

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Seattle becomes battleground in charter rule fight

SEATTLE — Private motorcoach operators from across the U.S. are keeping a close watch on this Pacific Northwest city as it becomes a major battleground over the new federal charter bus rule.

Although the rule has been tested in other parts of the country since it was put in place by the Federal Transit Administration on April 30, there are signs that what

happens here could seriously impact the entire motorcoach industry.

In the spotlight here are three separate charter-related shuttle activities that not only will test the meaning of the rule and how federal regulators enforce it, but also how well private carriers will do when they take over popular transportation services long operated

by public transit agencies.

The rule gives private operators first shot at providing charters for public events, including those that tax-supported public transit agencies have been providing — often illegally — for years.

The three cases here involve potentially lucrative parking lot shuttle services that King County Metro Transit has long operated

for the Seattle Mariners baseball team, the University of Washington Huskies football team and the Seattle Seahawks football team.

The hottest of the trio and the one that worries the motorcoach industry the most is the Mariners.

In that situation, the United Motorcoach Association is gearing up for a court battle over a decision by the Federal Transit Agency

to allow King County Metro Transit to run the shuttle service for Mariner games even though a private carrier was available to do the job.

Victor Parra, president and chief executive of the trade group, said the association has authorized the filing of a civil lawsuit against the FTA, charging that its decision con-

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2nd-quarter coach sales steady

A sharp drop in delivery of conversion bus shells during the second quarter of this year held total sales of new motorcoaches slightly below those of the same quarter in 2007.

A bright spot was sales of seated coaches to private bus operators who purchased more new coaches this year than they did a year ago.

National Bus Trader magazine, which serves as the industry clearing house for motorcoach sales figures, reported that 596 new coaches were sold in the U.S. and Canada between April 1 and June 30, 2008, down modestly from second-quarter 2007 sales of 603 coaches.

This year's second quarter was almost identical to the second-



Riteway Bus Service of Richfield, Wis., took delivery of the 5,000th MCI E/J-model coach to roll off the MCI assembly line in Winnipeg, Manitoba. See articles about Riteway and the MCI milestone on page 11.

quarter of 2006, when 593 new coaches were delivered.

National Bus Trader Editor

Larry Plachno said the narrow sales difference between this year

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UMA files suit to halt D.C.'s trip permit fee

WASHINGTON — The dispute over a law that requires charter bus operators to pay \$50 fee to bring a motorcoach into the District of Columbia is back in court.

The United Motorcoach Association has filed an action in the D.C. Court of Appeals, challenging a Superior Court ruling in June that upheld the law and the fee that was put in place last year by the D.C. City Council.

"We believe the fee is illegal and needs to be challenged," said Victor Parra, president and chief executive of the trade association.

UMA and others in the motorcoach industry have been trying to eliminate the requirement since

shortly after it was adopted, first by trying to work with the D.C. Department of Motor Vehicles and tourism organizations, and then appealing directly to the D.C. Council.

Industry representatives contend the measure is simply a "money grab" by the district, and warn it could backfire by reducing the number of operators who bring charters to Washington.

When their initial efforts failed, an industry coalition — that included UMA — filed suit against the district, charging the law violates federal interstate commerce regulations and is unconstitutional.

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Hurricane evacuation appears to go (much more) smoothly

Operators of roughly 500 motorcoaches, 400 school buses and about 35 paratransit buses transported tens of thousands of Louisiana residents away from Hurricane Gustav late last month in a movement that bore little resemblance to the disastrous evacuation that followed Hurricane Katrina three years ago.

The total of 900 buses involved

in the evacuation coordinated by state and federal officials doesn't include the dozens of additional buses arranged by private businesses, including oil companies and nursing homes, in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

Getting the individuals who were transported out of New Orleans and other southern Louisiana locations back to their homes was

the next trick performed by the dozens of private operators involved in the massive evacuation.

"We're not finished. We have to bring people back," said Edward Johnson, director of operations at New Orleans Tours, when contacted by *Bus & Motorcoach News* while he was still immersed in the action.

Amber Hebert, spokeswoman

for the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, said evacuation coordinators were forced to wait until parishes provided notification it was safe for individuals to return to their homes and the infrastructure was able to accommodate residents.

Wellington Lain, president of Platinum Coaches in Hampton, Ga., said that overall the evacua-

tion went smoothly.

"From my standpoint, it was organized as best as it could have been. It could have been a lot worse," he said. "When you're trying to move people as fast as we were things aren't going to go as smoothly as you would like. We were trying to move an entire city, in addition to the parishes.

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Critical industry issues to be center of attention at Motorcoach Expo '09

ORLANDO, Fla. — UMA Motorcoach Expo 2009 is barely more than four months away and it will take place during a critical time for both the nation and the industry.

Expo starts one day after a new president of the United States is sworn into office and as the industry continues making adjustments to a weak economy and a major change in the rules governing charter bus service provided by public transit agencies.

At the same time, UMA Motorcoach Expo is a family-oriented event and next year it will be in Orlando, one of the world's leading family destinations.

"Motorcoach Expo is not just a convention where people can learn and get more education. It's also a time when a lot of our families take their annual vacation, so we try with our convention to make sure we have a destination that offers both — gives you an opportunity to learn, get up to date on the industry, plus a place you and your family will enjoy," says Victor Parra, president and CEO of the United Motorcoach Association.

"And of course, Orlando, what can I say about it being a destination?"

In an interview with *Bus & Motorcoach News*, Parra was asked to discuss the major issues facing the coach industry and how Motorcoach Expo will address those issues and place them before operators.

Here in a Q&A format is what he had to say about UMA Expo '09, which will be Jan. 21-21 in the Orange County Convention Center:

Q: What are the key issues facing the industry today?

A: I think probably the No. 1 issue that's emerging is the new charter bus rule. This can be a turning point for our industry. What we're learning is that the transit authorities have been doing a lot of charter work, an enormous amount of charter work. There was one transit authority in the Indianapolis area that did 62 charters the month before the charter rule went into effect, which is extraordinary. That's a tremendous opportunity for the operators in that area to grab that work.

The theme of this convention is: "The dawn of a new age." That sounds like a pretty bold statement but we believe that we could be at the beginning of a major change in

our industry (because of the new charter bus rule).

There is great opportunity. And it could be the great missed opportunity if we don't help our members understand what's out there, the opportunity that's there, and more importantly, how to capitalize on it. Because this is going to be a new kind of business that people are not used to. In the charter business, you book a charter, someone calls, they say they'd like to take the Girl Scouts from here to there, and you book a charter. This is a different kind of work, this is contract work. And it may require different equipment.

At the convention, we're going to have a wide range of equipment on our floor, not just the 45-foot bus, but the shuttle bus; we'll even have a trolley or two on the floor. That is emerging as a piece of business. Weddings — when a wedding party wants to use a transit authority trolley. They can't do that anymore. So, that's probably going to be added to our fleet in companies around the country. We could be in the very beginning stages of a major revolution in our industry.

What's nice about this contract work is that it's steady, it's predictable, it's good cash flow, it's typically good margin business, it keeps us close to home. It's great work. And it's right there. But we're going to have to be aggressive to get it because the way the charter rule reads, if no operator responds to providing the service, then (the work) can go back to the transit authority. So, how we go after it, how we pursue it, how we capitalize on this opportunity, is going to be a change. There's going to be a learning curve here.

Q: How are you going to tie this into Motorcoach Expo? How exactly are you going to teach people?

A: We've got a number of sessions we're going to be looking at. So, we'll have three operators, four operators talking on a panel, talking about these new opportunities that have emerged. We'll find three or four operators who have done a good job. With our workshops, our



Victor Parra

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Coach insurance rates slide

Auto liability insurance rates for many motorcoach operators have declined during the past year, but there's no telling how much longer the soft market will last.

Executives with the two largest insurers of motorcoaches say the price decrease has been in single digits, and the reduction has not been across the board.

They attribute the easing of liability rates, in large measure, to an influx of new insurers looking to expand their business.

