

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Coaches out run 2nd hurricane

LAKE CHARLES, La. — For the second time in three weeks, the U.S. motorcoach industry helped evacuate thousands of individuals threatened by a major hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico.

Hurricane Rita hit the Texas and Louisiana coasts late last month but not before hundreds of coaches transported thousands inland and away from danger.

From Port Lavaca, Texas on the west, to east of Lake Charles, motorcoaches were pressed into service by both public and private organizations to carry out evacuations in the days before the hurricane came ashore.

And while Rita didn't match the destructive power of Hurricane Katrina, which hit New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast three weeks earlier, it still left a massive trail of destruction.

Meanwhile, motorcoach companies working for the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other relief organizations in the areas devastated by Katrina continue to report challenging operational issues, including spotty cell-phone service and difficulty finding fuel. And those companies based in the region struggled to cope with losses, insurance issues, displaced employees, crippled communications and reduced levels of



MCI commuter coaches operated by New York MTA make their way through New Orleans. The coaches were sent to help with the evacuation but ended up being used to transport military personnel.

business.

"We're hanging in there," said Henry Smith, owner of Starcoach in New Orleans. Smith's operation is on the west bank of the Mississippi River which suffered

far less damage than other parts of the city.

Getting coaches serviced or repaired also has been a problem. Motor Coach Industries set up a

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NTSB investigates bus explosion that kills 24 near Dallas

WILMER, Texas — The National Transportation Safety Board has launched a major investigation into the charter bus that caught fire and exploded here last month, killing 24 elderly nursing home residents that were being moved away from Hurricane Rita.

The incident was the worst disaster to hit the motorcoach industry in more than six years and is one of the deadliest accidents in Texas history. It occurred on Interstate 45, just a few miles southeast of Dallas, where the coach was heading.

The unusual nature of the tragedy and the unique circumstances surrounding it are likely to result in one of the most difficult investigations the NTSB has ever undertaken of a bus-related catastrophe.

Generally, the NTSB conducts an investigations when there is a major crash, resulting in several passenger deaths. In this case, there was no crash, no driver collapsing at the wheel, no bus flipping over, and no other vehicles directly involved.

Much of the NTSB attention

will focus instead on the way in which the coach was being used to transport a number of infirm passengers who were carrying and using medical oxygen; on why the coach burst into flames; on the circumstances under which the bus was pressed into service, and on the owner of the bus.

The last time more than 20 individuals died in a bus crash in the U.S. was Mother's Day 1999, when a coach operated by Custom Bus Charters of New Orleans crashed on Interstate 610, killing 22 of the 43 passengers on board.

The ensuing investigation of that disaster found that the driver suffered from several life-threatening medical conditions that probably incapacitated him. The probe also found the driver had marijuana in his system, had used a sedating antihistamine, and was fatigued.

The upshot of the crash was far reaching. It directly led to passage of the federal Motor Carrier Safety Act of 1999 and to the creation of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

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DOT, FMCSA gear up for busy rule-making agenda

WASHINGTON — Buried in the new federal highway and public transportation reauthorization law that was adopted by Congress this past summer are Congressional mandates for new regulations, requirements, programs and studies that will impact the motorcoach industry for years to come.

Now that the Federal Motor

Carrier Safety Administration appears to have gotten the revised driver hours-of-service rules for truckers out of the way, the agency's bureaucrats and those elsewhere at the USDOT are making preparations to crank out several new regulations and conduct numerous studies called for in the new highway spending act.

At the top of the FMCSA priority list is a mandate to modernize the commercial driver licensing program. In the coming months, the agency must propose a series of initiatives to improve both federal and state CDL procedures.

At the federal level, the FMCSA has been ordered to look at all aspects of how drivers of

commercial vehicles are licensed and update the Commercial Driver's License Information System that contains driver information and links to all 50 state licensing bureaus.

The FMCSA is required to begin the CDL upgrades no later than 120 days after the law was enacted.

The new law even spells out what some aspects of the improved CDL system should look like. For example, it must provide for the electronic exchange of information, including the posting of convictions; have self-auditing features to assure data are being posted correctly and consistently by the

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Operators use media trades to promote their businesses

When motorcoach operators advertise their businesses, they usually do three things: place an ad in the Yellow Pages, emblazon the company name on sides of their coaches, and create brochures they send far and wide.

A few brave operators add radio or television advertising to the mix.

And those that use broadcast media oftentimes swap their coach services for on-air time. But media trading can be a tricky business.

Still, those operators who swap charters for radio or television advertisements say it's all pretty good and they insist they're getting their money's worth.

"It's working out just fine for us," says Dean Brown, general manager of the Milwaukee operation of Lamers Bus Line, which has been doing it for more than 20 years.

He said media bartering has led to friendships with radio personalities who sometimes drop by Lamers' facilities and broadcast live, giving him a bonus over his trading arrangements.

Correction

The last of 10 Security and Emergency Preparedness Planning Workshops to be presented this fall by the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association will be March 6-7 in Scottsdale, Ariz. The date was incorrectly reported in the Sept. 1 issue.

Another operator that says it benefits from media trading is Knoxville Tours in Tennessee. "We've been pretty happy with it," says company president Stewart Lusk, who has a bartering deal with a television station that rewards its big advertisers with a free coach trip to two major NASCAR auto races. "We do quite well with the race trips," says Lusk.

Randy Cupp of Blue Lakes Charter and Tours in Clio, Mich., says he's been bartering for years, too, and it has generally been financial rewarding. However, he worries that the big jump in fuel costs this year could spoil things. "I'm thinking our trades are going to start slowing down some because of what we have to pay now for fuel," he says.

Other operators don't care much for media trading, saying that while they get regular calls from radio and television stations looking to barter, they usually turn them down because the payoff isn't big enough.

"Radio advertising does absolutely nothing for us," said Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City. He said because his business is strictly charter, the number of people who make charter decisions is too small to warrant mass-media advertising. "You have to do things like mailings to reach the people who make those decisions," he insists.

Polzien has done some bartering with radio stations in the past, but hiked up his price substantially and then gave the stations a 50 percent discount. "That way I still got my money," he said.

Tom Gobel of Lakefront Lines in Cleveland says he has given up the practice because he has seen few results from radio advertising. "I stay away from it now because most of it involves radio and I don't believe in radio advertising for our industry," he says. "Now if the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (the area's daily newspaper) offered me part



Blue Lakes Charter of Clio, Mich., has bartered for media ads for years, but fears higher fuel prices may reduce the practice.

of the travel section, I would certainly do it."

Those that engage in the practice all have a different approach

to it. Brown of Lamers says he usually goes for a 3-1 ratio in his favor

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THE DOCKET

Voters defeat fuel tax hike in Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA CITY — Voters in Oklahoma roundly defeated a statewide ballot measure last month that would have raised the state diesel and gasoline taxes to pay for bridge and road repairs.

