don't. The bill, S1997, has been referred to the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

The Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, based in McCaskill's home state, has endorsed the legislation, as has Public Citizen, Consumers Union, the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights, the Consumer Federation of America and the U.S. Public Interest Research Groups.

In Arizona, where the hot fuel issue is heating up, so to speak, the state Department of Weights and Measures has begun taking fuel temperatures at stations to get a 12-month average.

Already it has found summer fuel temperatures of about 104 degrees. Based on that finding, Phoenix-area motorists are paying about \$1 more for a 15-gallon fill-up than they would for the same amount of energy if the gasoline were 60 degrees, the industry standard.

That figure rises when fuel prices hit the \$3 mark they saw earlier this summer.

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ISSUE NO. 108

A former driver ponders the driver shortage issue

By Robert J. Beard
We managed.

Actually, as I reflect back, I managed.

I drove for a major line-service bus company on the East Coast for 30 years, starting in 1961. I worked the extra board full time and when I reached a point of enough seniority, I bid a two-day regular run.

Only once during those years of driving did I break \$30,000 in annual income.

During those years, my wife raised our four children, got them through Catholic schools, helped them with homework, took care of them when they were sick and to the doctor when necessary, to family affairs, parties, shopping for clothes, all without me. I was a full-time bus driver.

Who knew when I would be return home? Tomorrow? Four days from now? In two weeks? My family, for the most part, had to carry on without me for 30 years.

Still, we were able to buy a home and struggle to get it paid for. We bought used cars, outlet-shop clothing, and, at one time, used food stamps. All during those 30 years we never took a family vacation or bought a new suit.

We desperately needed a second, full-time income. But how, when the bus driver wage earner had no at-home schedule? Even when I was home I had to sleep.

I thank my friend Dave Millhouser for his remarks concerning the infamous driver shortage (June 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*). I even have to agree with some of the arguments that Michael Kraft presents and some of his remedies (June 15 issue). Debby Marcum's brilliant writing on the driver and the position's declining prestige almost brought tears to my eyes (Aug. 1 issue). In the 60s and 70s, I was one proud, sharp-looking, uniformed coach operator.

Today? I would be just another servant to the masses.

Heck, migrant workers are earning more than many charter and tour bus drivers. In fact, I suspect that a Burger King worker who put in as many hours as a full-time bus driver would earn more at their low wage if they were paid overtime for hours in

excess of 40 hours a week. And, they could go home when their shift ended. Never forget — bus drivers seldom, if ever, earn overtime no matter how many hours they work.

Families can't afford homes, raise children, have decent cars and clothes and live in a better part of town without at least two wage earners in the family. This has been true for decades. Many couples have or want to work additional part-time jobs to carry their children through college.

Now, I ask you, how can a family have two wage earners when one of them, the full-time bus driver, can go to work at any time of the day or night, and not be able to tell the spouse when he or she will be back — 10 hours from now, maybe next week, maybe in two weeks?

When a bus company hires a full-time, over-the-road bus driver out of a family, it limits that family to one, full-time, low-wage family income. You do a lot more than just hire his or her services for a number of hours or days. You also interact with that whole family because of how you need to use that driver.

Low wage? Oh, yes. I believe the average wage for a charter or tour bus driver today is around \$10 an hour straight time. I understand it is even less in Florida, California and other areas where retirees are able to make themselves available.

I also have been told that migrant workers, garbage collectors, illegal aliens working out of neighborhood collection points make much more than that. In a motorcoach driver you have the one person that meets all your customers, makes or breaks your reputation with those customers, has in his possession your coach worth almost a half-a-million dollars, and who, with one preventable accident can put you out of business.

Including yourself, is there a more important person in your company?

For years there have been cries of "where are the good drivers?"

"I hire them and they're gone within 6 months."

"I'm forced to hire people with no high school diploma or people with criminal and traffic records."

"I won't hire management

Sleep 101: What do drivers need?

The schedule of a motorcoach driver can be erratic, and getting enough sleep a challenge.

And even on nights (or days) when drivers do get a full cycle of sleep, they may still wake up feeling fatigued.

An inconsistent sleep schedule and possibly even a sleep disorder could be affecting a driver more than he or she realizes.

According to Dr. Carol Ash, medical director of the Sleep for Life program in Hillsborough, N.J., these problems can affect driving in a couple different ways.

First is the issue of sleep debt, which is a consistently inadequate amount of sleep. "Sleep debt is dangerous," says Dr. Ash. "It impairs focus, concentration and judgment."

If you've gone 18 consecutive hours without sleeping, the affect on your brain is the same as if you were legally drunk.

"Once sleep debt reaches a certain severity," she says, "microsleeps — tiny periods of sleep — intrude into wakefulness."

Obviously, a driver isn't safe behind the wheel if these microsleeps are forcing him or her to unknowingly doze off.

personnel who do not have CDLs. In my company, they have to be available to drive."

"I offer my operators a competitive wage, good health insurance, safety meetings and awards, an open door policy to my office, vacations, etc., etc., etc. But, I either can't find them or they quit soon after hiring on."

Well, I suggest this: The driver you hired liked his new job, probably liked you, your company and the benefits you offered. He was just the type of driver you needed to build your company and its customer base of satisfied people.

But, after a few weeks of employment, it was the driver's spouse who saw the future for their family: one full-time wage earner — with low wages at that — and no time at home to help raise and support the family and no way for the spouse to schedule another full- or part-time job. Your driver was given an ultimatum: find another more sane way to support and raise the family or else.

You've heard of a minimum wage, a competitive wage, and lately, a living wage. If this industry wants a supply of honest, professional, long-term drivers to

The second concern is that an irregular sleep schedule can mess up an individual's circadian rhythm, the normal rhythm of your body. Humans are wired to sleep when it's dark and be awake when it's light. So, if your circadian rhythm is disturbed, you're going to feel grumpy, groggy and gloomy even if you are getting five or six hours of sleep.

Aside from your irregular schedule is the matter of sleep disorders.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, 28 percent of commercial drivers suffer from moderate to severe sleep apnea. Apnea occurs when an individual's airway closes off during sleep and prevents a person from taking in the oxygen needed while asleep. It can lead to a heart attack, a stroke, diabetes and more.

How can an individual determine whether he or she might suffer from sleep apnea?

According to Dr. Ash, some common signs are: snoring; waking with a headache and dry mouth; acid reflux; frequent nighttime urination, and a neck size of more than 17 inches in

men or 15 inches in women. If you suffer from these symptoms, check with your doctor.

"Sometimes obstructive sleep apnea is more prevalent in obese people and can be treated by weight loss," states Ash, "but this is a condition that affects people of all body types. The gold standard of care is a Continuous Positive Airway Pressure unit, a medical device that gently blows air into the airway to keep it open during sleep."

Whether an individual is sleep deprived, suffering from apnea or both, if a person finds she or he is getting drowsy while driving, there is only one option: Sleep. Caffeine, loud music or cool air from an outside window aren't real remedies.

Dr. Ash says that if you can't pull over and sleep for a full cycle, aim for a 20-minute nap. Anything longer will actually put you into a deeper sleep phase, causing you to wake up feeling groggy.

Try to determine how many hours of sleep you require and do your best to get it. Not an easy task, of course. And see your doctor if you suspect you have a sleep disorder.

build our bus companies, then we had better coin a new wage — the Family Wage — because, if a driver, no matter how much they like their job, can't support their family in a reasonably safe and comfortable fashion, they will move on to other employment where they can.

To my way of thinking, if a full-time charter and tour-bus driver can't declare at least \$50,000 a year in annual income, he is shorting his family, and his employer is shorting him, and his family, also. I realize many Greyhound drivers, many transit drivers and some charter and tour drivers do make that much and more, but most do not.

Most likely, with the competition factor added in, the industry will probably never pay this professional driver his worth. You have a company to run, other employees to pay, new coaches to buy, and terrible maintenance and fuel prices beating at you all day. At the same time, there's that friend of a friend who has that old bus or two in his back yard who will do a charter for almost half of what should be charged.

The shade tree bus companies who cheat on their insurance, cut their maintenance, have people

waiting to drive for close to the minimum wage will always be there fighting for your business and cutting your throat. And, yes, there are some good companies out there who always seem to have a price lower than yours.

So, I do believe it is less individual greed and more competition from others that forces you to pay the most important employee in your company far less than what they deserve.

The driver shortage? To my way of thinking, with all you are up against, the driver's shortage is here to stay and no amount of 'side' benefits will halt that shortage.

Let me add this: 2007 marks my 47th year working within the bus industry I very much care for. Although I'm no longer driving, I'm still involved in many other aspects of bus transportation. I cherish the countrywide friendships I've made. But, if I had the chance, would I do it all over again? No, I would not. Not as a driver.

It was only after I retired from driving that I realized how hard a life I had presented to my wife and children. They didn't deserve this just because I liked being a bus driver.

Accident fraud

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

sustained very little damage and were removed under their own power from the scene of the accident.

Corbett said 20 of the 21 pas-

sengers on the bus immediately reported injuries and were transported by the Wertz bus to the Medical College of Pennsylvania Hospital.