Meanwhile, in the trucking industry, insurance premiums have

plunged by up to 50 percent as new insurance companies have flooded that market due to the fact insurers' capital base has strengthened during the past couple of years because there have been no catastrophic events, such as major hurricanes.

In 2005, there were a dozen truck insurers compared to 25 today.

Fran Walsh, vice president of Lancer Insurance Company, the nation's largest insurer of motorcoaches, says bus industry rates have been coming down by low

single digits for profitable accounts, but the marginal and unprofitable ones are still seeing price increases.

"It all depends on the loss history on an individual account," she says.

Michelle Silvestro of National Interstate Insurance, the No. 2 bus insurer, also reports single-digit price decreases in the past year or so.

"We are still individually underwriting accounts," says Silvestro. "If you've had an adverse experience, you shouldn't expect a

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THE DOCKET

Bill to reduce oil speculation gets bogged down in Senate

WASHINGTON — When the U.S. Senate returns from its recess later this month, one task before it will be to salvage the oil speculation bill (S 3268) that is threatened by a large number of amendments that have been attached to it.

The “Stop Excessive Energy Speculation Act” was intended to make the process of speculating in oil futures more transparent and to limit those who are allowed to trade in oil futures to those who actually produce or buy petroleum or its products.

As pointed out in an article in the Aug. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*, some of the speculators that presumably would be allowed to stay in the game are among the largest operators in the bus industry.

However, the effort to cut down on profiteering in energy seems to be sinking under the weight of 158 amendments that have been attached to the bill by senators on both sides of the aisle.

The bill's sponsor, Senate Ma-

jority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., urges passage of the legislation as a short-term method for bringing down the price of oil.

Supporters believe the new powers granted to the Commodity Futures Trading Commission in the bill would have an immediate impact on the price of oil, providing some relief until longer-term measures, such as conservation and alternative fuels, have had time to take effect.

Some Republicans are skeptical of the impact that speculation-only legislation will have on a complex problem like the high price of fuel.

Other critics, while supporting the bill, are disappointed that Congress has not put together a comprehensive energy bill that would reduce demand, provide technology tax incentives, and increase oil drilling, for example.

The legislation is supported by the United Motorcoach and other trade and business organizations through a coalition called “Stop Oil Speculation Now.”

FMCSA presses to wrap up new rules

WASHINGTON — With four months remaining in the Bush Administration, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration appears to be putting the finishing touches on several proposed new rules, some of which could significantly impact the over-the-road bus industry.

However, the timing of the rulemakings means it will be up to a new administration to decide whether to implement, modify or scrap them.

Two of the new regulations, governing electronic onboard recorders and driver hours-of-service, are being reviewed by Transportation Secretary Mary Peters.

Among other rulemakings the FMCSA is expected to send to the

secretary in coming weeks are a revised new-entrant safety audit program, a unified registration system, and a proposal for a revamped carrier safety fitness rating system.

Other regulations the FMCSA reportedly is working to complete include a pair of high-profile medical rules, one creating a national registry of medical examiners for drivers and another linking the medical certification to the commercial driver license, which already have been sent to the secretary, with an eye on publication in late November or early December.

Steve Keppler, director of policy and programs for the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance, told a leading trucking industry

publication that several of the proposed rules are “contentious.”

“There are a series of major rules that FMCSA has committed to getting out, and they’ve been pretty public about that,” said Keppler. “They’re working real hard on these things and they’re meeting their deadlines internally, is what they are telling me.”

As part of the rule-writing process, agencies must send their proposed regulations to the office of the secretary, who in turn sends them to the White House Office of Management and Budget for final review.

In May, FMCSA Administrator John Hill was quoted as saying he hoped to get the HOS and EOBR rules to OMB by September.

Senators seek tax credits for safety options

WASHINGTON — A bill has been introduced in the U.S. Senate that would give tax credits to buyers of commercial vehicles that have specific new safety technologies.

A similar bill, H.R. 3820, was

introduced in the U.S. House last fall by Rep. Mike Thompson, D-Calif., and several co-sponsors. (See May 15, 2008 and Nov. 1, 2007 editions of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The Federal Motor Carrier

Safety Administration has identified four technologies that would reduce commercial vehicle crashes and fatalities: collision avoidance, lane departure warning, stability control and brake stroke monitoring.

The new senate bill, S.B. 3428, would provide tax credits equal to half the cost of these technologies up to \$1,500 per item. The maximum allowable tax credit per year would be \$3,500 per vehicle and \$350,000 per taxpayer.

Speeds to vary on I-495 in Va.

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Speed limits on part of Interstate 495 in northern Virginia can now be altered as traffic conditions change.

Initially, the variable speed limit is effective only at night when certain lanes of I-495 near the new Woodrow Wilson Bridge are closed for roadwork.

Speed limits along the affected portion of I-495 will range from 35 mph to 55 mph, depending on congestion.

By lowering the speed limit as congestion increases, Virginia DOT hopes to prevent rear-end collisions that can occur as a result of the “funnel effect” created when faster-moving traffic approaching the Wilson Bridge is forced to slow down and exit lanes are closed for construction.



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Former Pa. chiropractor charged in staged 'accidents'

PHILADELPHIA — A former chiropractor has been linked to fraudulent injury claims submitted after two staged bus crashes here.

Dr. Eileen Means, 60, of Churchville, Pa., former owner and operator of Frankford Therapy in Philadelphia, is accused of fraudulently billing two insurance companies for more than \$27,000 for treatments to patients who claimed to have been injured in staged bus accidents, Pennsylvania prosecutors said.

Her involvement came to the attention of investigators, who learned that one of the people involved in one of the accidents told them he knew in advance it would happen.

Means allegedly submitted claims to Lancer Insurance Co. and Rutgers Insurance Co. for 53 days to 60 days worth of treatments she claimed to have provided to five patients from the two bus accidents. The bills totaled more than \$27,000 and Lancer paid more than \$13,000 and Rutgers paid nearly \$7,000. Agents said that none of the five patients were treated more than 20 days.

Additionally, Means' bills and treatment notes were reviewed by an expert in the detection of fraud in chiropractic billing, who concluded that the course of treatment claimed in Means' bills, even if it was performed, would have served no legitimate therapeutic purpose and simply would have served to run up a large bill, according to Pennsylvania Attorney General Tom Corbett.

"Dr. Means' scam was just another part of the elaborate attempt to scam the bus companies, Lancer and Rutgers," said Corbett. "The treatments she billed for were not done and, even if they had been done, they would have served no purpose other than to defraud the insurers."

Means is charged with 15 counts of insurance fraud, five counts of criminal attempt theft by deception, five counts of theft by deception and one count of corrupt organizations.

On Aug. 31, 2003, a chartered bus, headed from Philadelphia to Atlantic City and operated by Starr Transit Co., was struck by a car after it departed from the Germantown section of Philadelphia.

The accident resulted in only minor damage to the bus, but Lancer Insurance Co. and Rutgers Insurance Co. received 14 claims from individuals claiming to have suffered "soft tissue" injuries.

As a result of an ongoing investigation, agents learned the Starr collision was staged and nine people were charged in connec-

tion with submitting fraudulent insurance claims.

On April 18, 2004, a Wertz Motor Coaches charter, also headed from Philadelphia to Atlantic City, was struck by a car minutes after it departed from Germantown.

Although the bus had only

minor damage, Lancer received 29 claims from persons claiming to have suffered "soft tissue" injuries.

According to charges filed in September 2007, the Wertz collision was also staged and there were actually only 21 people on the bus; 12 people were charged

with submitting fraudulent insurance claims in connection with that collision. (See Sept. 15, 2007 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The 14 people who claimed to have been injured in the Starr Transit crash were allegedly treated by one of three chiropractors, includ-

ing Dr. Means and a relative of hers, prosecutors said.

As part of the ongoing investigation, agents learned that 14 claimants from the 2004 Wertz collision allegedly sought treatment from either Means or her relative.

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Hurricane Gustav

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"That's a big job," Lain added.

"We moved everyone out in pretty good time. It went pretty smoothly," agreed Johnson.