Roughly 87 percent of those voting cast ballots against raising the tax on diesel fuel by 8 cents a gallon and the tax on gasoline by 5 cents. The tax now stands at 14 cents for diesel and 17 cents for gasoline.

The measure was opposed by the fledgling Oklahoma Motorcoach Association and by state truckers.

Supporters knew they faced an uphill battle in trying to get the measure passed. Polls taken in the days leading up to the vote showed that 75 percent of likely voters opposed the idea. The referendum was placed on the ballot through a petition last year when gasoline was more than \$1 a gallon cheaper.

Meanwhile, diesel fuel taxes rose in 10 states during the second quarter of this year — Connecticut, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Washington. Most of the increases were relatively small, the result of escalator provisions.

However, in three states the increases were significant. Connec-

State & Provincial Fuel Tax Rates

A number of states boosted fuel-tax rates during the second quarter of 2005. Here are the updated rates for all states and provinces, plus the federal tax rate in the U.S.

| State | Gasoline | Diesel | State | Gasoline | Diesel |
|-------------------|----------|--------|---|----------|--------|
| Alabama | 16 | 19 | North Carolina | 27.1 | 27.1 |
| Alaska | 8 | 8 | North Dakota | 23 | 23 |
| Arizona | 18 | 26 | Ohio | 28 | 28 |
| Arkansas | 21.7 | 22.7 | Oklahoma | 16 | 13 |
| California | 36.26 | 29.5 | Oregon | 24 | 0 |
| Colorado | 22 | 20.5 | Pennsylvania | 30 | 36.4 |
| Connecticut | 33.944 | 35.956 | Rhode Island | 30 | 30 |
| Delaware | 23 | 22 | South Carolina | 16.75 | 16.75 |
| Dist. of Columbia | 20 | 20 | South Dakota | 24 | 24 |
| Florida | 26.47 | 29.37 | Tennessee | 21.4 | 18.4 |
| Georgia | 13.1 | 13.3 | Texas | 20 | 20 |
| Hawaii | 16 | 16 | Utah | 24.5 | 24.5 |
| Idaho | 25 | 25 | Vermont | 20 | 26 |
| Illinois | 29.8 | 32.5 | Virginia | 19.9 | 19.9 |
| Indiana | 29.8 | 27.8 | Washington | 31 | 31 |
| Iowa | 21.7 | 23.5 | West Virginia | 27 | 27 |
| Kansas | 24 | 26 | Wisconsin | 32.9 | 32.9 |
| Kentucky | 21.2 | 21.8 | Wyoming | 14 | 14 |
| Louisiana | 20 | 20 | U. S. | 18.4 | 24.4 |
| Maine | 26.88 | 27.52 | <i>Tax Rate in U.S. is cents per gallon</i> | | |
| Maryland | 23.5 | 24.25 | Province | Gasoline | Diesel |
| Massachusetts | 21 | 21 | Alberta | 9 | 9 |
| Michigan | 33.005 | 28.875 | British Columbia | 14.5 | 15 |
| Minnesota | 20 | 20 | Manitoba | 11.5 | 11.5 |
| Mississippi | 18.4 | 18.4 | New Brunswick | 14.5 | 16.9 |
| Missouri | 17 | 17 | Newfoundland | 16.5 | 16.5 |
| Montana | 27.75 | 28.5 | Nova Scotia | 15.5 | 15.4 |
| Nebraska | 25.3 | 25.3 | Ontario | 14.7 | 14.3 |
| Nevada | 23.81 | 27.81 | Prince Edward Is. | 20.6 | 20 |
| New Hampshire | 20.625 | 20.625 | Quebec | 15.2 | 16.2 |
| New Jersey | 14.5 | 17.5 | Saskatchewan | 15 | 15 |
| New Mexico | 18.875 | 22.875 | <i>Tax Rate in Canada = cents per liter</i> | | |
| New York | 37.8 | 37.25 | | | |

icut's tax on diesel fuel jumped nearly 4 cents a gallon to 35.956 cents, the second highest in the nation. The tax increased nearly 2 cents a gallon in New York, to

37.25 cents, the nation's highest rate. And, in Washington, the tax rose 3 cents a gallon, to 31 cents a gallon, the result of legislation earlier this year.

N.Y. targets toll evaders for collection

ALBANY, N.Y. — The New York Thruway Authority plans to hire a collection agency in an effort to recoup some of the roughly \$23 million in outstanding tolls and fees owed by thousands of motorists, including commercial vehicle drivers, who have breezed through E-ZPass lanes without paying.

Truck, bus and passenger car drivers would have one last chance to pay up before their names are turned over to OSI Collection Services, a collection agency based in St. Louis.

Authority officials admit their agency might get as little as \$1 million of the \$23 million that is

owed after OSI takes its 21 percent cut and uncollectible bills are written off.

"Whether it's \$1 million or \$2 million, we don't know, but we do think it's important to make the effort to collect what is owed to the authority," said Michael Fleischer, the thruway's executive director.

Oregon studies toll proposals for 3 projects

PORTLAND, Ore. — Oregon transportation officials have unveiled four proposals from private companies for three different projects that would require drivers to pay a toll if they want to get through congested areas quicker.

Officials said the tolls are

needed because motor fuel taxes and federal grants alone do not provide enough money to pay for necessary highway improvements.

The projects, which are also designed to help relieve congestion in the Portland area, include widening a portion of Interstate

205; constructing a bypass via Dundee and Newberg, about 20 miles southeast of Portland, and building a new road from Interstate 205 to Damascus in neighboring Clackamas County.

All of the proposals involve tolls to help pay for construction expected to cost about \$1 billion.

Doing business in Ohio may become more costly with new commercial tax

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Motorcoach companies doing a substantial amount of business in Ohio are facing a November deadline to register for a new gross receipts tax that went into effect this summer.

Many coach companies based — or operating — in Ohio may see their annual income tax liability increase significantly because of the tax that is replacing the state corporate franchise tax.

Ohio-based operators that have annual taxable gross receipts of at least \$150,000 are subject to the tax. Out-of-state operators having more than \$500,000 in taxable gross receipts in Ohio and driving more than 25 percent of their miles in Ohio are also subject to the tax.

That means that operators in nearby states such as Indiana, Pennsylvania, New York, Michigan, Kentucky and West Virginia should be concerned about the 25 percent mileage rule.

Other factors that can rope in an out-of-state business include having more than \$50,000 in real or personal property in Ohio, or spending more than \$50,000 in payroll for work in Ohio.

Under the law, even companies that did not make a profit would be required to pay the new tax. In the past, if a company lost money, it may not have had to pay taxes but now it will, say experts. That, of course, could hurt struggling operators.

The state says it adopted the new law to get multimillion-dollar corporations to pay a more fair tax rate. The state says that some giant corporations were paying as little as \$100 annually in state taxes.