Lancer eventually received claims for all 21 passengers, plus eight individuals who were not on

the bus at the time of the crash. The reported injuries were all "soft-tissue" injuries.

Corbett said the driver of the car also accompanied the bus to the hospital, but when police arrived he left.

According to the criminal complaint, the owner of the car was a

cousin of Shahiedah Nicholson, a passenger on the bus who sought medical treatment totaling \$4,449 for 53 alleged therapy sessions for lower back pain that took place between April and September 2004.

Corbett said Nicholson's sister, Shaakira Nicholson; her aunt, Trina

Nicholson, and her aunt's husband, Antonio Tarrance, also filed insurance claims even though they were not on the bus at the time of the accident.

Corbett said the bus was chartered by Brown for another individual who supplied the money and sold bus tickets with two of his brothers.

The affidavit states Brown allegedly filed claims for nine chiropractic sessions and pursued litigation against the insurance company. No monetary amount was provided for these sessions.

Lancer received medical bills for each of the 10 defendants arrested. The total amount billed for the 12 defendants being charged was more than \$29,556, with more than \$26,022 paid.

All 12 defendants are being charged with two counts of insurance fraud, one count of theft by deception, one count of criminal attempt to commit theft by deception, and one count of criminal conspiracy to commit theft by deception. Each charge is a felony of the third degree, which holds a maximum penalty of seven years imprisonment and a \$15,000 fine.

The defendants range in age from 23 to 50.

Corbett said the investigation is still ongoing.

Football is back, Madden is riding

CHICAGO — America's most famous bus passenger, NFL broadcaster and MCI celebrity spokesman John Madden, is back on the road with the start of the National Football League season.

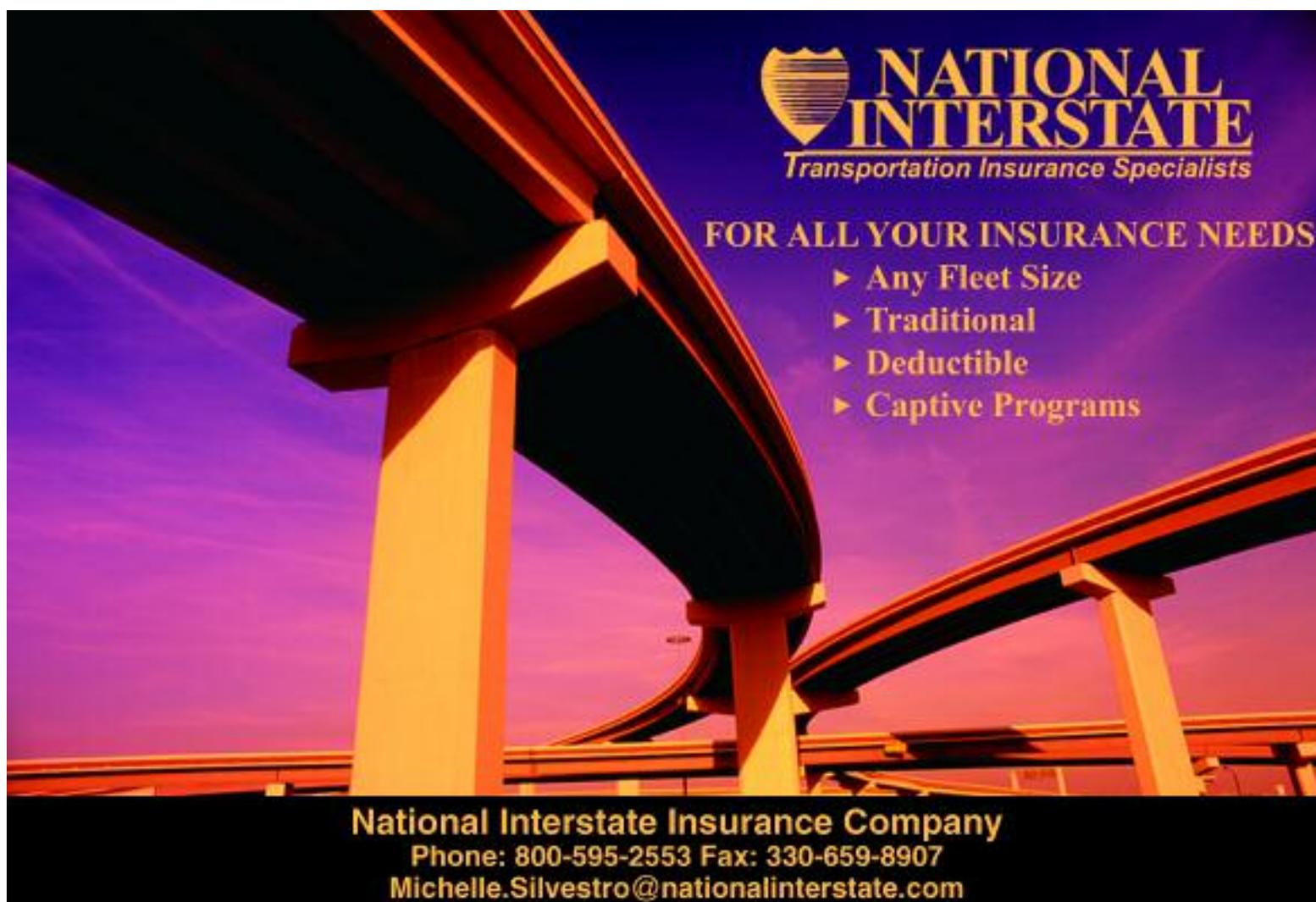
And this year, Madden's motorcoach travels are being promoted by his employer — NBC Sports, and motorcoach sponsor, Outback Steakhouse.

NBC conducted a contest early this month in which participants guessed how long it would take Madden's MCI conversion coach to travel from Indianapolis to Dallas.

Outback is promoting what it calls MaddenMiles. For every mile Madden's coach travels during the season, \$10 will be donated to the Juvenile Diabetes Association and Muscular Dystrophy.

On Sept. 19, MCI is hosting an event at Chicago Soldier Field where customers will have the opportunity to meet Madden.

MCI has been hosting Madden events annually for years in different parts of the U.S. It gives operators a chance to hear Madden's on-the-road adventures, gain insight into NFL players and coaches, and network and lunch with peers.



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UMA, Alabama operators fight Mobile airport shuttle

ATLANTA — The United Motorcoach Association has filed a formal complaint with the Federal Transit Administration asserting that an airport shuttle operated by Metro Transit of Mobile, Ala., violates federal charter service rules.

The Alabama Motorcoach Association and Thrasher Brothers Trailways also have filed protests with the Alabama Public Service Commission about the service.

The UMA complaint, submitted to the regional FTA administrator in Atlanta, contends Metro Transit has repeatedly failed to issue “will-

ing-and-able” notices to private bus operators, as required by federal regulations, for the shuttle.

The association also says the service does not qualify as mass transit.

Were those violations not bad enough, the association says Metro Transit is planning to expand the

illegal service “well beyond any geographic obligations they may have to the immediate community.”

Metro Transit has proposed extending the airport shuttle to seven counties beyond Mobile and Mobile County.

“There are numerous private operators competing in the Mobile

area, offering an array of services, including taxi, vans, minibuses and motorcoaches,” UMA Vice President of Industry Relations Ken Presley wrote in the complaint to FTA.

“The need for taxpayers to subsidize airport shuttle service in the Mobile area simply does not exist,”

he added.

UMA asked the FTA to investigate the complaint on an expedited basis in view of the pending expansion of the illegal service.

The Mobile Airport Authority leases four vehicles — two midsize buses, a minivan and a SUV — from Metro Transit for the service.

Nursing homes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

tion, plus a key staff member, participated in the most recent planning summit held in May.

The contributions made at the summit by UMA Chairman Brian Scott of Escot Bus Lines in Largo, Fla.; Vice Chairman Godfrey LeBron of Paradise Trailways in Hicksville, N.Y., and Ken Presley, vice president of industry relations at UMA, are mentioned prominently in the report.

For example, in the section on “promising transportation practices,” it cites recommendations from the UMA team that prior to a disaster nursing homes develop personal relationships with their contracted motorcoach provider and make that operator part of the nursing home team.

“The relationship will be an important asset during an emergency,” the UMA recommendation said.

On the national level, UMA suggested that nursing home associations establish a central coordinating unit to work alongside national representatives from motorcoach operators so available transportation can be immediately identified when needed.

Presley and Bob Watkins of Consolidated Safety Services proposed that nursing homes purchase retired transit buses for use during emergency evacuations. The idea generated a great deal of interest during the summit.

Relatively cheap to buy, the buses could be maintained and driven for a fee by private bus companies.

The biggest advantage, said Watkins, would be assurance that rides would be available when needed.

The report issued by the nursing home leaders is called *Caring for Vulnerable Elders during a Disaster: National Findings of the 2007 Nursing Home Hurricane Summit*.

To read the complete report, go to www.fhca.org.

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legal for transit authorities to do. ... The type of (trolley rental) service we were giving is no longer acceptable.”

(Correction: It has never been acceptable.)