It's estimated that more than one million people left 19 coastal parishes, including the thousands who did not have their own transportation and relied on motorcoaches, Amtrak trains and commercial flights, according to Veronica Mosgrove, spokeswoman for the Louisiana Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness. Only 10,000 people were believed to have remained behind in New Orleans.

Compared to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, "it was smoother," said Mosgrove. "There were a number of factors; people were warned early on, they didn't play around. They left."

The state-contracted buses, which were largely arranged by Landstar System Inc., a trucking logistics firm headquartered in Jacksonville, Fla., picked up evacuees at central locations in the region and moved them to shelters in north Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Alabama, according to Hebert.

Evacuees traveling by plane and train were organized by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, she said.

Platinum Coaches started out moving evacuees to the New Orleans airport and then shifted from there, says Lain.

The company was paid primarily at a daily rate, although it was too early to tell how much was made, he said.

Platinum used seven buses, which launched from the New Orleans' Amtrak station to Baton Rouge, and then Alexandria, and then on to Shreveport, all in Louisiana. It was a matter of finding space for the evacuees. Either the sites were full or they were not ready for the people, says Lain, so buses had to keep on going up the line.

"Facilities weren't ready to receive people, and we had to keep on going," he said.

Some of the people moved by Platinum were elderly. Many were disabled, and had to be moved in sheets or with aid.

Platinum was contacted Aug. 27 by New Orleans Tours and began moving people Aug. 30, says Lain.

New Orleans Tours had contracts with private and state-run nursing homes, oil companies evacuating rigs, and the city of New Orleans, according to Johnson.

They gave the nursing homes the standard rate, while the city had a negotiated rate, which only ran a few dollars more, he said. The nursing homes paid a deposit; the city did not. He used about 55 buses, including other operators' equipment for the evacuations.

He was notified Aug. 26 or 27 the evacuation would begin and he started moving people Aug. 30.

Tri City Charter of Bossier City, La., moved about 2,000 nursing-home patients in 36 busloads, reported Jim Pitstick, owner. He said he had had a standing contract with

Hurricane evacuation = controversy

NEW ORLEANS — A hurricane evacuation wouldn't be complete if there wasn't a little controversy.

During the Hurricane Gustav evacuation there was a report that Landstar System Inc., the Jacksonville, Fla.-based trucking logistics firm that rounded up the buses used by the state of Louisiana, had difficulty providing the number of buses needed to handle all of the evacuees from southern Louisiana.

Landstar CEO Henry Gerkens disputed the reported, telling the Florida Times-Union his company was able to provide enough buses as promised.

"I think part of the issue was a communications issue," said Gerkens.

The New Orleans Times-Picayune quoted Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal as saying the state's primary bus contractor had "run into challenges" providing the 700 buses that were supposed to be available for the evacuation of New Orleans and other areas.

The newspaper said state officials identified Landstar as the contractor.

Later, Amber Hebert, spokeswoman for the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, said the buses provided were sufficient to move the evacuees.

the nursing homes since Katrina.

"This has been ongoing since Katrina. We were their transportation. We were on standby," said Pitstick. He had to seize transportation from a client whose tour was nonessential, losing about \$10,000 in business. "I hope they understood the urgency, but I had a moral obligation. I canceled what I could and took off," he said.

The evacuations handled by Tri City began Aug. 29, and were completed Aug. 31. Company employees worked around the clock, cleaning buses between runs.

The nursing homes had conducted evacuation drills, helping make the move smoother. The homes provided food and drink, and firefighters greeted the buses on both ends. Ramps were used, and some pa-

tients had to be carried on sheets. It took about two hours to load a bus, then: "My people were on the bus for eight hours," says Pitstick.

The evacuation went so smoothly that, "It was almost like a field trip, but a long one," said Pitstick. In all, it could take the move from a nursing home, including loading and unloading, up to 16 hours. "Our drivers were exhausted; our office was open 24 hours." He had contracts with about 25 nursing homes; for some evacuation runs, it took two-three buses per nursing home.

It was Pitstick's first experience working with the nursing homes. He charged a standard rate of \$3.80 per mile, with a 10 percent down payment. "They did everything but set the time and date."

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Cummins changes mind, adopts SCR

COLUMBUS, Ind. — In one fell swoop, engine builder Cummins Inc. has thrown cold water all over the heated battle over 2010 diesel engine technology.

Last month, Cummins reversed its decision to use only exhaust-gas recirculation to meet 2010 heavy-duty diesel engine emission standards, saying it would instead use urea-based selective catalytic reduction, or SCR, in order to improve its engines' fuel consumption rate.

"Our SCR system will deliver up to a 5 percent increase in fuel efficiency over today's solution, and that was the most compelling reason to make this change," said Jeffrey Jones, Cummins vice president for sales and market communications.

Company executives noted that fuel prices have increased 70 percent since Cummins originally rejected selective catalytic reduction for its big, heavy-duty engines.

Cummins decision is of great significance to the motorcoach industry because starting in 2010 it possibly could be the only engine supplier to four of the companies that build motorcoaches for the North American over-the-road bus industry.

Caterpillar revealed in June it will not manufacture any 2010-compliant power plants for the U.S. bus and truck market (See July 1 and June 15 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*), and Detroit Diesel will only supply engines to Setra, starting in 2010.

A year ago, Cummins executives were quoted as saying selective catalytic reduction was impractical for over-the-road trucks and buses because drivers would have to constantly replenish their

supply of urea, an essential ingredient in the system's process of converting nitrogen oxides to harmless nitrogen and water.

They also had said that meeting tighter federal standards for emissions of NOx and soot using enhanced exhaust gas recirculation, commonly known as EGR, would offer commercial vehicle buyers engines with known, familiar technology.

However, "after a significant amount of thrashing it out and thinking, in light of new inventions and the drift in fuel pricing going up 70 percent, we decided to take a deeper look at fuel economy, and that formed the backbone of our decision," said Jim Kelly, president of Cummins' engine division.

"The development of copper-zeolite for a catalyst that has very good properties for NOx conversion has allowed us to optimize engine and after-treatment performance, for better fuel mileage and to meet EPA standards," said Steve Charlton, Cummins' vice president of heavy-duty engineering.

Charlton said copper-zeolite became available for commercial use less than a year ago and "proved far superior to the iron-zeolite catalyst available when Cummins ran its original SCR tests three years ago."

The looming choice between 2010 engines that use exhaust gas recirculation or selective catalytic reduction was poised to become the most hotly contested argument in over-the-road bus equipment in a generation. (See June 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

High-ranking executives on both sides of the engine debate had taken passionate, public stands to back their technology choices.

Cummins' decision to adopt SCR leaves Navistar Inc., which has begun making its own heavy-duty engines for International trucks, as the only engine manufacturer planning to use EGR to meet 2010 emission standards.

Navistar spokesman Roy Wiley expressed confidence in the company's decision to avoid SCR. "We said all along we believe we're going with the solution that best fits commercial (vehicle) customers, which is EGR," Wiley told one trucking publication. "EGR doesn't have the extra weight of urea systems, and our customers won't have to go looking for it."

Navistar has declined to comment on questions whether it has been contacted by U.S. over-the-road bus manufacturers about using its new large-bore, heavy-duty MaxxForce engine line in their coaches.

Trucking industry analysts and executives generally welcomed Cummins decision, saying it was good for the industry because now all major engine OEMs are using the same after-treatment system.

Additionally, the Cummins' switch further strengthens the viewpoint that SCR is good for fuel efficiency.

Spokesmen for Detroit Diesel have been quoted as saying that company's switch to SCR should improve fuel economy on the company's DD15 heavy-duty flagship engine by about 3 percent.

Starting in 2010, Detroit Diesel engines only will be available to the motorcoach industry in Setra coaches.

Similarly, spokesmen for Volvo, parent company of Prevost Car, have been quoted as saying their companies' engines should

Official defends biodiesel, says it helps environment

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — In response to lingering questions about the viability, sustainability and "greenness" of biodiesel fuel, an executive of the National Biodiesel Board insists biodiesel is the "epitome of a green fuel."