Operators subject to the tax must register with the Ohio De-

partment of Taxation by Nov. 15. If a company fails to register, it could be fined \$100 a month, or a maximum of \$1,000.

The tax was included in a sweeping tax reform package initiated and signed into law this past summer by Ohio Gov. Bob Taft. The law phases out two major business taxes — corporation franchise and tangible personal property, and phases in the new commercial activities tax, or gross receipts tax.

The commercial activities tax is essential an annual tax for the privilege of doing business in Ohio. It is based on a business's gross receipts, with the amount of taxable gross receipts determining whether or how the tax applies.

Examples of gross receipts include sales, performance of services, and rentals or leases. The calculation for gross receipts is based on what the taxpayer is required to use for federal income tax purposes, whether accrual or cash basis. There is a deduction for bad debt.

Businesses with annual gross receipts of \$150,000 or less are not subject to the tax; those in-state businesses with receipts from \$150,001–\$1,000,000 pay a minimum \$150 tax; receipts exceeding \$1 million — when the tax is fully phased in — will be taxed at a rate of 0.26 percent (\$150 plus 0.26 percent)

The tax rate for the first tax period — from July 1 to Dec. 31, 2005 — is 0.06 percent.

Registration for the tax includes a one-time refundable fee of \$15 for registering on-line, or a \$20 fee for paper registration. On-line registration is available via the Internet at the Ohio Business

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Virginia toll proposal criticized

RICHMOND, Va. — A proposal that would require motorists using the state's interstates to pay tolls via open-road tolling at 38 locations has drawn criticism from both lawmakers and commercial vehicle operators.

The plan would require passage by the state General Assem-

bly, in addition to approval by Congress. Some state legislators have questioned the viability of the proposal.

Commercial vehicle operators generally oppose tolls because they are a form of double taxation and because they also can pose a safety hazard.

Federal compliance costs cost small businesses most

WASHINGTON — The nation's small businesses spent \$2,365 more per employee last year to comply with federal regulations than large businesses, a figure small business advocates say needs to be pushed lower.

In 2004, all businesses spent a combined \$648 billion to comply with federal regulations, up more than 30 percent since 2000, according to a new report from the U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Advocacy.

Release of the report coincided with the 25th anniversary of the signing of the federal Regulatory Flexibility Act. The act, designed to make sure small businesses are considered by federal regulators, became law in late September 1980.

The anniversary was marked in Washington by a gathering of small business owners, trade association representatives, think-tank scholars, congressional staff and elected officials. The United Motorcoach Association was a major sponsor of the event.

While the SBA's Office of Advocacy figures that the Regulatory Flexibility Act saved small businesses more than \$17 billion last year alone, the new SBA report suggests there remains much more to do.

The study found that those firms with fewer than 20 employees annually spend \$7,647 per employee to comply with federal regulations, ranging from tax and environmental compliance, to international trade and workplace requirements. That compares with \$5,282 spent by firms with more than 500 employees.

In 2000, small businesses spent \$6,975 per employee on compliance. Then, the study showed small businesses paid nearly 60 percent more than big firms per employee, but the methodology for calculating the cost was different.

The small businesses included

Sirius to offer traffic service

NEW YORK CITY — Sirius satellite radio plans to broadcast traffic data nationwide starting next month for 22 major U.S. metropolitan areas, according to digital map company Navteq, which will provide the updated traffic information.

Navteq culls traffic reports from multiple sources, including commercial traffic data providers, government departments of transportation, police and emergency services, road sensors, cameras and airborne reports and relays that information directly to a navigation system.

in the study were in services, manufacturing, health care, and wholesale and retail trade. The report did not look at the cost of state and local regulations. Among the findings:

- The health care industry had the lowest cost per employee for regulatory compliance, at \$3,246. Utility companies had the largest

share at \$17,636 per employee.

- Economic regulations, such as tariffs for international trade and transportation rules, were the biggest dollar burden on businesses, at \$2,567 per employee. The smallest amount was spent on tax compliance: \$894 per employee.

To help reduce the regulatory

burdens on small businesses, federal agencies must consider how new rules will affect small companies under the Regulatory Flexibility Act.

President Bush, in an executive order signed three years ago, also began requiring agencies to notify the SBA Office of Advocacy

whenever a rule change may have a "significant" economic impact on small business.

The order's intent was to get the advocacy office involved with recommendations early so small-business burdens can be addressed.

For more information, go to www.sba.gov/advo.



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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 offer service or to bid on contract opportunities. UMA urges appropriate operators to take the time to respond to these notices:

Jefferson City, Mo. Deadline: Oct. 6, 2005. Write to: Richard

Turner, Transit Division Director, Jefferson City Department of Community Development, 820 E. Miller St., Jefferson City, MO 65101. Phone: (573) 634-6479.

Bowling Green, Ky. Deadline: Oct. 11, 2005. Write to: Gail Wolgast, Public Transit Coordinator, Community Action of Southern Kentucky, P.O. Box 90014, Bowling Green, KY 42102. Phone: (270) 782-3162.

Michigan alters IFTA reporting

LANSING, Mich. — Michigan has changed its procedure for bus companies reporting miles traveled within the state.

The state Department of Treasury announced that starting this month bus companies reporting miles traveled in Michigan must report all of their miles as taxable on the International Fuel

Tax Agreement schedule filed with their IFTA return. The first return to be filed reflecting the change is for the fourth quarter of this year.

In a "special notice" sent to bus companies, State Treasurer Jay B. Rising said that all fuel consumed in Michigan by a company's "qualified vehicles" must be reported as taxable on the IFTA schedule.

All undyed diesel fuel purchased in Michigan, where the tax was paid, can be claimed in the tax-paid gallon column of the IFTA schedule, Rising said. Dyed diesel fuel purchased in Michigan cannot be claimed in the tax-paid column.

However, dyed diesel fuel consumed in qualified vehicles must be used in computing the company's fleet average miles per gallon.

Michigan law provides for a

refund to all qualified motorcoaches for tax-paid fuel purchased and consumed in Michigan. To obtain a refund, an operator must request a refund from the state. To do that, a separate claim form must be used. To get the form, an operator must complete a *Request a Motor Fuel Tax Refund Claim Form*. The form is available on the Treasury Department Web site at <https://treas-secure.state.mi.us/motorfuel/request.htm>. (The Web address in the letter sent by the Treasury Department contains an error and will not link to the form.) Or, the form can be obtained by calling (517) 636-4600.

Questions should be directed to the Treasury Department customer contract division at the above phone number.

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Regulations

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states, and integrate the CDL and the medical certificate.

Organizations like the United Motorcoach Association and others have been advocating integration of the CDL and medical certificate for years. Now it looks like it is finally going to happen.

Included in the legislation is \$100 million earmarked for grants to be used by states to make improvements to their licensing programs. Another \$28 million will go to states to upgrade their CDL information systems.