At the core of the opposition, Blair said, is the fact that IndiGO,

as a public transit authority, in some cases uses federal money to purchase equipment. “Not a penny of federal money” was used to purchase the trolleys, Blair said, but the IndiGO trolleys are stored and maintained in facilities built with federal dollars.

Blair admitted that IndiGO had long resisted “suggestions” by FTA inspectors that the transit

authority drop its trolley rentals. He went on to explain he didn’t halt the service because IndiGO never received a “cease-and-desist letter” from the FTA and because there was a steady demand for the rentals.

“The FTA believes we are not compliant,” said Blair, and to avoid exposing IndiGO to “crushing penalties that would damage

IndiGO permanently,” the transit authority leadership has decided to immediately eliminate the trolley rentals.

“We’re out of options now,” said Blair. “We don’t like it. We don’t think it’s a good thing. We think it hurts families. ... But there’s nothing we can do. ... Regulations are regulations.”

For half the year, the IndiGO

trolleys were popular vehicles. “From May to October it was rare for them to be sitting still on Saturdays,” said Blair.

He estimated the trolleys — after deducting operating costs — generated a profit of about \$18,000 annually. That money, according to Blair, was used to lower the costs of providing service on IndiGO’s fixed routes.

Mrs. Weisman said her company has been reluctant to blow the whistle on area transit agencies that are violating federal charter rules because it has had long-time, cordial relations with most of them.

However, in asking the public agencies to halt their illegal services, Mrs. Weisman has approached them with both an iron fist and a smile on her face. She’s taking on another area transit agency and has yet another in her sights.

As Victor Parra, president and CEO of the United Motorcoach Association, told Mrs. Weisman: “We really need more folks like you to take a stand. Transit companies around the country have been performing these kind of services — charter work — with very little or no opposition from operators. On behalf of all private operators in this country, thank you.”

At the same time, however, Mrs. Weisman is concerned about possible fallout. She said one transit system has been charging a dollar a mile for its charter services. She thinks potential customers will suffer significant sticker shock when informed of the real-world prices that private operators must charge.

Now that it’s out of the trolley rental business, Blair says IndiGO will likely advertise and sell the older of its two trolleys, and perhaps keep the newer one for use on IndiGO’s fixed routes and in parades and similar events.

Good use of a \$250,000 asset.

Expensive parking

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — There are a lot of places in the U.S. where parking a motorcoach for the weekend is expensive. But it’s unlikely many approach the price of parking a bus at one particular spot here.

On the grass of the infield at Lowe’s Motor Speedway.

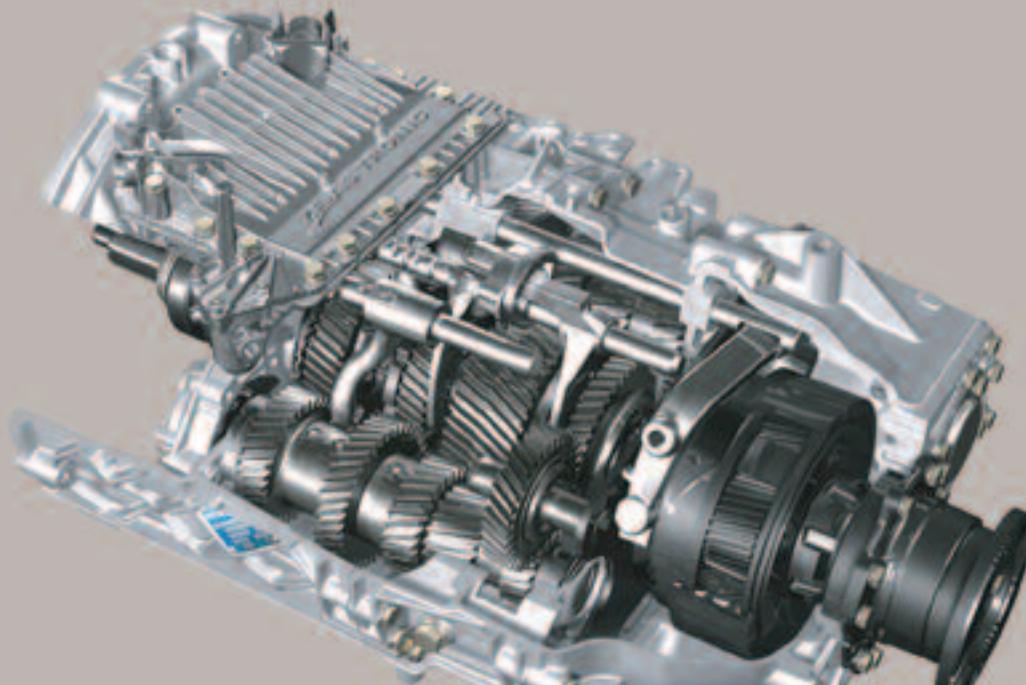
There are five bus parking spots in the Lowe’s infield that have grass, and on a race weekend it costs \$5,000 to rent one. That’s according to speedway tour guides.

Supposedly, folks like NASCAR superstar Jeff Gordon use the spots for their conversion coaches and do it every year.



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Rear, side-vision cameras add new measure of safety

ELKHART, Ind. — Increasing congestion, a shrinking number of motorcoach parking spaces and the high cost of repairing body damage have more coach operators looking at camera-based vision assistance systems.

For years, manufacturers of midsize buses and motorcoaches didn't actively promote rear-view camera systems because of their relatively high cost and because of the old driver training dictum that buses were never to be backed up.

However, today's congestion, limited parking and adverse real-world situations frequently force drivers into all sorts of driving maneuvers, including backing, sometimes with unfortunate results.

According to ASA Electronics, manufacturer of mobile entertainment and safety electronics, an increasing number of coach operators are moving towards blind-spot viewing via camera/monitor systems that can eliminate accidents, prevent injuries, and help reduce maintenance, repair and operating costs.

ASA offers the Voyager observation systems to the bus industry. With Voyager systems, drivers can benefit from the added vision provided by single- or multiple-camera systems designed specifically to aid in the prevention of moving bus accidents.

The systems allow drivers to actually "see" their surroundings beyond the normal scope of vision provided by mirrors.

Not only do they help drivers during backing, but they also aid in changing lanes, merging, and making wide turns. Each Voyager system includes a monitor paired with rear- and/or side-vision observation cameras. Depending on the system installed, up to four observation cameras can be used.

ASA says that one of the fastest growing segments in mobile camera systems is side-vision cameras. The Voyager side cameras offer drivers a horizontal view of 102 degrees, helping them to see three-to-four lanes over on highways while never losing sight of the side of the bus.

The side cameras are available in different housing covers: white, chrome and gray primer (paintable to match the bus) and do not protrude any further than the larger marker or signal lights.

An operator safety advantage of Voyager side cameras is that they can be tied into the turn signals, automatically activating when a turn signal is engaged.

"The side cameras are our

fastest growing segment for larger commercial vehicles," says Michael Padrnos, ASA Electronics' bus industry manager. "When compared to any audible alerts provided by radar- or sonar-based systems, there really is no comparison to the vision provided to the driver by Voyager cameras.

"Hearing an alert and then searching in the mirrors for what is approaching adds extra time and effort for the driver, and added stress. The Voyager cameras provide real-time video coverage allowing the drivers to actually 'see' what's along the side of their buses or what's coming their way."

The Voyager system uses heavy-duty LCD monitors that feature robust circuitry and sealed LCD displays.

"The commercial bus industry can be a very rugged environment," says Padrnos.

"Fleet operators put their trust into components that are going to

last. And, in the case of safety, need to last."

Monitors are available in a variety of sizes and capabilities. Depending on which Voyager monitor is selected, up to four cameras can be utilized for added vision assistance.

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

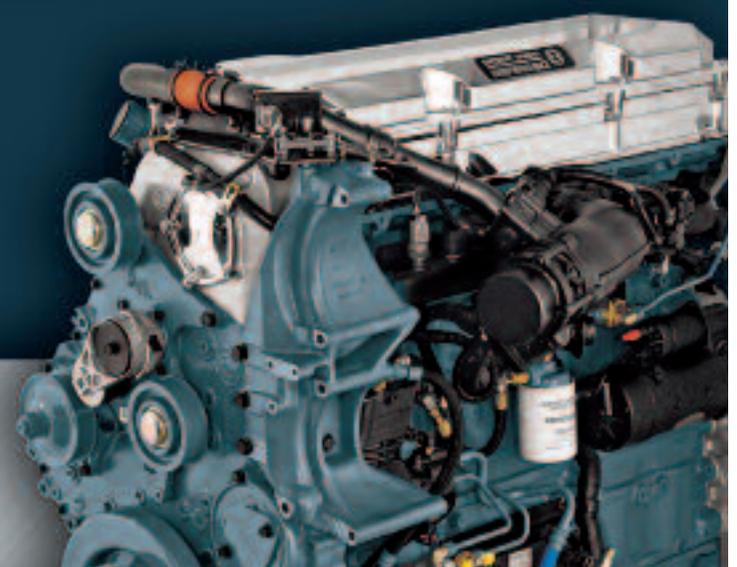


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Smart camera system from Israel is designed to prevent bus crashes

SOUTHFIELD, Mich. — An Israeli company is eying the U.S. bus industry for its high-tech accident avoidance system.