"The amount of greenhouse gases biodiesel reduced in 2007 alone was equal to taking 700,000 vehicles off the road," says Don Scott, director of sustainability of the biodiesel board. "The U.S. biodiesel industry aims to quadruple that positive effect by 2015."

According to Scott, biodiesel fuel reduces atmospheric carbon dioxide by 78 percent, compared with petroleum diesel. That reduction is proven, he says, in a study by the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Department of Agriculture on soy-based biodiesel.

New and varied biodiesel feedstocks — such as the fat byproducts of meat processing and waste greases — are increasing in use, says Scott.

The majority of U.S. biodiesel is still made from surplus soybean oil. The food protein is 80 percent of a soybean — the traditional economic driver for soybean farming.

Soybean yields have been increasing but net acreage being farmed in the United States has not increased in nearly five decades.

Assertions that warn against converting land to grow biofuel crops do not reflect what is actually going on in the United States, according to Scott.

Furthermore, biodiesel has one of the highest energy balances of any liquid fuel, at 3.5-to-1, according to the USDOE and USDA. For every unit of energy it takes to make biodiesel, 3.5 units are gained.

By comparison, every unit of energy it takes to refine diesel fuel, you get 0.83 unit back. That's a negative energy balance.

Moreover, nitrogen oxide is not raised in biodiesel — it comes out neutral.

Biodiesel production also results in 79 percent less wastewater and 96 percent less hazardous waste, compared with petroleum refining, according to Scott.

Based on rigorous data, ASTM International has approved specifications for blends of B6-B20, and for B5 in the diesel fuel specification. ASTM is a consensus organization that includes engine manufacturers and petroleum distributors.

"Biodiesel is here and can be used in modern and traditional diesel engines to improve emissions, our economy and energy independence," says Scott.

post fuel economy improvements of 2 to 3 percent by using SCR.

Cummins executives deny the company was experiencing problems meeting 2010 mandates with EGR. Cummins still intends to use EGR engines but will be able to "dial it back a little" for greater efficiency because much of the NOx

will be removed by the after-treatment system instead of the original plan of inside the engine only.

Using SCR to remove NOx allows engines to run hotter, which means using less recirculated exhaust gases to cool combustion and allowing the engine to burn more efficiently.

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Cellular amplifiers keep passengers, drivers connected

ST. GEORGE, Utah — Motorcoach operators wanting to make it more convenient and reliable for their passengers to use cell phones while traveling have a new tool.

Utah-based Wilson Electronics designs and manufactures cellular amplifiers and antennas for a variety of vehicles, including buses, cars, trucks and RVs.

Wilson says its products help users extend their signal range as much as 10 times, increase data rates for cellular data cards, and significantly reduce dropped calls.

A typical Wilson system consists of an amplifier and two antennas. One antenna, mounted on the outside of the bus, communicates with the cell site and transfers cellular signals through a cable to the amplifier inside the vehicle.

The amplifier boosts those signals and re-broadcasts them through an inside antenna, typically mounted on the coach ceiling or wall.

Because of the amplifier's bidirectional technology, the process is reversed when the cellular devices transmit, and a stronger signal is sent back to the cell tower.

No physical connection is required between the amplifier and the cellular device; multiple cell phones and data cards can benefit simultaneously from the stronger signal. Thus, a number of bus passengers can have improved cellular performance in a coach equipped with a Wilson amplifier system, says the company.

In addition to increasing passenger convenience, a Wilson amplifier system provides an extra measure of safety for the coach operator and the bus company when calls for assistance are required. In an emergency, a cell phone is of no use without a reliable signal. This

is particularly critical for travel in remote areas, the company notes.

While most cell phones operate with output power of half a watt, Wilson boosters have up to three watts of power, and that power is managed by microprocessor-based technology to protect

cell sites from potentially harmful interference.

As a motorcoach draws closer to a cell site and the signal becomes stronger, the amplifier reduces its power, even shutting down when no amplification is needed. When the signal begins to

fade, as the vehicle heads away from the cell site or into an area where the signal may be blocked by buildings, hills or valleys, the amplifier automatically goes back to work, increasing its power to match the need.

Wilson says it offers single-

and dual-band mobile wireless amplifiers to support virtually all North American cellular carriers. The company also manufactures a variety of high-gain exterior and interior antennas.

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

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D.C. trip permit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

To the surprise of virtually no one, a D.C. Superior Court judge, Jeannette Clark, sided with the district and upheld the measure.

Under the statute, out-of-town carriers are given three options for operating in the district: establish their businesses in the district; purchase apportioned registration tags in their home state each year and pay the district a fee based on the number of visits each coach makes to the district, or buy a six-day, \$50 trip permit for each of their buses that enters the district.

Parra maintains that the first option is out of the question for established carriers, the second flies in the face of federal regulations, and the third is illegal. "If we can get the fee declared unconstitutional, then there would be a domino effect with the others," he suggested.

Dan R. Mastromarco, aorton, Va., attorney who filed the appeal on behalf of UMA, said the legal arguments against the law will zero in on the three options the statute gives motorcoach opera-

tors, and if the court examines them properly, it should strike the measure.

"That is because the District of Columbia statute does, in fact, require carriers to choose between three Hobsonian choices for the privilege of conducting tours in D.C.," he said. "These choices are not just distasteful; read in its entirety, the statute forces a constitutionally invalid result."

He agreed with Parra that motorcoach operators would not move their businesses to the district, and stressed that the apportioned registration option cannot be enforced by the district because federal regulations clearly give bus owners the option of buying apportioned tags.

Therefore, he said, the only option available to them under the statute is to purchase the trip permit, which he contends is unconstitutional and cannot be imposed on interstate motorcoach operators.

Mastromarco said the case probably will be heard by a three-judge panel of the appeals court, which is the highest court in the district. Lawyers from both sides will exchange briefs over the next

Website aids would-be bus drivers

GIG HARBOR, Wash. — A new website offers individuals, looking at career options, dozens of job-specific compatibility assessments in high-demand fields, including charter bus driving.

JOBaviors of Gig Harbor worked with companies and training organizations across the country to develop its focused job assessments.

"Our goal is to provide individuals with powerful information that comes directly from people who love what they do," says Mark Tinney, president of JOBaviors.

"Our main focus is to help people discover the job that offers the greatest potential for success and long-term happiness. At the same time we want to connect companies and training organizations with high-potential candidates who've given their permission to be contacted."

The job assessments are available free and are based on behavioral analysis of people who have

found long-term success and satisfaction in their employment.

The site allows people to choose assessments from a variety of industries, including: Transportation, fleet maintenance, automotive, sales, childcare, banking, construction, grocery, education, health-care, sports, and others.

The assessments take 10 to 15 minutes to complete and provide instant comparative results (one through five stars), along with a narrative describing the person's likelihood of finding long-term job satisfaction.

The assessments are available both for people interested in career insight for job training as well as for those who want to stand out in the crowd of otherwise qualified job candidates.

Jobseekers are able to create an account that allows access to dozens of assessments along with the ability to "opt-in" (results are kept private until a user decides to make them public) to share their result

and contact information with companies offering training and/or employment opportunities.

"Since our assessments are tied directly to a job analysis with people who love what they do, we're able to dramatically improve training completion and long-term retention of new employees," Tinney says. "Our clients realize turnover reduction of up to 60 percent, with 90 percent to 95 percent completion of training. At the same time jobseekers are able to save time and money they might otherwise have spent pursuing the wrong job."

JOBaviors partners are able to register with the service and create queries for candidates that meet such criteria as minimum assessment result, geographic location, employment versus training, and availability. Preferred partners are able to create custom links that provide exclusive access to high potential applicants.

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

several weeks before arguing before a panel of judges, possibly in November, he said.

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Riteway Bus proactively tackles driver sleep apnea

RICHFIELD, Wis. — Riteway Bus Service Inc., a 50-year-old, family-owned coach company, has launched a joint program with its employees to diagnose and treat any cases of sleep apnea among its drivers and other staff.