A CDL Task Force is being set up to examine a range of issues, including state CDL-related enforcement practices, operational procedures to detect and deter CDL fraud, assuring adequate proof of citizenship, and updating technology and improvements for data sharing between state and federal agencies. The task force must submit its recommendations and findings to Congress in two years.

The FMCSA has even less time to begin loosening CDL-licensing restrictions on individuals who use insulin to treat diabetes. The law requires the FMCSA to come up with new rules within 90 days of enactment of the law.

Among the studies the FMCSA and USDOT must conduct are several that likely will affect the motorcoach industry. A sampling:

- A review to determine the degree to which Canadian and Mexican commercial vehicles currently operating or expected to operate in the United States com-

ply with federal motor vehicle safety standards.

- A field test in conjunction with the University of Iowa on "an approach to assessing highway-use fees based on actual mileage driven by a specific vehicle on specific types of highways by use of an onboard computer...linked to satellites to calculate highway mileage (and computes) the appropriate highway use fee for each of the federal, state and local governments as the vehicle makes use of the highways.

- A nascent movement in the U.S. to do away with fuel taxes as the primary method of paying for highway construction and maintenance. This hydra-headed issue has its basis in the declining rate of growth of revenue from fuel taxes. The advent of hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles that use little — or sometimes no — gasoline or diesel fuel and the greater fuel efficiency of autos generally is reducing fuel tax revenues at a time of increasing congestion and enormous highway construction requirements.

- A study of how new technologies might be used to enhance the collection of the excise tax on diesel fuel.

- A study to identify the issues related to the protection of the rights of individuals whose motor vehicles are towed and to identify potential remedies for those issues. This is an increasingly important issue because of the growing prevalence of electronic-data-recording devices, or black boxes, on all vehicles, including buses.

- A study of highway toll-collection facilities, including toll booths, to determine their safety.

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Not a pretty picture

The further Hurricane Katrina gets in the rearview mirror, the uglier the picture becomes of the government's effort to organize the evacuation of New Orleans.

The *Chicago Tribune* may have said it best in an investigative piece it published the other day.

"The story of the bus evacuation of New Orleans is partly one of heroism by a handful of people who, when called upon to help, acted quickly and improvised deftly in the face of desperate need.

"But the story also underscores a critical failure in the disaster plan: the inability of government to provide even the most rudimentary transportation to take people out of harm's way."

When Katrina's storm surge breached New Orleans' levees, putting much of the city under water, it became the responsibility of state officials and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to oversee the gigantic evacuation. But they, like the city, were unprepared.

Though it was well-known New Orleans would flood in a major hurricane, FEMA had no emergency management plan for evacuating the city. So what did the bureaucrats at FEMA do when it became painfully obvious the city had to be evacuated?

They turned to a trucking logistics firm.

Landstar Express America held a federal contract worth up to \$100 million annually for disaster transportation. However, Landstar was as ill equipped as FEMA to move tens of thousands of people.

But being smart business people, executives at Landstar did what any sixth grader would do, they went on the Internet and found Carey Limousine, whose Web site touted its ability to move large groups of people.

Carey in turn tapped Transportation Management Services of Vienna, Va., which specializes in arranging buses for large events, to help fill an initial order for 300 coaches.

While all this was happening, the presidents of the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association were beating on FEMA's door, trying to offer help. But, of course, no one was home at FEMA. Or, when they did respond, they provided bad information.

Finally, two days after the hurricane hit, Victor Parra of UMA and Peter Pantuso of ABA linked up with Carey and others... and the wheels started turning.

Asserting our rightful place

By Carmen Daecher
The Daecher Consulting Group

Katrina.
Nothing else has to be said.

The most far-reaching disaster in our nation's history. I hope and pray it remains so.

By the time you read this, more than 1,000 dead. Hundreds of billions of dollars for complete reclamation and restoration.

A city below sea level drowned. Towns in Mississippi eliminated. Tens of thousands of people without jobs. Tens of thousands temporarily or permanently homeless.

Mother Nature reminds us once again that no matter how powerful and intelligent we think we are there is a greater force. A force we cannot control; a force that can control our destiny. While evil men may try to shake our lives, Mother Nature can do the same thing with more devastation. And while we can thwart evil men, we cannot stop Mother Nature.

The potential to know what could happen and possibly how to respond — ignored. Official weather predictions — ignored. The attitude of "chances are slim — why worry?" prevailed. Now, finger pointing galore. An entire country at odds. Iraq is no longer headline news.

While we know why it happened, the nagging question is why did it have to be so bad? Why didn't someone anticipate that the levees would fail? Why were people trapped for so long?

Why didn't all levels of government do more? Where was the leadership? Where was their wisdom? And I will add one other question to this list: Where were the buses?

Yes, buses from many states came to the rescue and transported evacuees to safety. But, it is painfully obvious that for all of the "talking" we have heard for

four years (since 9/11), a woeful lack of planning and preparation occurred to meet such a disaster. I don't want to hear that Katrina was something that had a low probability. Mother Nature will always be here and will always show her might. Hurricanes, earthquakes and the like should be expected and must be met with decisive action when they occur.

During Katrina, planes could not fly and trains did not move. But buses continued to weave their way along navigable sections of highway and roadways if necessary. They could get as close to evacuees as possible. They could carry

'When will the federal government realize that motorcoaches are one of the strongest components of our transportation system?'

up to 55 people with their belongings to safe harbor, and offer them comfort facilities as part of the ride. The Superdome did not have to be a place of misery for any longer than the time it took to assemble a queue of motorcoaches and possibly school buses to move people to other locations. But where were the buses?

There are cities that have contingency plans in place for disasters that incorporate buses to move residents to safer locations. No such plan apparently was in place in New Orleans. Nor was it apparent that such contingencies were in place at the state and federal levels. Why not?

When will the federal government realize that motorcoaches are one of the strongest components of our transportation system? When will they recognize the strategic potential of the motorcoach industry in serving the people of this

country and in fulfilling a critical need in times of emergency? When will they embrace and support the industry from at least a crisis/disaster component, if nothing else?

It is time for the industry to assert its rightful place of strategic importance to this country. It is time for this country and the federal government to understand the value of the motorcoach industry, and support it as necessary so it is available and can respond to catastrophes and in times of need.

The time is now to go to the halls of Congress and make this case. With the finger pointing going on, they should welcome an answer for preventing a Katrina-type disaster response from happening again.

While I believe the motorcoach industry has the capacity to accept this critical role, you must be sure you are prepared. Does your company have plans for contingencies associated with emergencies and natural disasters? Have you thought about where your employees may go and how they can remain safe if they find themselves in the midst of a disaster such as a hurricane or a flood? Can you move your buses quickly to a safe place at a moment's notice if necessary?