Called AWACS (for advanced warning system), the technology is designed to avoid accidents when a driver's loss of attention — perhaps from punching in a number on a cell phone, responding to a passenger question, daydreaming or even fatigue — has impaired safety.

The system works by providing a warning to the driver when a dangerous situation is identified. The system issues a warning for three key hazards: lane departure, headway monitoring and forward collision.

The manufacturer says it is the only system in the world that provides three applications in a single processor, based on image-processing technology.

The system uses a forward-looking camera that typically is attached to the inside of the front windshield (the "observer"), and unique image-processing technology.

The compact camera captures data in pixels. The data is sent through a cable to a small processing unit. The processing platform uses proprietary algorithms to determine the vehicle position in relation to lane markings and the speed and position of surrounding objects relative to the vehicle.

When the system identifies a hazard, the

information is processed in real time and turned into a verbal or sound warning, and into a visual warning that is shown on a display installed near the driver.

For example, if a driver gets too close to the lane markings without having engaged the turn signal, a rumble strip sound comes from the left or right radio speaker, depending on which lane marking the vehicle is moving toward.

There is a different audible warning when another vehicle is too close in the driver's headway.

The system was developed by Mobileye, a Jerusalem-based company that says it is a world leader in image-processing application development for traffic accident prevention.

The Mobileye technology has been tested by European, Japanese and U.S. automakers, and is being adopted for advanced models from BMW (series 5 and 6) and General Motor (Cadillac and Buick). The company says other automobile manufacturers also will be using the system.

In the BMW adaptation of the system, the steering wheel vibrates, creating a feeling similar to the rumble strips on the shoulders of highways.

Aftermarket installations are available for over-the-road buses and trucks.

More information at www.mobileye.com.



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REI's BUS-WATCH system is rugged, offers key features

AHA, Neb. — Radio Engineering Industries has introduced the latest version of its mobile surveillance system for buses.

The REI system, known as BUS-WATCH R1001 and accompanying R4001 mobile digital video recorders are specifically designed to meet the rugged demands of a bus environment.

REI says its engineers developed the BUS-WATCH system to stand up to the constant vibration, G-force shock, humidity, temperature extremes, dust and dirt common in buses.

The latest BUS-WATCH model uses the first in a series of affordable mobile digital video recorders from REI. The recorders are compact and feature rugged extruded aluminum housings. This eliminates the need for a fan and provides a low-weight, vibration-resistant unit.

These mobile digital video recorders can be configured to include a number of features customers frequently request:

- GPS module for time synchronization, latitude, longitude, speed, heading and mapping
 - Inertia sensor/accelerometer module ("Black Box" technology)
 - Ethernet port, allowing the viewing of information via a laptop computer on the bus
 - Wireless network compatibility
- Other features include 2.5-inch removable

mobile-rated hard disk drives and USB security lockout.

A wide variety of camera styles are available, including heavy-duty cubes or sturdy domes. High-resolution day/night cameras feature ultra bright infrared LED lamps for low-light operation.

REI utilizes a host of lenses ranging from 2.9mm to 12mm.

For operators wanting additional security for their BUS-WATCH system, REI offers a heavy-duty security housing/lock box. Fabricated from 16-gauge cold rolled steel, the optional security housing/lock box offers an added level of protection for the valuable information contained on the hard drives inside the system's mobile digital video recorder.

There also is the capability of connecting an optional vehicle sensor harness to various locations in the vehicle to provide on-screen information regarding vehicle and driver performance.

The system can monitor vehicle speed, brake activation, turn signal indicators, warning lamps, stop-arm activation and systems.

The optional record indicator/event-mark cable provides a positive signal to the driver that the system is functional and recording.

The event-mark switch lights up when the system is operating properly.

For more information, go to www.radio-eng.com.

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New safety features make new coaches safest ever

By Dave Millhouser
ABC Companies

We were cruising down historic Route 66 between Chicago and St. Louis on a summer night in 1969.

The old Brill was doing 60 mph (her personal best), when the gentleman who was training me mentioned there were 11 rail crossings on this stretch, and an ocean liner stopped faster than this bus.

He said we'd better spot the crossings as they came over the horizon, or we'd end up straddling them. It made me feel a bit like the lookout on the Titanic.

We take so much for granted today. Not only do brakes actual-

ly stop a coach, they do it quickly, in all sorts of conditions.

Recently, we've seen a variety of new safety-related features offered on coaches, with even more on the horizon. If history teaches us anything, some will catch on and become industry standards, while others will fade away.

The trick is to determine which provide real (but affordable) benefits, and which are expensive solutions to minimal problems.

Another thing history teaches is that it's dangerous to force technology into the market before it's ready. Antilock brakes were a disaster in 1974, but now are generally accepted and reliable.

Fire suppression has leaped to the fore as a result of a perceived increase in bus fires, and a 24-hour news cycle. Every coach manufacturer currently offers a system.

A couple of things you should consider. You not only pay to purchase the system, but it does need regular maintenance. On the other hand, some insurance companies are helping reimburse for these systems. You'll want to ask.

Generally, they are most effective in the engine compartment. Any time there is an ignition source the whole area is already hot. In this type situation, fire suppression has a good chance of keeping a breakdown from turning into a "thermal event."

On the other hand, if you're dealing with a tire, bearing or cabin fire, a suppression system will make a minimal difference.

A promising innovation is electronic tire-pressure-monitoring systems. A dash-mounted module lets the driver know when air pressure falls, or tires get hot. In addition to preventing a sizable percentage of tire failures (and fires), proper monitoring improves tire life. This puppy can pay for itself. Every coach manufacturer now offers a version, and it's not rocket science to retrofit.

Another device gaining traction is the event monitor. It visually records inside and outside views of any event that exceeds a pre-set G force. This triggers a management review. While useful in analyzing accidents, its greatest value is in training drivers to avoid "events" that trigger the boss's curiosity.

Some versions offer a manual mode, where a driver can choose

to record an event, such as unusual passenger behavior. This helps in situations like the sting operation one transit operator ran. Beset



Dave Millhouser

by fraudulent claims, they faked an accident with an empty bus. Miraculously, 60 people claimed injury (and were indicted for their pain).

A variety of GPS systems now allow you to either track your bus, or have it tell you when it's off route or schedule.

In Europe, some coaches have systems that prevent driver inputs that would overturn a bus. Some coaches automatically monitor the multiplexed electrical system, and call home when the bus has a problem. One system monitors brake wear, and causes all the lining to wear evenly. Time will tell if these technologies are practical, or will work in North America.

We've grown accustomed to systems that seemed revolutionary when they were introduced. They're worth mentioning because they require some maintenance. Redundant air systems, self adjusting anti-lock brakes, air driers, power steering, traction control and windshield washers all help, but require attention. Some of us are even old enough to remember emergency brakes that DIDN'T apply automatically when air was low.

Automatic transmissions originally gained popularity because they allowed the driver to concentrate on steering, rather than shifting. They were cost effective because they cut down on minor accidents and made it simpler to train drivers.

Coaches are safer today than at any time in history.

All of these systems help make a good operator better. None are a substitute for good maintenance systems and a motivated, trained driver.

Nearly 40 years ago, after 280 miles of carefully camouflaged rail crossings, crunchy gear shifts and sneaky traffic lights, we finally eased onto that greatest safety system of them all, the interstate.

Dave Millhouser is an account representative for ABC Companies. Contact him at: dmilhouser@abc-companies.com.

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Coaches do well during northeastern safety inspections

SCITUATE, R.I. — Motorcoaches and their drivers inspected during a three-state, three-day commercial vehicle safety blitz late last month had no problems, but over-the-road trucks were ordered off the road at an astounding rate.

The Tri-State Roadcheck was conducted just before the Labor Day weekend in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island by a special 50-person commercial vehicle enforcement team.

It was conducted simultaneously with the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance's annual Brake Safety Week.

A total of five agencies — the Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut state police, Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles, and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration — participated in the effort aimed at getting unsafe vehicles off the road, as well as educating commercial drivers on air brakes, wearing seat belts and staying away from booze.

Lt. Thomas M. Underhill of the Rhode Island State Police Commercial Enforcement Unit said roughly 70 motorcoaches were checked during the safety program. According to Underhill, most of

the coaches were making runs to Foxwoods Resort Casino in Ledyard, Conn., and Mohegan Sun Casino in Uncasville, Conn.

All of the coaches and their drivers were given North American Standard Out-of-Service Criteria Level III Inspections, which consist largely of credential and document checks.

Underhill said inspectors looked at log books for hours-of-service violations, driver medical cards, pretrip inspection reports, IFTA decals and other documents. At the same time, inspectors conducted a coach walk around, inspecting tires and looking for leaks, plus broken windows, mirrors and lights.

Underhill said all coaches passed the safety checks, with not one being put out of service.

The buses were not subjected to more rigorous safety inspections because of a lack of facilities to accommodate passengers.