Riteway is partnering with a relatively new company, Sleep Apnea Solutions Inc. of Waukesha, Wis., to institute the voluntary and confidential program to promote employee wellness and help prevent accidents associated with driver fatigue.

It is estimated that 28 percent of commercial driver's license holders are at risk for the medical disorder known as sleep apnea, or failure to get adequate sleep. Earlier this year, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Medical Review Board recommended that all CDL holders be tested for sleep apnea and treated if they are found to have it.

"Given the FMCSA's interest in sleep apnea and driver fatigue, we believe this issue is going to impact drivers in the next couple of years in regards to medical qual-

ifications. We want to get ahead of the curve on this," said David Butcher, safety director at Riteway Bus. "And besides that, it is just the right thing to do."

Individuals with untreated sleep apnea do not get the restorative sleep they need, leaving them excessively tired when they're awake. Driving while tired puts a driver at a seven times greater risk of being in an accident.

For commercial drivers, untreated sleep apnea is particularly dangerous and potentially much more deadly — not just for themselves but for the individuals they

transport and for other drivers sharing the road.

While conducting conversations with Riteway employees on the topic of sleep apnea, Butcher learned that drivers do not pursue testing for sleep apnea for two reasons: first, they don't want to go to a lab for an overnight sleep study and, second, it costs too much.

But, as Sleep Apnea Solutions points out, there is technology available today that has made testing for sleep apnea easier and more economical than it used to be. And this portable testing makes more sense for commercial drivers, in-

cluding bus, motorcoach and limousine drivers who are constantly on the go.

"We're grateful for the program (Sleep Apnea Solutions) has put together for us. It allows us the opportunity to assist our employees in getting tested and treated at a far more reasonable cost, provides them with the convenience of testing in their own home, and most importantly can be done on their own schedule, which tends to vary most of the time," said Butcher.

Riteway drivers are educated about sleep apnea and perform a brief comprehensive sleep evalua-

tion with Sleep Apnea Solutions' specialists prior to completing the home test. Results of the tests are scored by a registered sleep technician and reviewed by a board-certified sleep physician.

If the results indicate a high likelihood of sleep apnea, the driver is encouraged to start treatment immediately.

Riteway's program makes both the company and the participating employees accountable for a portion of the cost.

Riteway employs more than 600 people and operates terminals in Germantown, Milwaukee, Milton, Cedarburg, Portage, Slinger, Columbus and Oak Creek, Wis. The company management team consists of three generations of the Bast family. Its website is www.ritewaybus.com.

Sleep Apnea Solutions also is a family-owned business that was established in February of last year to educate consumers, employers and the medical community about the need to identify and treat sleep apnea. Its website is www.SleepApneaSolutions.biz.

5,000th E/J-model coach delivered by MCI

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Motor Coach Industries marked a milestone last month with the delivery of the 5,000th coach produced on its E4500- and J4500-model assembly line here.

The coach, a J4500, was delivered to Riteway Bus Service of Richfield, Wis.

Riteway's new bus is equipped with a Cummins engine and ZF AS-

Tronic transmission.

It's Riteway's first "clean-diesel" coach, meaning it has a reduced-emissions engine mandated for all buses equipped with 2007 and later engines.

According to *National Bus Trader* magazine, which tracks sales data for the industry, the J4500 has been the industry's No. 1-selling model since 2004. (See

related story on Page 1.)

Since 2001, MCI has been building the J4500, a simplified version of the more sophisticated E4500 model (formerly called the Renaissance and introduced in 1996). BMW Designworks USA helped create both models, which feature a patented spiral entryway.

To date, MCI has built nearly 3,000 J4500s.

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Why it makes sense to run your company 'by the book'

By Dave Millhouser

It can't be done. You can't drive past a police car without checking the rearview mirror to see if it has fallen in behind you.

Even when you've done nothing wrong, you fear the officer has seen some tiny infraction and will stop you, with the resulting hassle.

The number of motorcoach company compliance reviews by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and state agencies is on the rise, and the perception is that, like a truculent traffic cop, they can always find something wrong.

The safety reviews are increasing for a number of reasons.

The 24-hour news cycle highlights every serious bus crash and the public sees it. When there's an accident, folks want to know why and it's government agencies (and politicians) they ask.

The response (and it's not a bad one) has been increased scrutiny of our industry in several ways, including destination and roadside inspections and compliance reviews. Federal regulators say more are coming.

Compliance reviews are a bit like tax audits — ugly but necessary. (Coincidentally, that's my wife's description of me.)

The way to prevent a tax audit is to avoid raising red flags, and that works for buses too. In a stunning display of logic, the FMCSA is looking closely at statistics

gleaned from inspections, traffic violations and crashes, going after companies that consistently do poorly. These statistics are kept reasonably current and are available for all to see at ai.fmcsa.dot.gov/SafeStat/SafeStat-Main.asp.

Tour-and-charter bus customers have learned to access this website, and many are using it as criteria for selecting a coach operator. It's a good idea for operators to check their own report regularly, so they know where they stand, and can spot (and correct) errors. If an operator's numbers are good, it's less likely to be on the FMCSA radar.

Sooner or later all operators will be reviewed, and there are some things that can be done to make the process less painful — even helpful. Some companies feel the insights gained are worthwhile, and ask to be reviewed. This can help prevent accidents and document a company's effort to operate safely.

To follow the rules, an operator must know them. If you don't have a copy of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations in your facility you should. There is a version available (through J.J. Keller & Associates or the United Motorcoach Association) that includes both the rules and interpretations. Interpretations are critical, so, for about \$30 it's a good investment.

A wise bus industry executive once said that "safety is between the owners ears." When the boss values safety, his or her company will too. The problem is that, as organi-

zations grow, it becomes more difficult to maintain a corporate culture of safety.

The FMCSA requires certain minimum standards for drivers, maintenance and operational systems. A review is the agency's way of making sure operators institute and maintain those standards. Proper compliance is your lifeline during a review, or after an accident.

Someone has to be responsible for all of this. Large companies can dedicate a person or department. But even small companies need to have someone who is the hub for all this information and responsibility.

If he or she does it as part of their job, it needs to be an important, consistent task. They need to understand all the regulatory stuff and have the clout to institute the right systems in your company.

These procedures can be incorporated into the way you run your business, using government standards as part of your system to handle driver qualifications, operations and maintenance. There's no sense in trying to do it your way, then scrambling to translate it all for government regulators.

The person responsible for compliance needs to be on top of it on a daily basis. When records are well maintained and easily accessible, regulators get a warm and fuzzy feeling.

Examiners understand that no one's perfect, but a string of lapses in logs or maintenance procedures sends a signal that a company is not taking things seriously. If mistakes

are discovered late, and buried, the reviewer will generally find them, and wonder what else is being hidden.

Acknowledging an error tells a regulator that you're committed to getting things right, and improves your chances when you have a legitimate beef. These folks see lots of bus companies and have picked up insights into what does and doesn't make an operation safe.

It's never fun to be on the wrong end of a regulatory colonoscopy, but these guys really do care about safety and can teach us a lot — if we let them.

Take this stuff seriously and keep on top of it because you don't ever know when you're going to be examined. Current, accurate driver files are crucial.

An older gentleman was being interviewed on his 100th birthday. The TV guy asked him why, after all these years, he was still reading his Bible every day.

"Cramming for the finals, sonny," said the old guy.

Good for him, but an iffy way to run a business. Cramming stuff together AFTER an incident is sure to make a bad situation worse.

Dave Millhouser is a bus industry marketing consultant and freelance writer. Contact him at: dave_millhouser@hotmail.com.