If you are not prepared for such contingencies, you are not prepared to serve others in need during disasters and catastrophes. Remember the five Ps: Planning and Preparation Prevents Poor Performance.

Hurricane Katrina was a wake up call. We must be prepared to respond appropriately to any disaster for our own purposes to be available to serve the greater need. The industry should stand tall and demand its appropriate place for response to future emergencies and disasters. Government at all levels should start practicing the five Ps and recognize your value, seek it out, and let you serve as only you can in time of need.

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To the Editor: DriveCam prevents crashes, saves lives

I disagree with Tom Sorrells' (CEO of Motor Coach Industries) characterization of DriveCam as only a crash recorder that doesn't do anything to prevent accidents (*Bus & Motorcoach News*, Sept. 1). At Classic Transportation, we have demonstrated that DriveCam saves lives by preventing accidents.

Classic has achieved a 60 percent reduction in casualty losses since we installed the DriveCam Feedback and Behavior Modification Program. The ability of Classic and other operators who successfully use DriveCam to reduce casualty losses is "the real soul of safety equipment and training" to which Mr. Sorrells is aspiring.

As a member of the TRAX Insurance Captive, Classic is responsible for the first \$300,000 of each casualty loss. Over the next several years our reduction in losses will pay us significant dividends, as well as lower future insurance costs. This cost reduction is directly related to improving safety for drivers and passengers.

Ninety-five percent of all collisions involve driver error. DriveCam records bad driving behaviors before they become accidents. Over the years, statistical studies of bad driving behavior, as well as Classic's own DriveCam videos, indicate there are approximately 10 near misses for every accident. DriveCam gives Classic the ability to observe these near misses and to use them to counsel and retrain drivers.

Insurance experts have told us for years that you can control frequency but not severity. With DriveCam, motorcoach operators can observe and counsel frequency of near misses instead of waiting for a severe accident to defend.

Classic also believes that when you focus on the frequency of bad driving behaviors you reduce the opportunity for severe loss. Our own drivers tell us they drive more carefully to avoid a DriveCam event.

I shutter to think what our casualty losses would be like if we didn't use DriveCam. Classic operates in one of the most dangerous, litigious and congested driving regions in the United States. The best defense against this extremely difficult environment is to get the utmost out of the DriveCam system. That is why every piece of rolling stock covered by our insurance is equipped with DriveCam. We would never put anything on the road unless the DriveCam camera is installed.

Mr. Sorrells incorrectly implies that a fire suppression system is a

better safety investment than DriveCam. I disagree. We have 34 charter coaches. In the last 10 years we have had four coach fires, three of which were in the engine compartment. That equates to three engine fires during roughly 250 bus years of data. The cost of a fire

suppression system is about \$10,000 per coach.

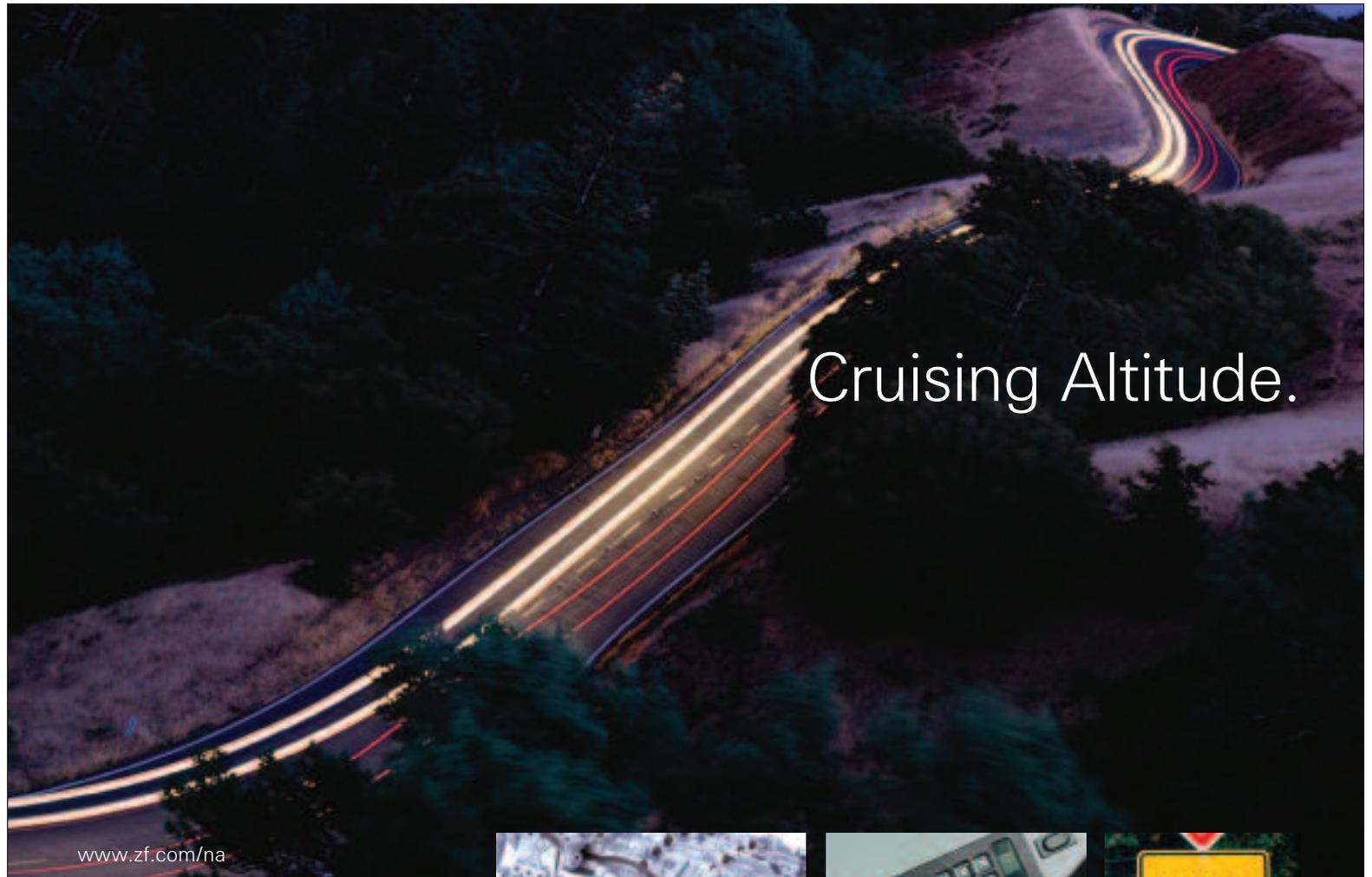
Conversely, it costs approximately \$1,000 per coach for a DriveCam with all the software. If I equipped all of my coaches with fire suppression equipment it would cost me \$340,000, com-

pared to spending \$34,000 for DriveCam. Considering our 60 percent reduction in casualty losses, Classic has gotten both a terrific return on its investment and an improved safety record with DriveCam.