Over-the-road trucks inspected during the blitz didn't fare as well, but then they were given more rigorous Level I inspections.

A total of 336 big rigs were inspected and 141 were put out of service for safety or other viola-

tions. That equates to an out-of-service rate of 42 percent. A total of 51 truck drivers were ordered off the road for various violations, or

an out-of-service rate of 15 percent. The law enforcement personnel issued 150 citations to truckers, totaling more than \$60,000 in fines.

The inspections took place along major thoroughfares, including Interstate 295 and State Route 146.

Walla Walla to get bus service again

OLYMPIA, Wash. — The Washington State Department of Transportation has selected Airporter Shuttle/Bellair Charters of Ferndale, Wash., to provide intercity bus service between Walla Walla and Pasco, Wash., beginning this fall.

The department will use part of a federal grant to subsidize the services for a two-year pilot project, said Cathy Silins, the department's manager of public transportation and commuter options.

Since Greyhound discontinued service in August 2004, several companies have tried unsuccessfully to provide a service between Walla Walla and Pasco, a nearly 50-mile run along U.S. 12 in southeastern Washington.

It's an important route and the services need to be started soon,

said Silins, who added that the department expects Airporter Shuttle/Bellair Charters eventually to develop a sustainable business without subsidies.

Larry Wickkiser of Airporter Shuttle/Bellair Charters told a Washington newspaper that the company would like to start the bus service early next month.

The company is in the process of getting necessary permissions and identifying stops in Walla Walla.

Airporter Shuttle/Bellair Charters plans to use vehicles with 12 to 15 seats, plus space for those in wheelchairs, for the three daily roundtrips. There's a market for the service, especially among the low-income residents, the elderly and those who want to fly out of the Tri-Cities Airport, Wickkiser said.

Ontario buys new MCIs for GO Transit

TORONTO — The first 20 of 60 MCI commuter coaches being purchased by GO Transit have been delivered.

Ontario and GO Transit are investing roughly \$35 million in new wheelchair-lift equipped coaches, which are manufactured at the MCI plant in Winnipeg,

Manitoba.

The remaining 40 buses will join the GO fleet during the next two years.

"Fleet renewal is key to retaining ridership and encouraging more Ontarians to take public transit," said province Transportation Minister Donna Cansfield.

Some Introductions,

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The all-new Dodge Sprinter shuttle bus from DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses has the versatility you have been looking for, only now with a refined look and overall increase in length and height. It can now comfortably seat up to 15 - plus driver, and provides superior ride and handling. With its roomy passenger cabin with plenty of standing room, effortless passenger boarding, and other optional onboard amenities, the Dodge Sprinter shuttle bus will become one of your most demanded shuttles in your fleet.

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megabus.com double-deckers hit the road in the Midwest

CHICAGO — megabus.com, the low-fare curbside line-run operator, began putting its new double-decker Van Hool coaches into service last week, with an inaugural run between Chicago and Minneapolis.

The company said it's offering the first double-decker intercity service in the U.S.

"These new state-of-the-art double-decker coaches are a first for the United States and will support our strategy to develop the megabus.com brand in North America," said Brian Souter, chief

executive of Stagecoach Group, the Scottish-based corporate parent of Coach USA and megabus.com.

"The high-quality double-decker coaches we operate in the (United Kingdom) have been a big hit with customers. By providing a low-cost high quality alternative to the car, we are confident we will get a tremendous response from passengers in the U.S.," Souter added.

megabus.com and Coach USA are spending \$10 million to buy 17 wheelchair-accessible double-

decker Van Hools. By January, the coaches will be integrated into already scheduled routes to Ann Arbor and Detroit, Mich.; Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus and Toledo, Ohio; Kansas City and St. Louis, Mo., and Indianapolis.

Said Coach USA/megabus.com President and COO Dale Moser: "megabus.com strives to introduce new concepts in intercity express bus travel in the United States. The double-decker buses megabus.com operates in the UK have been a huge hit with customers."

The U.S.-spec'd double-decker Van Hools can accommodate 79 passengers, with seat belts for every passenger, and two wheelchair spaces. The coaches have two doors, with the rear door equipped

with a wheelchair ramp.

More than 500,000 passengers have traveled on megabus.com since it was launched in April of last year. Service is provided to nearly 20 cities.

megabus.com as contrarian

By Bill Virgin
Seattle Post-Intelligencer

If you were looking for a niche in which to start a business, you'd probably want to find one that hasn't shown growth in decades, a segment whose base technology was long ago eclipsed by options in competing sectors, one with a bit of an image problem, a category dominated by one long-established and well-known company, and one that operates with considerable government oversight.

In other words, a niche like intercity passenger bus transportation.

Well, too bad for you. Someone has already gotten to this niche ahead of you.

As unlikely as intercity bus travel might seem as a place to go trolling for growth — the Bureau of Transportation Statistics reports that the number of passengers was lower in 1999 than in 1960, several companies see potential in the sector, and one has already started operating in it.

Therein lies an interesting case study on how there may yet be life in a lot of business segments that people have written off.

The best known of the new ventures into intercity bus service is megabus.com, a subsidiary of Coach USA, in turn a part of U.K.-based Stagecoach Group.

megabus.com has been operating a network of low-fare, express-route buses in the Midwest, linking such cities as Chicago, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Cleveland and Milwaukee. In August, it announced expansion of the service to Southern California, Nevada and Arizona, linking six cities, including Los Angeles, Phoenix, Las Vegas and San Francisco.

Dale Moser, president of megabus.com, says the company's business model calls for finding a large destination city with other large cities in a 300- to 350-mile radius.

Also part of the model is cost cutting. megabus.com sells tickets solely via the Internet (there's no walk-up business; relying on the Internet also gives it much faster information for pricing promotions or capacity changes).

Its "bus stations" are street corners.

The appeal to consumers, aside from cost, is time. mega-

bus.com operates express routes, meaning that if you're traveling from Chicago to St. Louis, you're not going to be stopping at every farm town in between.

"Our journey times are just as quick as if someone were driving themselves," says Moser.

In fact, Moser says, that's megabus' biggest potential audience for passengers — not Greyhound, the name most people would associate with bus travel, not Amtrak, not the airlines (although on short hauls, Moser believes the bus can beat the all-day ordeal of an airline trip).

megabus.com's target audience is the leisure-travel market; the largest demographic slice is not retirees or college students but women 35-55.

"We're not a commuter/transit business," Moser says. "This is an intermodal shift away from the car."

In 2004, Greyhound pruned back its service, as part of a larger effort to focus on short and medium-distance routes with the greatest demand, trimming out unprofitable routes.

That's not good news for those who live in those communities (which, if they're not big enough to support bus service, aren't likely to have scheduled airline service, either) and don't drive.

What Greyhound was doing, aside from trying to improve profitability, was remaking an old business model, much like megabus.com is attempting.

At the time of the cuts, Greyhound said customers "will experience improved convenience, faster service, fewer stops and improved on-time departures and arrivals." Greyhound's ad slogan, unveiled in the Northwest following those changes: "Stop Less. Go More."

megabus.com says its passenger counts and load factors to date indicate there's life yet in the bus business.

All of which demonstrates that some people may be too quick to dismiss the potential of mature industries such as bus travel, or to pull another example out of the air, newspapers. Who knew that "the wheels on the bus go round and round" could work not just as a quaint children's song, but as a strategic business plan as well?

Reprinted from the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.



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People

International Motor Coach Group has awarded the title of Alliance Partner of the Year to *Brenda Borwege*, vice president of marketing for **ABC Companies**.

The award recognizes an IMG alliance partner that "participates in industry leadership roles, promotes IMG within the industry, actively participates in IMG programs, and demonstrates vision and commitment to building relationships with IMG shareholders."

"Brenda exemplifies a true partner who is always willing to offer assistance and participates in all efforts to build our industry," said IMG Chairman *Jack Wigley*.

ABC Companies has appointed *Andrew Fung* its director of engineering services. Working in the company CustomerCare Division, and reporting to division vice president *Chuck Avery*, Fung will be responsible for the direction of the technical staff, including engineers, field technicians and the CustomerCare call center. He will provide customers with technical support for their ABC products while serving as the liaison between customers and the product manufacturers. He also will be responsible for new product development, including buses, parts and services. A graduate of the University of Manitoba with a degree in engineering, Fung has spent the past 12 years working in the motorcoach industry, most recently as director of fleet support engineering for **Motor Coach Industries**. He has relocated to the Orlando area from Louisville, Ky.

Prevost Car has appointed *Mark Armstrong* as branch manager of its parts and service center in Mira Loma, Calif. Armstrong will be responsible for overseeing day-to-day operations of the facility.

Armstrong is a former sales



Brenda Borwege



Andrew Fung



Mark Armstrong



Gene Perro

director for a high-end electronics manufacturer and holds an MBA in technology management and a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

"Mark's background in engineering, process standardization and ISO standards will be an asset to us as we move forward with our branch standardization program," said Prevost Service Network Manager *Randy Castillo*.