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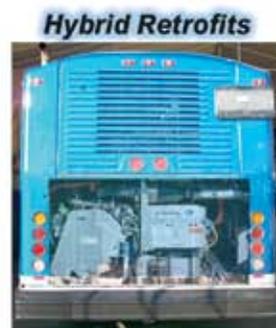
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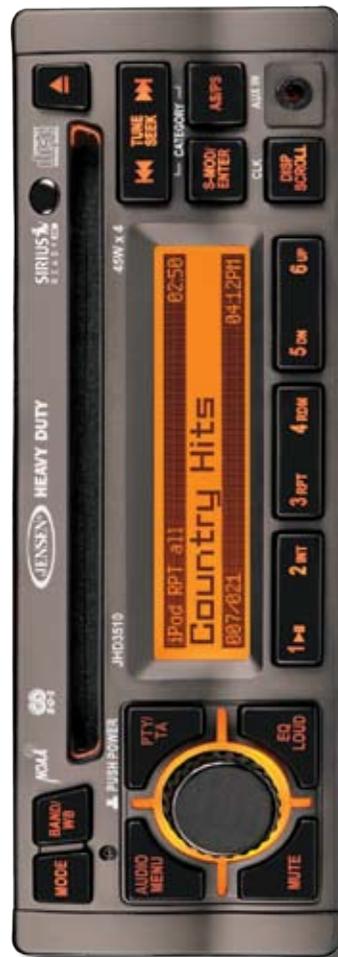
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Insurance rates

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

decrease. The insurance companies that have been in this business for a long time will continue to maintain underwriting discipline."

According to Silvestro, a few new insurers have entered the motorcoach market, contributing to reduced rates. "I don't expect them to be around for long," she insists. "They usually aren't. They'll be around as long as it takes them to figure out they don't really understand the business."

Silvestro said insurance follows "a supply and demand curve."

"There is all kinds of capacity in the market. Prices are low, so insurance companies come in, and once they see the losses we see in our business, they get out of the market," she noted.

Walsh agrees that insurance companies entering the coach market have tended to have a softening impact on rates.

"But the majority of motorcoach operators realize they are better off with the known quantities that have been insuring transportation risks for many years," she said. "While the new kid on the block may be cheaper, how can the new kid provide the same level of quality service, especially in the claims

area, as companies that have been doing it for years?"

Adds Walsh: "This is a business of big claims. Adjusting claims in the transportation business is unlike any other business. When you are transporting people, not commodities, there is a whole different skill set required as a claims adjuster to make sure you keep the operator's customers happy."

What's more, she said, "Underwriters do not look favorably on the loss runs of lame duck insurance companies, which in turn affect their pricing."

Walsh declined to speculate on how long current market conditions will last, but said: "It certainly won't be nearly as long as the last soft market, which saw rates come down for close to 15 years."

Silvestro isn't sure, either. "My guess would be through 2009," she said. "As the insurance market is cyclical, it will change — that you can count on."

National Interstate Corporation, parent company of National Interstate Insurance, reported its transportation component grew 11.2 percent during the second quarter of this year and 7.7 percent for the first six months of 2008, compared to the corresponding periods in 2007.

Dave Michelson, president and chief executive of National Interstate, said the growth is significant considering the soft market conditions. He said the company added new programs and insureds, and was able to avoid attracting business with under-priced policies.

Silvestro offered advice for motorcoach operators in the current market: "I would suggest they take advantage of the soft pricing and maybe look at buying excess limits as the pricing is low, but don't compromise their relationships with their current agent or insurance company for a cheap price. If it's too good to be true, it probably won't last very long."

"They should be looking at all options available and make sure they educate themselves on what's available in the market. Then, make the best decision, based on facts, for their company — long term, not just for the moment."

Walsh agreed: "You get what you pay for."

Motorcoach operators that have been around a while can remember cases where a new insurer has become insolvent, forcing operators to pay for claims out of their own pockets.

"Imagine buying an insurance policy one day and then waking up two or three years later only to

International Motor Coach Group chooses Eyre Bus as top operator

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. — Eyre Bus, Tour and Travel has been given the 2008 Operator of the Year Award by International Motor Coach Group (IMG).

The award, announced at IMG's annual Strategic Alliance Meeting, was presented to Ron Eyre, president and CEO, by IMG Board Chairman Jack Wigley of All Aboard America.

"Again this year we had a difficult decision to make in choosing the Operator of the Year," said Wigley. "We have so many deserving operators it gets harder every year. Ron Eyre and his staff definitely deserve this award and we are extremely proud to have them as part of the IMG family."

Eyre Bus, Tour and Travel of Glenelg, Md., was chosen by its peers as the fifth recipient of the award. The award honors an operator that best exemplifies the standards and values as set forth by the organization and exhibits leader-

ship within the organization, the community and the motorcoach industry.

Harry and Mary K. Eyre founded Eyre 61 years ago when they bought a school bus and operated a school bus route. The business grew steadily and the early 1960's they bought their first used motorcoach for transporting students to school events.

In 1972, their son, Ron, joined the business.

"We are extremely proud to receive this award from IMG," said Ron Eyre. "We work very hard to maintain the standards as mandated by IMG. This (award) validates all our hard work and the Eyre family is very appreciative to the IMG board and shareholders," he added.

IMG is composed of nearly 60 independent charter-and-tour companies. The owners/shareholders of IMG operate more than 7,000 vehicles in North America.

learn the insurance you thought you had was not there," Walsh said. "It's not a position anyone

ever wants to be in, yet there are more than a few operators who can tell this story."

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Seattle battle

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

flicts with the new charter bus rule.

"This ruling (by the FTA) has to be challenged because it truly undermines the very essence of the charter bus rule," he said.

Parra warned that if the decision is allowed to stand, it will not just impact the operator that lost the opportunity to provide the shuttle service, but every private motorcoach carrier in the United States.

Being challenged is a decision issued in June by FTA Administrator James S. Simpson, who ruled that King County Metro could operate the parking lot shuttle service for the Mariners until the end of the baseball season.

King County Metro has provided the shuttles for the past several years, but was expected to drop them this year because the new charter rule is supposed to eliminate the type of charters the public transit agency was providing for Mariners' games.

Starline Transportation sought to take over the service but was unable to reach agreement with the baseball team, according to Gladys Gillis, who runs the Seattle-based charter company.

Mariners resist change

She said the baseball club was never serious about allowing a private carrier to operate the service and stalled the negotiations until just before the baseball season was to start so Metro could seek a last-minute charter rule exemption from the FTA.

Simpson granted a 60-day exemption and later extended it to cover the remainder of the season, claiming the team would be without any service if he did not act.

"There was tremendous resistance to change from the Mari-

ners," Gillis said. "They told me straight out they would not pay the privates anything, but if Metro did the shuttles, they would pay."

UMA maintains Simpson erred in his decision by relying only on a finding that the baseball games were "time sensitive" events and ignoring a provision in the rule that also requires a finding that an event be "unique."

UMA contends the ruling seems to imply the FTA can consider as a "unique and time sensitive event" those events that are commonplace and known well in advance.

"Sporting events take place in every major city and, by definition, they are scheduled and marketed in advance," noted UMA attorney Dan R. Mastromarco, who's preparing the suit for filing in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C.

Seahawks like subsidy

Starline also sought a contract for the parking lot shuttle service for the Seahawks games, but, again, was rebuffed by the team owners.

Gillis said the team, which has been paying Metro to operate the shuttles for several years, refused to pay anything toward the shuttle operation. "They've paid in the past, but were reluctant to do it now," she said.

Metro last year took in fare box revenues of \$123,000 from the shuttles and then billed the football team \$83,000. The Seahawks paid \$40,000 of the bill and then took a \$43,000 "public relations" credit offered by Metro for the remainder. "That's nothing but a taxpayer subsidy, and not very many people know about that," Gillis noted.

Not wanting to lose the shuttle service to Metro, the Northwest Motorcoach Association stepped in and agreed to operate the service. However, because of the lack

Operators urged to attend planning seminars

ALEXANDRIA, VA. — The United Motorcoach Association is urging its members to participate in a series of one-day seminars being conducted this fall to familiarize private bus operators with governmental transportation planning processes and the business opportunities that can result from state and local transportation projects.

The workshops are being funded by the Federal Transit Administration and organized by the Taxicab, Limousine & Paratransit Association.