Perhaps one day soon coach

manufacturers will realize that installing a DriveCam in every coach they sell is clearly in the best interest of all operators and the traveling public.

—Bill Schoolman, President
Classic Transportation
Bohemia, N.Y.



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Ramblin' Express Denver/Colorado Springs

Ramblin Express, a charter, line-haul, shuttle and limo operator, has taken delivery of two new MCI J4500 coaches and two pre-owned J4500s.

The new J4500s, which are equipped with Caterpillar C13 engines and ZF-AS Tronic transmissions, are serving the company charter operations. The 2002 models, which have Detroit Diesel engines and Allison B500 transmissions, are being used for the company's scheduled casino runs.

"Customers love the J4500," said Gary Agnes, Ramblin Express' general manager. "It's a beautiful coach."

Founded 12 years ago by Todd Holland, Ramblin Express has a

fleet of 19 coaches. The company serves Denver and northern Colorado from its Broomfield, Colo. location, while its facility in Colorado Springs serves the southern part of the state.

In addition to its charters and casino business, Ramblin Express is the exclusive transportation provider for Colorado Springs' famed Broadmoor Hotel.

"We appreciate longtime customers like Ramblin Express," says Patricia Ziska, MCI vice president of marketing and major accounts. "And we're proud to be able to provide them with coaches that fit their need..."

For more information go to www.ramblin.com.

Trans-Bridge Bethlehem, Pa.

Trans-Bridge Lines has taken delivery of two new MCI D4505 coaches, featuring U.S. flag graphics.

Trans-Bridge chose the colorful coaches after purchasing another MCI coach — a demo J4500 model — that has the same graphic treatment.

When Trans-Bridge put the J model into service for its commuter runs to New York City, the coach proved to be very popular. "Commuters reacted well to the graphics, and we needed two more coaches for our New York commutes, so we decided to use the same theme," said Kirby Parnell, senior vice president of Trans-Bridge.

Trans-Bridge's new D4505s have Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines and Allison transmissions, plus Ricon wheelchair lifts. They also have Amaya seating, Firestone tires, Alcoa wheels, National model 93-B driver seats, and REI A/V systems with six flat-screen monitors.

Trans-Bridge, is owned by the



JeBran family, which are second- and third-generation family members who operate the 65-year-old company.

Today, Trans-Bridge has a fleet of more 65 intercity coaches, with most of them MCI models.

The company provides daily service to New York City, Atlantic City, Newark and JFK Airports. An affiliate company, Trans-Bridge Tours Inc., offers tours throughout the U.S. and Canada, including one-day excursions to Atlantic City, sporting events and shows, as well as overnight trips to such destinations as Florida and Tennessee.

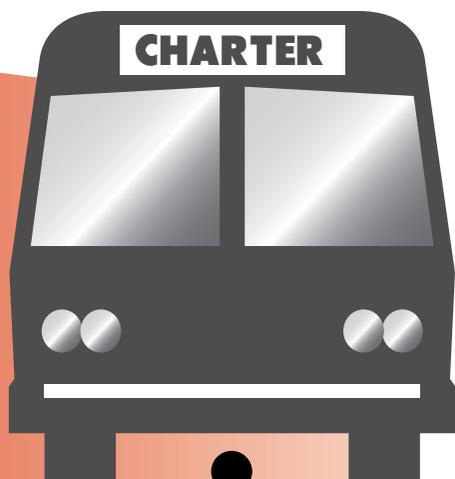
Trans-Bridge Tours has five offices — in Bethlehem, Whitehall and Easton, Pa., and in Phillipsburg and Clinton, N.J. Trans-Bridge carries more than 1.3 million passengers annually and employs 190 people.

Trans-Bridge becomes one of the first operators to take delivery of MCI's new-look D4505, and it will take delivery of two new 40-foot D4005 coaches this month.

MCI recently restyled its D-coaches, giving them a curvier front end, flared headlights, LED directional lights, a new upper cap, frameless side-sash windows, and a one-piece front bumper.

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Capital Trailways Montgomery, Ala.

Capital Trailways/Capital Motor Lines Inc., one of the largest motorcoach operators in the South, has taken delivery of a 2005 Van Hool C2045 coach.

The enhanced model is equipped with a Caterpillar C13 engine, ZF-AS Tronic 12-speed transmission, Amaya Brasil seats, and a Ricon S&S wheelchair lift. Other equipment includes roller-type shades, Monogram flush-type recirculating toilet, REI A/V system with DVD/VCP player, four monitors and radio, and Isringhausen driver seat.

Sky Express Charlotte, N.C.

Sky Express, a new company providing line-run service between Charlotte and New York city, has purchased a 2005 Van Hool C2045.

The coach has a Caterpillar C13 engine, ZF AS-tronic trans-

mission with intarder, Amaya Brasil seating for 61, Isringhausen driver seat, Goodyear tires, Alcoa wheels, REI A/V system with four monitors and DVD player, and Monogram flush-type toilet.

The new addition brings the number of C2045 Van Hools in the company fleet to 10. Capital Motor Lines was established 75 years ago and has offices in Montgomery and Huntsville, Ala., and Jackson, Miss. It offers Trailways intercity service, plus tours and charters throughout the U.S. and Canada, as well as local shuttles. It operates 100 buses.

Company Vice President of Maintenance Ed Sunday said Capital Trailways is looking at acquiring additional C2045 models.

Far West Charters San Pedro, Calif.

Far West Charters has added a third new Van Hool C2045 coach to its fleet in as many months.

Established 23 years ago by owner Carlos Garcia, Far West Charters has grown from one MCI MC-5 to a fleet of 18 coaches, all but one of which are 45-footers.

The company specializes in charter and transfer services for groups, including corporate and school accounts.

All three of Far West's 2005 C2045 coaches are equipped with Caterpillar C13 engines and Allison B500 transmissions. Other equipment includes Amaya



Brasil seats for 57 passengers, Isringhausen driver seats, Goodyear tires mounted on Alcoa wheels with hub covers, Monogram flush-type recirculating toilet, and REI A/V system with DVD player, four CRT monitors and radio.

Silver State Coach Placentia, Calif.

Silver State Coach, a family-owned and operated motorcoach company, has taken delivery of a 2005 C2045 coach from ABC Companies.

Silver State is owned and operated by Tony and Jill Fiorini and was founded in Reno, Nev., 19 years ago.

Converting to a two-coach operating company in the Los Angeles area about 10 years later, the company has continued its growth and now has more than 30 coaches in its fleet. In addition to local tour and charter services, the company also provides transportation for several large tour companies, as well as corporations and government agencies, and is licensed for travel in both Mexico and Canada.