Gene Perro has joined the **P.A. Post Agency** of Mahwah, N.J., a leading motorcoach industry insurance agency and brokerage, as a sales executive.

Perro comes to P.A. Post Agency with more than 20 years of insurance experience, most recently as an executive with **KMA Insurance Agency** in Burnsville, Min. He has been focused on the passenger transportation industry for the past 15 years.

"Gene Perro's extensive experience and abilities in providing insurance programs for the transportation industry is a great asset to P.A. Post Agency," said *Brad Post*, president of the family owned agency.

E-mail Perro at gperro@postfinancial.com.

FirstGroup eyes October to complete Laidlaw deal

ABERDEEN, Scotland — The takeover of Laidlaw International and its subsidiary, Greyhound Lines, by First Group PLC is expected to be completed early next month.

Scotland-based FirstGroup announced it was close to clearing the final obstacle — U.S. antitrust approval — in the way of completing its acquisition of Laidlaw, which owns Greyhound.

FirstGroup's announcement was followed by a statement from Laidlaw saying that "substantial progress" had been made in discussions with the antitrust division of the U.S. Justice Department about the major share of the American

school bus market the takeover would give FirstGroup.

Rachael Borthwick, FirstGroup's corporate communications director, said the company had reached agreement in principle with the Justice Department officials and with a group of state attorneys general which had expressed an interest in the deal.

The interest by the state attorneys stems from the extensive school bus services operated by both Laidlaw and FirstGroup.

In its announcement, FirstGroup said it expected to conclude an agreement with the antitrust division which would allow it to complete the deal by Oct. 7.

Coach America to retrofit lifts

RIVERSIDE, Calif. — Complete Coach Works has received a contract for the installation of wheelchair lifts in MCI coaches operated by Coach America's operation in Long Beach, Calif.

The contract includes providing Ricon wheelchair lifts and custom

installation, including integration of the lifts into the bus system.

Three lifts are expected to be installed this year, with three more next year.

John Romero, maintenance manager of Coach America in Long Beach, said Complete Coach

Works was chosen for the work because of its "vast experience with these types of modifications. Their emphasis on quality and customer satisfaction have served us well in the past, and we are happy to have Complete Coach Works as a key service provider and supplier."

DaimlerChrysler Fla. center gains seal

GREENSBORO, N.C. — DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses North America says its Florida service and parts center has been awarded the Blue Seal of Excel-

lence by the National Institute for Automotive Service.

The award is the highest level of certification by the institute.

"We are extremely proud that

our parts and service center of Florida has been recognized..." said Patrick Scully, chief commercial officer for DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses North America.

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Crash tests

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

for seat and lap belts, seat anchors, roof strength, window types and glazing, and emergency evacuation procedures.

To study the value of various types of passenger restraint systems and related hardware, the safety agency will conduct controlled bus crashes, as well as sled tests, with unbelted, lap-belted and lap/shoulder-belted instrumented crash dummies.

The research also is expected to consider alternatives to seat belts, such as interior airbags.

"Fortunately or unfortunately, however you look at it, the motorcoach industry doesn't get much attention because it is such a safe industry," said NHTSA spokesman Rae Tyson. "But we know that there always is room for improvement."

He said the agency report was the result of a regular review of transportation safety issues and will serve as a road map for the agency to follow over the next few years as it works to make motorcoach travel even safer than it is now.

Some of the research already has started and more will get under way before the end of the year, said Tyson, adding that most of it should be completed in 2008 and 2009.

Industry reaction

The new NHTSA initiative was welcomed by industry executives and safety experts, many of whom have been critical of the agency for not responding to safety issues in a timely manner.

"While UMA applauds NHTSA's initiative to finally begin long-overdue crash testing of motorcoaches, we are concerned that elements of the approach may ignore the tremendous safety components that currently exist in motorcoaches," said Ken Presley, vice president of the United Motorcoach Association.

"While one fatality is always one too many, we believe it is critical that NHTSA avoid compromising existing safety features and that any new standards only enhance and improve current safety standards."

Congressman studying coach safety dies

WASHINGTON D.C. — The sudden death of a U.S. congressman may have derailed plans for legislation that could have led to additional passenger protection systems in over-the-road buses.

Rep. Paul Gillmor, an Ohio Republican whose political career covered four decades, had been working closely with motorcoach industry executives so legislation he was planning to introduce in the next few weeks would not be opposed by coach operators. (See June 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The congressman died unexpectedly Sept. 5 at the age of 68, leaving the future of his legislation uncertain.

Gillmor's proposal called for

government-funded bus crash tests to examine the worthiness of all types of passenger protection systems and to determine if some type of restraints should be required in motorcoaches.

He became involved in bus safety issues at the urging of the parents of a number of Bluffton (Ohio) University baseball players who were involved in a motorcoach accident earlier this year that killed seven people, five of them players, and injured dozens of others.

While the parents sought mandatory seat belts, the congressman went a step further and, after consulting the motorcoach industry, decided to include in his legislation a detailed review of other methods

Daecher also noted that the agency document appeared to discount the potential of technology affecting crash and fire events and their outcomes.

"Technology can be more readily retro-fitted to coaches; any design changes through testing will only affect new coaches," he said.

Many of the safety issues NHTSA said it will look at were among strong recommendations made to the agency by the National Transportation Safety Board following investigations it has made during the past decade, including a 1998 bus crash in Pennsylvania that killed 7 people and the 2005 motorcoach fire that left 23 elderly passengers dead and several others seriously injured as they were being evacuated from Hurricane Rita.

Seat belts overseas

The NHTSA blue print notes that while passenger restraints have been required on motorcoaches in Australia since 1994, and in Europe since 1998, their standards differ greatly, and there is no information available as to which is safer and more appropriate for use in the United States.

Its crash tests, NHTSA suggested, should provide the missing information that will help determine the best design performance requirements for seat belt assem-

blies and seat anchorages.

Daecher cautioned that the seat belt issue not only will be difficult to address because of the lack of current data, but because seat belts might not be the best answer for reducing fatalities and injuries in motorcoach crashes.

Testing costly

Crash testing to develop standards for seat belts and seat and seat belt anchors is costly and complicated because it has to involve a wide range of crash scenarios, including the use of seat belts, lap and shoulder belts, no restraints at all, as well as different types of crashes, rollovers and the like, said Daecher.

He emphasized that there is significant doubt among bus safety experts as to whether seat belt installation may actually reduce fatalities and injuries in many crash scenarios except rollovers. He suggested the studies of roof and window strength would likely be even more beneficial to passenger safety.

"Statistics obviously indicate that (passenger) retention in the bus during crash events will significantly reduce fatalities by over 50 percent," he stressed. "Therefore, window composition and anchorage and roof structure stiffness are the most important issues which I think can be tested within reason."

of protecting passengers as well.

"He could have simply introduced legislation making seat belts mandatory, but, instead, he chose to look at the big picture when it comes to occupant protection and came to understand that none of us can simply prescribe what some might conclude is safer, absent legitimate scientific study" said Ken Presley, vice president of the United Motorcoach Association. "As a result, his proposed legislation was sound public policy."

The resulting legislation would have funded and mandated the crash tests and required research of all types of passenger protection possibilities, including seat belts, passive restraints, window glazing

and roof strengthening.

The motorcoach industry has long held that seat belts may not offer the best protection for bus passengers involved in an accident and extensive crash tests and research should be conducted before any decisions are made.

Presley said Gillmor will be greatly missed by the motorcoach industry, calling him a decent man who was not out to get publicity, but rather serve the people and do what was right.

"In working on motorcoach safety, he could have grabbed a few headlines but chose rather to work towards scientific solutions," he said. "We can only hope his work will be championed in the future."

NHTSA said in its report the agency will evaluate current roof strength testing procedures that include buses being rolled onto their sides and roofs to help determine if new roof crush performance requirements need to be established for motorcoaches.

Such an evaluation, it said, would shed light on concerns of passengers being ejected through windows that either shatter or pop out during a crash.

"Roof deformation may affect the structural integrity surrounding the effectiveness in preventing occupant ejection," the report noted.

Daecher holds that if retention can be improved using a window and roof strength approach, then seat belts would not necessarily prove beneficial.

Materials test, too

The report also said new studies and tests of interior and exterior materials for flammability and smoke emissions will be conducted with an eye toward possibly developing more stringent standards for motorcoaches.

Additionally, it said studies and possibly some testing will be done on emergency exits and reviews will be made of existing requirements for emergency signage and illumination.

Equipment designed to help

prevent crashes and fires also drew some attention in the report, but were not listed as priorities and in need of immediate action.

Instead, it said the agency will monitor existing devices and new technologies that have the potential to improve motorcoach safety. Among them are devices that warn drivers when they begin to drift out of their lanes or are in danger of having a collision, and equipment that alerts them of possible wheel or brake fires.

Electronic data recorders also were mentioned by regulators who noted the agency has been studying the devices on trucks for more than a year and when that work is completed, their use on motorcoaches will be considered.

"The agency has decided that attention to the priority strategies identified (in the report) is where the focus needs to be directed to have the most immediate impact on motorcoach safety," the report stated.