The seminars will give private bus operators greater insight into local and state transportation plan-

ning, how to participate in governmental transportation planning, and how to take advantage of opportunities to participate in projects resulting from the planning.

Additionally, the seminars will review FTA and other transportation funding programs for which private operators are eligible, and how to align your business with contracting and other transportation opportunities.

The team conducting the training is from KFH Group in Bethesda, Md., and J.M. Rubino Consulting of Saint Augustine, Fla.

The seminars are being conducted in five cities; the dates and

locations are:

- Sept. 16, Courtyard by Marriott Alexandria-Pentagon South, Alexandria, Va.
- Sept. 23, The Orleans, Las Vegas
- Oct. 26, Tampa Marriott, Tampa, Fla.
- Nov. 5, Radisson Hotel Chicago O'Hare, Chicago
- Nov. 7, Downtown Denver Courtyard by Marriott, Denver

The seminars begin at 8:30 a.m. and end at 3:30 p.m. A registration fee of \$35 is charged.

For additional information or to register, call (866) 928-6550, or go to www.tlpa.org.

of financial support from the Seahawks, the association will charge \$12.50 per person each way, substantially higher than the \$3 that Metro charged.

The higher fare touched off a firestorm among Seahawk fans, including many who said they will be looking for alternative transportation this season. It also emphasized the public relations challenge that private carriers face when they take over services that had been heavily subsidized by taxpayers, usually without people even knowing about it.

Taking a gamble

Gillis, one of the Northwest association's most active members, said she does not expect many people to be willing to pay the higher fare and some buses probably will be running with just a few passengers. "But we are committed to running the shuttle even if we lose money," she said. "If the Seahawks were willing to pay something, then we could lower the prices later."

The ice thaws?

Meantime, a solution might be on the way. Gillis said the Seahawks suddenly reopened negotiations after hearing the fan complaints and a contract with the association or Starline could be in the mix before the team's first home game Sept. 14.

Regardless, Gillis said the situation will be evaluated at the end of the season to help determine if the private company will want to run the shuttles next year.

Although Starline had trouble with the two professional teams, it did manage to land a contract for the Huskie games this season.

However, because of concerns raised by the college, the company subcontracted part of the work to Metro and will share the money the college will pay for the service. The college is required to pay for the service because of an agreement it has with the city to alleviate traffic problems in the neighborhoods surrounding the football stadium.

Gillis said the college worried

about Starline having to put more coaches into the neighborhoods than Metro did because it does not have larger articulated buses and if it would be able to meet the college's ADA needs.

Starline agreed to use this season as training for the company and will observe Metro's operations, including staging procedures and loading and unloading times. "We'll take over some of the parking lots late in the season this year just to get our wheels on the ground," she added. "We will be ready for next year."

The Huskies shuttle operation is one of the largest in the state. Last year, the buses transported more than 187,000 people to seven football games.

Gillis said she's confident her company will be able to handle the job, pointing to the company's success in running shuttles to events at last month's popular Seafair festival that also was held in Seattle neighborhoods with traffic congestion. "Everything worked out just fine," she said.

Bus sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and last was easily explainable: Sales of conversion bus shells plummeted 26 percent.

There were 59 conversion shells sold during the second quarter of this year, compared to 80 coach shells delivered in the second quarter of 2007, a drop of 21 units.

In the first quarter of 2008, there were 10 fewer conversion shells sold than during the first quarter of 2007.

"Some people credit this reduction to increased fuel prices," said Plachno.

"However, it is difficult to believe that people who pay a million dollars for a vehicle would be concerned about the price of fuel at

the pump."

A better explanation is that wealthy conversion coach buyers are sitting at home licking their stock market and real estate investment wounds.

Plachno also noted that motorcoach purchases by public transit agencies and other government units were at a cyclical low during the second quarter of this year.

"While we do not have accurate numbers, my guess is that the second quarter of 2008 is at least 30 units lower than 2007 in public-sector sales," Plachno said.

On a more positive note, the second-quarter 2008 figures show that 537 seated coaches were sold, versus 523 in the second quarter of 2007.

"There has been an increase in private-sector sales that has almost

offset the decrease in conversion shell and public-sector sales," said Plachno.

"In general, it appears we are in a fairly stable era of sales with slightly increasing private-sector sales making up for small reductions elsewhere."

During the first half of this year, a total of 1,122 new motorcoaches were sold in North America, down by a grand total of 3 from the first half of 2007, when 1,125 were sold.

The seven top-selling new coach models during this year's second quarter were: MCI J4500, MCI D4505, Van Hool C2045, Prevost H3-45, Prevost X3-45, Setra S 417 and MCI D4500.

That line-up, which Plachno calls his *Hit Parade of Popular Seated Coach Models*, saw changes

from the first quarter of this year. The No. 3 and 4 models, Van Hool C2045 and Prevost H3-45, swapped positions between the first and second quarters, with Van Hool moving up to No. 3 in the most recent quarter. Also, the No. 6 and 7 models switched places, with the Setra S 417 displacing the MCI D4500 for No. 6 on the chart.

The three top-selling models, the J4500, D4505 and C2045 captured 53 percent of the total market in the second quarter. That compares to 56.8 percent for the three top sellers in the first quarter of this year and 60.6 percent in the fourth quarter of 2007. A year ago, the three models captured 57.4 percent of the market.

The percentage of imported coaches sold during the second quarter also changed little. Imports

came in at 23 percent of the total market, compared to 23.9 percent in the second quarter of last year.

The percentage of new coaches purchased by Canadian operators in the second quarter was essentially flat. Canadian sales accounted for 12.8 percent of the total for the '08 second quarter, versus 12.9 percent a year earlier.

The percentage of coaches delivered with the ZF AS-Tronic transmission dipped during the second quarter of this year to 29.5 percent, down from 36.8 percent a year ago. ZF's are not spec'd for conversion shells or in coaches going to government agencies.

Questions about *National Bus Trader's* sales reports should be directed to Plachno at (815) 946-2341, or e-mail him at lplachno@busmag.com.

Western Canadian Greyhound drivers limit carry-ons

CALGARY, Alberta — Many drivers for Greyhound Canada have begun requiring passengers to stow carry-on bags in the luggage bay in an effort to reduce the possibility of violence directed at both drivers and passengers.

The drivers took the action at the urging of their union, the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1374, and in the wake of the horrific murder and mutilation of a Greyhound Canada passenger at the end of July.

The union says it also will push for improved security measures, such as restricting carry-ons, introducing luggage screening, and random baggage inspections when it meets with company management later this month.

Jim Higgs, president of Calgary-based ATU Local 1374, said the grisly stabbing of a 22-year-old sleeping passenger on a Greyhound Canada bus near Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, roughly 50 miles west of Winnipeg, has

heightened security concerns for drivers and passengers.

“How could the man who killed that boy have gotten a knife the size of a Bowie (knife) on that bus? I’ll tell you,” said Higgs. “It was in his carry-on.”

Higgs, who has been critical of Greyhound for allegedly dragging its feet on the issue, would like to see a company directive mandating that procedures similar to the local’s limited carry-on policy be implemented right away.

“If you get on in a rural area, you won’t be allowed a carry-on, is my proposal. It will have to go underneath the coach,” said Higgs. “It’s a relief to the driver to have it underneath, unless you’re traveling with medical supplies or something. At least then we can minimize the chance of an instrument like that getting on a coach.”

Higgs said drivers currently do their best to scrutinize passengers which has resulted in “the removal of knives and stuff, and the people

have put them underneath the coaches. But now we have to go one step further and restrict the carry-ons.”

In his criticism of Greyhound, Higgs also says it should not be the union and individual drivers who have to take the initiative. “Why should drivers be obligated to search luggage with all of the other things they have to do?”

In response to company statements that no security system would be impenetrable, Higgs asserts: “Well, that doesn’t mean we should do nothing. This is urgent.”

Greyhound spokeswoman Abby Wambaugh said Transport Canada is conducting a risk assessment for Greyhound buses that will help guide security policy if changes are needed. But she said Greyhound would require government funding if new security procedures — such as passenger screenings and metal detectors — are implemented.