The company's new C2045 is equipped with the Cummins ISM 450-horsepower engine and the Allison B500 transmission. It also has a Monogram flush-type recirculating toilet, REI A/V system with 4 CRT monitors and radio, Amaya Brasil seats, Alcoa wheels, and roller-type shades.

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NTSB

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Roughly nine hours after the Wilmer bus fire and explosion, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration sent an e-mail to the United Motorcoach Association, the American Bus Association and others containing a copy of the USDOT guidelines for carrying medical oxygen tanks on buses (see Page 13), a copy of suggested bus evacuation procedures developed by a taskforce of the Bus Industry Safety Council, and an offer to provide information about brakes and various research on detecting overheated brakes.

Some motorcoach industry observers were underwhelmed with the FMCSA response, pointing out that the motorcoach industry has petitioned the DOT for years for standards for carrying medical oxygen. "In every instance they've waffled and stonewalled," said one long-time industry safety expert.

Godfrey Lebron, owner of Paradise Trailways, a New York-based motorcoach company, and chairman of the legislative and regulatory committee of the United Motorcoach Association, said UMA "had been harping about oxygen on buses" since the Americans with Disabilities Act became law 13 years ago.

Unlike the strict rules that govern oxygen canisters on airplanes and trucks, the presence of oxygen on motorcoaches is virtually unregulated. The USDOT guidelines limit the amount of compressed

oxygen that a coach can carry to 99 pounds.

"If that amount of oxygen were on a truck, it would be subject to all kinds of federal regulation," said Norman Littler, senior vice president of government and industry relations at UMA. "But if it's on a bus, it's just wide open."

There were unconfirmed reports that several oxygen bottles had been loaded in the coach's luggage bay.

In the days following the Wilmer bus fire, Texas news organizations turned their focus on the operator of the coach, Global Limo Inc. of Pharr, Texas, which has a history of financial and safety woes, *The Dallas Morning News* reported.

The newspaper said that the owners of Global Limo filed for bankruptcy protection in February in a bid to block a takeover of the business for nonpayment of debt. The company's operating authority also was revoked for a few days in May by federal regulators — the second time in the past 12 years.

The FMCSA also had singled out Global Limo for full inspections whenever police stopped its buses, the newspaper said.

The Morning News and the *Houston Chronicle* both reported that Global Limo had a history of driver violations. In the last 2½ years, the company had five drivers put out of service during random inspections in Texas, New Mexico and Missouri, according to the FMCSA. The most common violation by Global Limo drivers was



'Witnesses reported seeing smoke and fire coming from the bus before a series of explosions.'

failure to properly maintain log books.

According to state records obtained by the *Morning News*, Global Limo operated nine buses, and is owned by James H. "Butch" Maples, 64, and his wife, Kathleen, 46.

Efforts to reach the company and Maples for comment were unsuccessful.

The *Chronicle* also reported that the registration for the bus had lapsed but that it probably had been pressed into service because of the hurricane.

The *Chronicle* said the 1991 MCI was not among the buses registered with the state as being used commercially by Global.

Mark Cross, a spokesman for the Texas Department of Transportation, told the *Chronicle* that because the state issued a waiver in advance of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Global Limo didn't have to provide information on every vehicle it used to evacuate people.

The coach was one thousands

of vehicles used in the evacuation under a Sept. 20 emergency order issued by Texas Gov. Rick Perry. The order suspended some requirements for motor carriers so every available vehicle could operate during the emergency evacuation.

Cross speculated that the reason the bus did not have proper registration was because it was not in regular use and possibly had been in storage. Its registration expired in July.

Whether the bus was insured is unclear. The other Global Limo buses were listed as having the required \$5 million in coverage, Cross said.

Although Global Limo had a clean maintenance record, its driver safety rating is 97. That means it is worse than 97 percent of all companies. The company history is based on violations recorded in the past 30 months, said Jim Lewis, spokesman for FMCSA in Washington. The reason for the high rating was because three of the violations occurred this year: in August, June and March. Two years ago, a Texas inspector discovered a driver for Global who was not licensed to drive a bus.

BusBank, the Chicago-based clearinghouse, arranged the Global Limo charter on behalf of Brighton Gardens nursing home of Houston to take 38 residents and six staff members to sister nursing homes in Dallas.

Bill Maulsby, president of BusBank, said his company has always considered Global Limo "a well-operated company."

"I know the operator is a good operator," Maulsby said. "Unfortunately, something went terribly wrong when they got south of Dallas."

What witnesses saw

Witnesses interviewed by police and news organizations reported seeing smoke and fire coming from the bus before a series of explosions. The bus was headed north toward Dallas about 6:30-6:45 a.m. when a witness saw it pass his car with smoke pouring out of the rear on the driver's side. About two minutes later, the bus exploded just north of Mars Road in Wilmer.

Sgt. Don Peritz, spokesman for the Dallas County Sheriff's Department said a tire on the bus was changed in Corsicana, Texas, but the problem may have originated with the vehicle's brakes. A fire broke out and apparently spread quickly, igniting one of the oxygen tanks, he said.

Dr. Paul Pepe, chairman of emergency medicine at UT Southwestern Medical Center, said one of the victims told him they stopped at 5:55 a.m. to change a tire. After they got back on the road, people started signaling that smoke was coming from the back of the bus. They pulled over and began trying to put the fire out, he said.

According to David Robertson, a Dallas County deputy sheriff on the scene, the bus left a lengthy skid mark on I-45. A piece of metal was lodged in the right rear wheel of the bus, and crash investigators believe this caused the tires to lock up.

Media trades

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

when he barter with radio stations that are running promotions for their listeners. But, he takes it down to 2-1 when the station is sponsoring a trip just for its own employees.

The radio stations he barter with produce most of the ads for him and then provide him with a log listing the times the ads will be running. "You have to be very careful of them trying to run them at 3 a.m.," he says.

While he's open to bartering year round, he tries to do most of it during the slowest times of the year. "When you're jammed to the max, then I would not want to do it. But when you have equipment sitting around, like in November through March, then it makes all of the sense in the world to participate in it," says Brown.

Lusk said the radio station-sponsored race car bus trips from Knoxville to Bristol, Tenn., usually end up in his favor by about

\$1,000. He also barter with a Christian radio station for two trips a year to a Christian music performance but makes those runs on a 1-1 ratio.

Greg Beach of Beach Transportation Co. in Missoula, Mont., has a different approach to his bartering. The company has charter and school bus operations and provides a couple of trips a year to a radio station in exchange for the station

broadcasting a series of school safety tips to its listeners, all at an even trade. "The company name is mentioned but the ads are about school bus safety," he said.

Cupp, who works with about eight radio stations and one television station in the Flint and Saginaw areas in eastern Michigan, says he doesn't have a specific ad ratio for his media trades, but gets them in his favor most times.

Ohio tax

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Gateway at www.obg.ohio.gov; paper applications are available on the Ohio Department of Taxation Web site at www.tax.ohio.gov.