Selection of the priorities was based on several factors, including size of the population that would benefit from an improvement, likelihood that any action would be successful, resources and time needed to carry out the research, NTSB recommendations, and the anticipated cost of implementing any new requirements.

California Bus Association goes 'green' for show

LAS VEGAS — The 34th annual California Bus Association Convention, Trade Show and Maintenance Seminar will be here Oct. 13-16 at the Palace Station Hotel and Casino.

The convention will feature nearly two days of seminars and presentations, plus social events, two golf outings, and the nearly famous Dennis Easley Bus Rodeo.

The theme of this year's con-

vention is "Bet on the Green," as in: Can you use more 'green' in your bottom line?; What does 'green' mean to you, your customers and your destinations?; How will environmental changes impact your business?; Are you ready for the retrofit emission controls retrofit?, and Are you familiar with the current and proposed CARB regulations?

Among the speakers and ses-

sions will be Lancer Insurance Co. Vice President Bob Crescenzo making a presentation entitled "Managing Your Company... What Does 'Green' Mean to You, Your Customers and Your Destinations?"; popular sales/profit motivational speaker Graham Foster; bus fire expert Chris Ferrone, and panel discussions on biodiesel and emissions controls moderated by Michael Melaniphy of Motor

Coach Industries.

Other speakers include Victor Parra, president and CEO of the United Motorcoach Association, and Peter Pantuso, president and CEO of the American Bus Association.

The convention exhibit floor will feature the latest buses, shuttles, products and services.

Highlighting the convention each year is the awards and installation banquet.

Calendar

SEPTEMBER 2007

15-19 South Central Motorcoach Association Annual Meeting and Marketplace, Marriott Hotel, Baton Rouge, La. Info: www.southcentralmotorcoach.org.

28-Oct. 1 Virginia Motorcoach Association Annual Convention, Music Road Hotel, Pigeon Forge, Tenn. Info: Go to www.vamotorcoach.com or call (434) 376-1150.

Parents push for coach seat belts

BEAUMONT, Texas — A group of Texas parents whose children were involved in a charter bus crash early last year that killed two high school students and injured 21 others says it's making headway in a campaign to make motorcoaches safer for children.

Now, the West Brook Bus Crash Families is urging the motorcoach industry to get involved, too.

The parents, who convinced state lawmakers this past spring to enact seat belt requirements for buses that carry school children, and their school district to no longer use charter buses, are calling on motorcoach operators to make seatbelts standard equipment on their coaches.

"They're required in Europe and it is inconceivable that they are not required in the United States," says group spokesman Steve Foreman. "We want to see the industry address this issue."

In addition to passenger restraints, he said the group also favors coaches with stronger roofs to protect passengers in a rollover, and glazed or safety windows that

would not shatter or pop out during an accident.

The motorcoach industry has long held that before seat belts are mandated by the government, crash testing and research needs to be conducted to determine if such restraints would be safer for passengers or if other types of passenger protection systems might work better.

Such studies are expected to be conducted soon by the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration under a blue print for motorcoach safety the agency issued last month. (See story on Page 1.)

Foreman praised the report, saying those in his group expect it to be helpful in advancing bus safety.

The parent group, which is affiliated with the Texas chapter of the National Coalition for School Bus Safety, was formed in 2006 after a motorcoach carrying 23 members of the West Brook High School girl's soccer team swerved to avoid road debris, skidded out of control and tipped onto its side. Many of the girls were thrown

from the bus, including at least two who were pinned beneath the overturned coach.

"We don't want others to go through what our children and families have had to go through," said Foreman.

Texas lawmakers earlier this year bought into the notion that seat belts can help protect bus riders by approving legislation requiring them to be on all school buses by 2010 and on all charter buses that transport children by 2011.

However, the legislature failed to identify funding to pay for the requirement for belts on school buses. (See June 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

In addition, the school district in Beaumont banned the use of motorcoaches for future school trips and, instead, purchased 30 new buses equipped with lap and shoulder seatbelts, air conditioning and DVD players that will be used to transport students to out-of-town activities.

The West Brook Bus Crash Families maintains a Website at www.safebuses4kids.org.

Former N.Y. coach operator gives major gift to university

ST. BONAVENTURE, N.Y. — Former long-time New York bus operator Louis Magnano, and his wife, Patricia, have pledged more than \$2 million to St. Bonaventure University.

Magnano, who operated Blue Bird Coach Lines of Olean, N.Y., before selling to Coach USA in 1998, and his wife, made a \$2.03 million commitment to the private Catholic university and gave a \$1 million check to the university 150th anniversary campaign last month.

The \$2 million gift is to be completed by mid-2009, when the campaign ends. Magnano, president and CEO of Park Centre Development in Olean, was a trustee of the university from 1993 to 2001.

The university plans to rename its dining complex the Magnano Centre in recognition of the gift. The complex features a new cafe and a renovated dining hall.

The gift will be used for scholarships for qualifying students; to

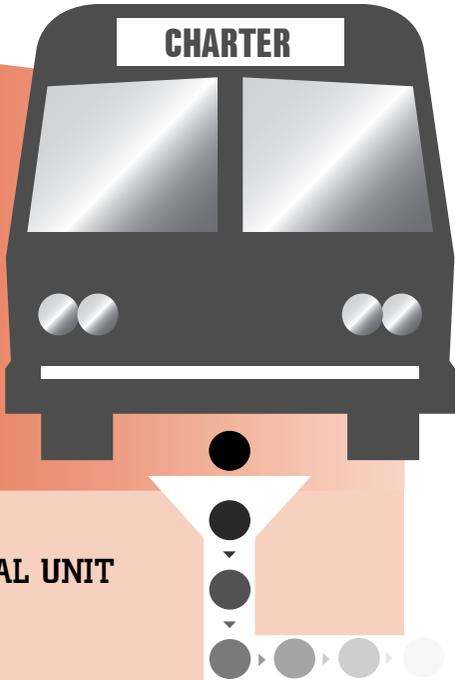
establish an endowment fund to provide annual maintenance for the dining complex; to fund additional campaign priorities, and to bolster the university's annual giving campaign.

The Magnanos have a long history of philanthropy in the Olean area. The Louis A. Magnano Heliport at Olean General Hospital was the result of a gift to the hospital, where the emergency room also is named for the Magnanos. Other projects they've supported include the center-court scoreboard at the St. Bonaventure University Reilly Center Arena, as well as the repair and maintenance of the Olean Recreation Center ice rink.

Magnano built Blue Bird Coach Lines into the largest privately owned motorcoach company in New York before selling to Coach USA. At the time, the company operated 127 motorcoaches, 21 school buses and 8 vans. Annual revenues in 1997 were roughly \$14 million.

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Gulf Coast

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

loway. "The income coming in has helped us to recover at a quicker pace."

Holloway expects the number of casinos in Biloxi to more than double in the next 10 years, in part because of a post-Katrina rule that allows them to rebuild 800 feet ashore.

Before the storm, Mississippi casinos were required to be on floating barges, which limited their size.

In New Orleans, casino business has also been brisk, a bright spot in a city where about 60 percent of the population has returned.

Harrah's, the only land-based casino in the city, is on pace to bring in record revenue this year.

A handful of riverboat casinos in the area are still benefiting from a post-Katrina boom caused by the closure of other local entertainment venues.

Riverboats such as Treasure Chest, docked outside New Orleans, have no hotel and rely primarily on local clients. But Harrah's, which opened a 450-room hotel last fall, is counting on the return of national and international tourists to boost business.

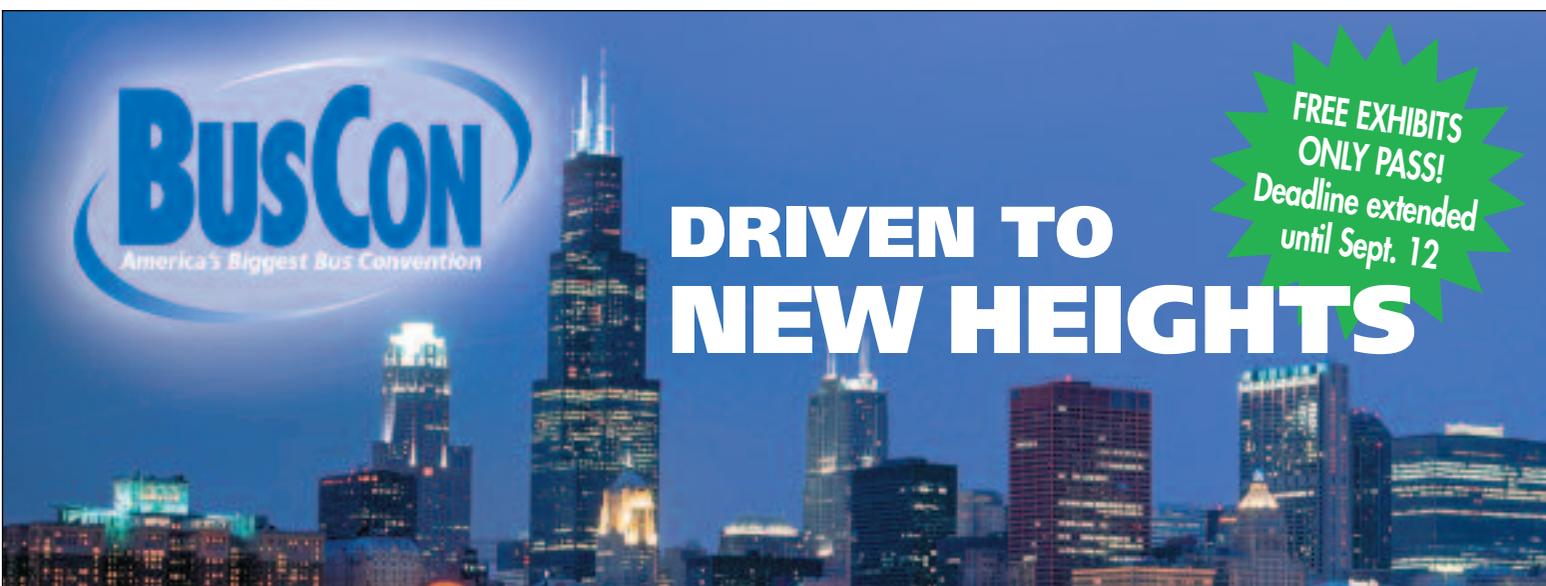
Still, all is not totally rosy. The resurgence of the gambling industry in the region also may have come at a price: higher potential for gambling-related problems.