The ATU represents 2,000 bus drivers and support staff, including 1,100 Greyhound drivers.

Greyhound asks exception for recorder placement

WASHINGTON — Greyhound Lines Inc. is seeking permission to mount video event recorders in its buses at a lower position than federal rules allow.

Federal safety regulations say antennas and other devices may not be mounted more than 6 inches below the top of the windshield and cannot block any part of the windshield that’s swept by the windshield wipers.

Greyhound says today’s com-

mercial bus windows and wipers are larger than they used to be, when the regulations were adopted, and the recorders must be in the swept area to maximize their effectiveness and increase safety.

Greyhound notes in its exemption application — filed with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration — that the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance submitted a petition for rulemaking to FMCSA last October, seeking to

amend the regulation covering the placement of event recorders.

The CVSA petition requests that federal regulations be amended to permit video event recorders and similar devices that require a clear forward facing visual field to be mounted not more than two inches below the upper edge of the area swept by the windshield wipers, provided they are outside the driver’s sight line to read highway signs and signals.



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Expo Q & A

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

breakout sessions, we have three current tracts: marketing, operations and finance. We'll be addressing this issue from three major areas.

It's going to require different marketing. It's not just putting an ad in the yellow pages and waiting for the phone to ring. We're going to be talking about how you use the internet to pursue this business and boost sales.

We'll be talking about the financial aspects. This is going to be a different kind of financial management. It will be different economics for our business. How do you manage cash flow, how do you manage accounts receivable in a contract world, as opposed to a

charter world? So there's going to be a learning curve there.

And, of course, operations. It's not your typical dispatcher who says: "This bus will go out, pick up these people at this location and the other group at this location, go on the highway and come back." You'll be working with other operators. So, we're going to be covering all the nuances of this new world that's opening up to us.

Now, that's the good news. The bad news is if we don't do this, not only will it be a sad, missed opportunity, in fact it could give rise to an argument the transits can make, and that is that the private sector is not ready for this. That has been their argument all along. ... It has been their argument leading up to the final rule. So, we've got to prove them wrong. We've got to

say: "We can do this." Maybe not one company can do it, but working together we can fill the needs of these new customers we'll have.

Q: What are other topics you'll be tackling at Expo?

A: Well, for example, we'll be focusing on guerilla marketing. It's a way to help small companies really get the most out of their marketing dollars. Most (small) companies don't have good marketing budgets. And this is a way to teach them how to capitalize on every marketing opportunity that's there, whether it is word-of-mouth promotion, fliers, internet. It's utilizing all available marketing avenues in a cost-effective manner to position your company to get an established brand identity.

We'll also be addressing the

fuel issue. Contracts. Futures. Everyone knows what's been happening with fuel. We know that fuel will be a growing part of our operating costs. What can you do to control this volatility? It's very difficult to manage your business when you've got such a large expense on your balance sheet. How do you book a charter six months out and account for fluctuations in fuel? Very difficult to do. So, one of the ways is to buy futures and buy contracts. "I'm going to buy X amount of fuel in the next six months and lock into a price. I can manage my business more effectively that way, by saying, OK, I can book this business knowing that one of my major costs is now under control. I know that six months from now, I'll be paying X amount per gallon for fuel."

We'll also be talking about recruiting drivers. Clearly, when we have these new services emerge, we're going to have to really expand our driver pool. And it's not going to be the typical driver who likes to get behind that wheel and go out for a day or two and come back. This is going to be a different kind of driver. It's going to be 8 to 6 at night or 8 to 1 in the afternoon. So we're going to be teaching them how to deal with that.

Another thing we're going to be focusing on is reaching the international customer. This is a major opportunity for us. I talk about the new age. It's not just the charter bus rule, but the fact the dollar is weak; it's the fact that we're getting the international customer.

Some of the things we'll be doing at the convention is training drivers to better match fuel consumption. We'll also be talking about engine emissions. And working with the local transit authority. Not all transit authorities are the enemy.

We'll also be talking about the internet to boost your sales.

Then there's accounts receivable. Accounts receivable sounds like basic finance 101. But I think in this new world there will be some new nuances, changes we need to focus on, learn about so we're getting our money.

Then there's spec'ing the vehicle for optimum efficiency. In this day and age, being able to control our costs, fuel costs, operating costs, you need to look at what you need to spec your vehicle to make sure your vehicle operates at peak performance and at the lowest cost.

Also, the school bus transportation association is doing their meeting. So on the front end, we'll have the IMG operations workshop, and the school bus guys are also meeting on the back end.

For me, Motorcoach Expo is a great way to read how dramatically different it is from how it was 10 years ago when I got here. It's a very different state of mind. Not just financially, we're still emerging from deregulation — we're way beyond deregulation.

I think we're at a point where we're having to run smart, aggressive, effective businesses. We've got a lot of pressures on us, between fuel and the economy. Our business is tied to discretionary spending — but we've got some new opportunities.

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Bill Connor of Prairie Coach Trailways dies at 50



Bill Connor

DELL RAPIDS, S.D. — William L. Connor, who 10 years ago at the age of 40 walked away from the presidency of a credit card bank to found a motorcoach company on the Dakota prairie, died early this month after battling leukemia for four years. Mr. Connor was 50.

Owing to humble roots, Mr. Connor had to hop a city bus whenever he needed to get anywhere in his hometown of St. Paul, Minn., as a child and youth. As a result of that experience he developed a life-long love of buses.

Much later, after achieving business success and rising to be president of Security Service Corporation, a subsidiary of a bank that specializes in issuing credit cards, Mr. Connor shed his banking mantle to start Prairie Coach Trailways in 1998.

He picked Dell Rapids because it was near Colton, S.D., hometown of his wife and partner, Nola.

His family says he was never happier than when he was behind the wheel of one of the 12 buses in his fleet.

After his son, Jaran, was diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer in 1999, Mr. Connor was inspired to form a nonprofit corporation, Angel Bus, which was patterned after Angel Flight.

The mission of Angel Bus was to coordinate travel — across the U.S. — for terminally ill children in luxury and conversion coaches. Before his own illness, Mr. Connor personally drove several Angel Bus missions.

He said he was always humbled by the opportunity to serve those most in need.

Mr. Connor was diagnosed with acute leukemia 20 days after his son died in 2004, and he fought the disease in one form or another during the next four years, with rare periods of remission.

When first diagnosed, Mr. Connor's goal was to live to celebrate his 50th birthday. He met that goal a few months ago. Shortly afterward, the leukemia returned.

Mr. Connor was greatly admired by those who knew him.

"Bill was a great champion for our (Trailways) team," said Gale Ellsworth, president of CEO of the Trailways organization. "Many of us were able to spend time with Bill during Trailways' 72nd annual gathering this past March in Los Angeles. Bill's friendship, great sense of humor, marketing savvy, altruism and spirit of entrepreneurship will be greatly missed."

Shortly after he founded his coach company, Mr. Connor contacted the anchorman at a Sioux Falls, S.D., television station in an effort to gain some publicity for his new business.

The anchor, Doug Lund, agreed to see Mr. Connor, who drove one of his coaches to the station. "I couldn't believe his enthusiasm over buses, of all things," Lund recalled a couple of days after Mr. Connor died.

"In all my years, I've never met anyone more considerate of others

or more open and passionate about things than Bill Connor," said Lund.

Besides his widow, Mr. Connor is survived by his mother, Marge Hughes of Brainerd, Minn.; his foster parents, Grant and Judith Johnson of Pillager, Minn.; his daughter Anika Athman of Sartell, Minn.,

and several brothers and sisters.

A memorial has been established in Mr. Connor's name with the River of Hope Foundation, P.O. Box 1597, Sioux Falls, SD 57101. A donation form is available at www.riverofhopefoundation.org.

Tributes to Mr. Connor can be found on the Prairie Coach Trail-

ways website, www.prairiecoach.com, and the website of South Dakota television station KELO, under the *Lund at Large* link.



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