Colleen Leonard, program director of the Louisiana Problem Gamblers Helpline, says calls to the hotline are "much more serious than three years ago. Basically, what we're seeing is a lot of people going to the casino to do more escape-type gambling, or to the racetracks," says Leonard. "We have people who called us and said they have received money" from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and they lost it gambling.

However, Wendy Bailey, of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, says her agency has not seen "a noticeable rise in addiction problems for our citizens" as casinos have rebuilt and expanded.

Meanwhile, much of the growth of the casinos in Biloxi and nearby Gulfport is coming at the expense of Louisiana and New Orleans.

Because Mississippi allows its casinos to open on shore, and Louisiana doesn't, large gaming companies are selling casinos in Louisiana and investing in Biloxi, possibly so they can develop "bigger, resort-style projects," according to a state report.



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Gambling palaces continue opening, expanding in U.S.

NEW BUFFALO, Mich. — The expansion of the nation's casino industry, which has been a boon to the motorcoach industry for the past 15 years, seemingly continues unabated. A few of the latest examples:

After six years of legal wrangling, the \$400 million Four Winds Casino Resort, southwestern Michigan's first casino, opened last month. The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians owns the complex on a 675-acre site off Interstate 94 at Michigan Exit 1 in New Buffalo.

The casino has 130,000 square feet of gaming space, including 3,000 slot machines and 100 table games. It also features a 165-room suites hotel, six restaurants, entertainment bars and retail shops.

In late January, Harrah's Entertainment opened a 2,750-slot casino, called Harrah's Chester Casino & Racetrack, southwest of Philadelphia.

Harrah's Chester has 100,000 square feet of gambling space, plus the usual assortment of restaurants and bars, plus daily simulcast video of horseracing.

In July, harness racing returned to the adjoining track; the racing continues through much of December.

In February, Presque Isle Downs opened in Erie, Pa. The racetrack and casino is situated on 272 acres just south of the city off Interstate 90.

The casino is up and running and the racetrack is expected to open early this fall.

Presque Isle Downs has more than 2,000 slot machines, plus two restaurants, two named bars and a buffet.

In May, Harrah's and entertainer Jimmy Buffett announced plans for a new Gulf Coast gambling palace, Margaritaville Casino & Resort, on the shores of Biloxi. The project investment is expected to be \$704 million.

At the news conference announcing the casino, Buffett performed a couple of songs. Whoopee.

In Middleborough, Mass., voters overwhelmingly endorsed a deal with the Mashpee Wampanoag Indian tribe that could bring casino gambling to the Bay State for the first time.

The town residents gathered at a community meeting and voted 2,387 to 1,335 in favor of the tribe's proposed \$1 billion casino. Middleborough has a population of about 20,000.

In exchange for allowing the casino, the town would receive \$250 million in infrastructure improvements and an estimated \$11 million in annual payments,

among other benefits.

Significant hurdles remain, however. The tribe, which officially received federal recognition in May after more than three decades of fighting for it, still needs state and federal approval for the casino.

The vote came after about 2½ hours of debate on an athletic field behind the high school. Residents

sat in lawn chairs under umbrellas and ate food they brought with them.

Meanwhile, another Massachusetts tribe, the Wampanoag of Martha's Vineyard, could wind up with the state's first casino-resort.

A local developer, who is pitching plans to build a mega-casino in the western Massachusetts

town of Palmer, says he has had preliminary discussions with the tribe about teaming up.

The developer apparently wants to involve the tribe in the project because casinos run or owned by Native American tribes generate higher public approval ratings — a factor in the politically charged gambling issue.

Despite the growth of gambling across the U.S., Las Vegas remains far and away the market leader. Here's a rundown of the revenue leaders:

- Las Vegas Strip: \$6.7 billion
- Atlantic City: \$5.2 billion
- Chicagoland, Ind./Ill.: \$2.6 billion
- Connecticut: \$1.7 billion

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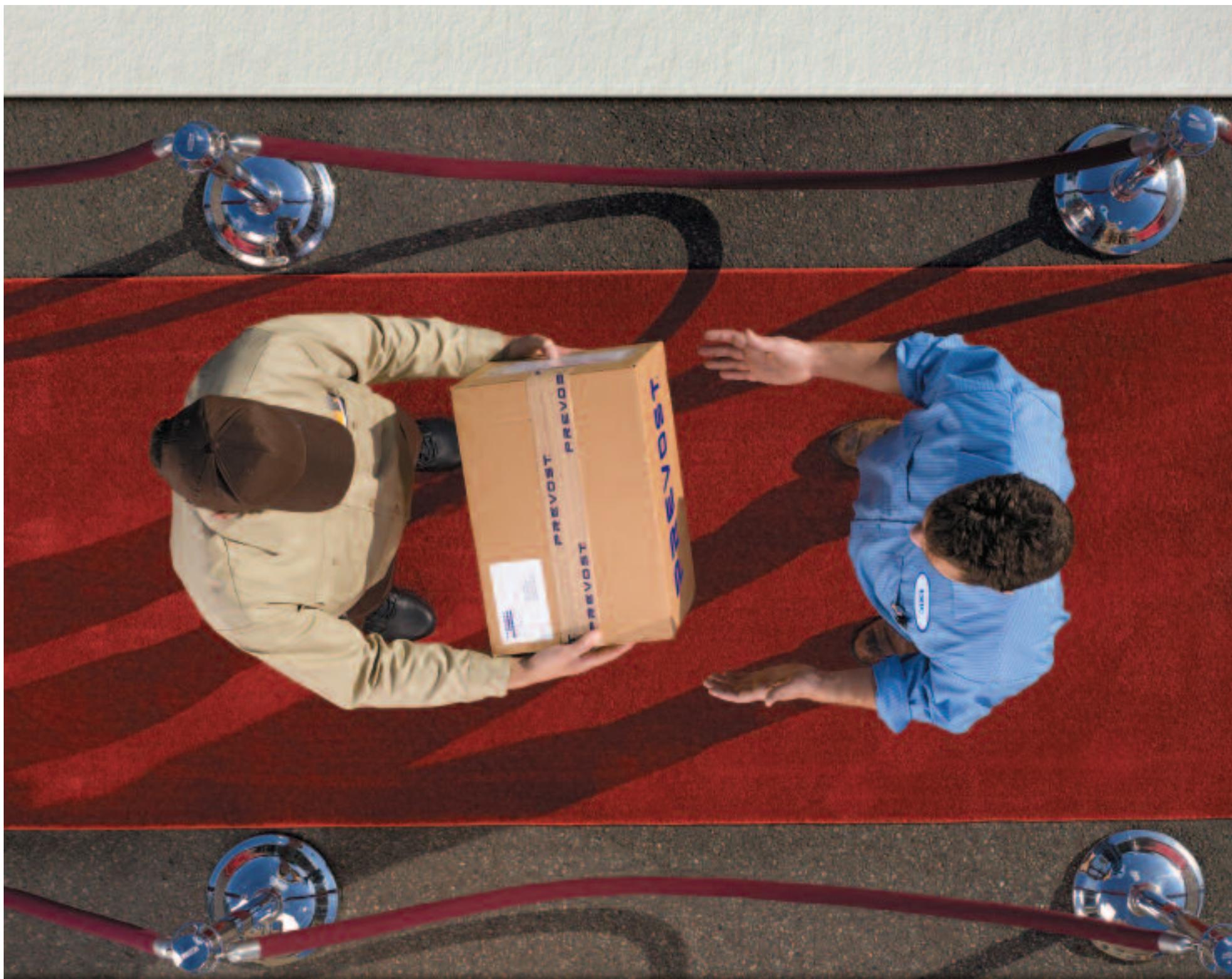
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