Information on filing and payment of the gross receipts tax is being sent to all registered taxpayers. The first returns must be filed by Feb. 10.

Here are other aspects of the tax reform package:

- The corporation franchise tax is being phased out over five years at the rate of 20 percent

annually beginning in tax year 2006.

- Tangible personal property tax is phased out over four years at about 25 percent annually beginning next year.

- The individual income tax rate is cut for all tax brackets by 4.2 percent for this tax year and an additional 4.2 percent (from 2004 rates) each year through 2009 for a total cut of 21 percent.

The state sales tax rate is cut from 6 to 5.5 percent. The vendor discount of .9 percent remains for timely filed and paid sales tax returns.

"If we have a \$700 bus trip, then we get about \$1,000 in ads," he explains.

He said his company designs the ads and uses radio station personnel to provide the voice talent when the amount involves only a few hundred dollars. For more expensive trades, the radio stations produce the entire ads.

"Being in the public eye and having a good rapport with the

The 10 percent property tax rollback on most commercial and industrial real property is eliminated.

Ohio's additional estate tax (sponge tax) is eliminated. The Ohio basic estate tax remains in effect.

As might be expected, there is considerable talk of legal challenges to the new tax law.

Answers to questions about the commercial activities tax and the other tax changes can be found at the Department of Taxation Web site www.tax.ohio.gov, or call (888) 722-8829.

media is a good thing," he stresses. "And being friendly with media people isn't going to hurt either."

Cupp takes his bartering a bit further than most. His company belongs to a business trade exchange in which hundreds of businesses earn and bank barter points by performing services for member companies. Then, when a business needs the services of another member, it can obtain them by using its banked barter points. "We have a Christmas party every year for our employees and it is catered by someone in the exchange and we use our points to pay for it," he said.

Because the companies involved in bartering have so many different ways of doing it, Beach thinks the industry should look into the practice and possibly develop some payment ratios and other standards.

"I would encourage the industry to consider the media trading issue and see if it can develop some guidelines and standards for all of use," he says.

USDOT guidance for safe transport of medical oxygen for personal use on coaches

The Department of Transportation recommends that bus and train operators take the following precautions to assure that medical oxygen being transported for passengers' personal use is handled and transported safely:

For transport in the passenger compartment

- Oxygen should be transported on a bus or train only when medically necessary.

- Oxygen should be transported in a cylinder maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. The manufacturer's instructions and precautions are usually printed on a label attached to the cylinder.

- Before boarding, inspect each cylinder to assure that it is free of cracks or leaks, including around the area valve and pressure relief device. Listen for leaks; do not load leaking cylinders on the bus or train. Visually inspect the cylinders for dents, gouges or pits. A cylinder that is dented, gouged, or pitted should not be transported.

- Limit the number of cylinders to be transported on board the vehicle to the extent practicable. If possible, transportation in the passenger compartment should be limited to one cylinder per person.

- Cylinders used for medical oxygen are susceptible to valve damage if dropped. Handle these cylinders with care during loading and unloading operations. Never drag or roll a cylinder. Never carry a cylinder by the valve or regulator. Carry the cylinder carefully using both hands.

- Do not handle oxygen cylinders or apparatus with hands or gloves contaminated with oil or grease.

- Each cylinder should be secured to prevent movement and leakage. Each cylinder should be loaded and secured in an upright position. "Secured" means that the cylinder is not free to move when the vehicle or train is in motion.

- Oxygen cylinders or other medical support equipment should never be stored or secured in the aisle. Make sure that the seating of the passenger requiring oxygen does not restrict access to exits or use of the aisle.

- Since the release of oxygen from a cylinder could accelerate a fire, each cylinder should be

secured away from sources of heat or potential sparks.

- Under no circumstances should smoking or open flames (cigarette lighter or matches) be permitted in the passenger compartment when medical oxygen is present.

- When you reach your destination, immediately remove all cylinders from the bus or train.

For transport in the cargo compartment

- Each cylinder should be placed in a box or crate or loaded and transported in an upright position.

- Valves should be protected against damage.

- Each cylinder should be secured against movement.

- The total weight for oxygen cylinders permitted in a bus cargo compartment is 99 lbs (45 kg).

For additional information contact Marilyn Burke, emergency coordinator for the Department of Transportation Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, at (703) 403-0365.

Katrina tax act aids businesses

The *Katrina Emergency Tax Relief Act of 2005*, adopted by Congress to help residents in the hurricane-damaged areas of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama rebuild their homes and lives as quickly as possible, has a number of provisions that also apply to businesses. Here are key provisions that apply to businesses or that may be of interest to business owners:

Deadline for using insurance proceeds extended. To avoid taxes on insurance payments, the money must be used to replace damaged or lost property. Normally, businesses have two years to reinvest the money; individuals have four. In both cases, the Katrina act extends the deadline to five years provided the replacement property is located within the disaster area.

Tax incentives for employers. There are a number of tax breaks for companies that employ Katrina victims. For instance, the "Work Opportunity Tax Credit," which gives employers a tax credit for hiring individuals in certain target groups, has been expanded. It now includes anyone who lived in the area that is eligible for assistance under something called the "Stafford Act."

Employers within the assis-

tance area can claim the credit for the next two years. Companies outside the area are also eligible for the credit if they hire WOTC individuals from the declared disaster area before the end of this year.

Small business tax credit. Companies in the Katrina disaster area with 200 or fewer employees are eligible for a tax credit of up to \$2,400 for each employee they keep on the payroll. This is available even if the employee is working at another facility.

Penalty-free retirement plan withdrawals. Katrina victims who withdraw money from their company retirement plans or IRAs to make repairs or pay bills will not be hit with the usual 10 percent early withdrawal penalty even if they are under age 59 1/2.

The maximum withdrawal is \$100,000. In addition, these individuals can spread the income tax on these withdrawals over three years instead of having to pay the entire amount in the year of the distribution.

If your company retirement plan offers "hardship" loans, the maximum amount is temporarily increased from \$50,000 to \$100,000.

Tax deadlines extended. Indi-

viduals who were supposed to submit income, estate or gift taxes will now have until Feb. 28 to do so. This includes filing tax returns and making estimated payments.

Incentives for charitable contributions. People who donate cash to a bona fide charity supporting Hurricane Katrina relief efforts will be able to deduct the entire amount. Normally, the deductible amount is limited to 50 percent of your adjusted gross income. Under the Katrina law, individuals or corporations that make charitable contributions in cash will be able to deduct 100 percent of the amount, provided the donation is made before Jan. 1.

The measure also waives the 10 percent income limitation on corporate donations to charity.

Tax break for use of personal vehicle. Volunteers who use their own car or truck in their charitable work can deduct 14 cents per mile — much less than the 48.5 cents per mile that the I.R.S. just approved for business use. Through the end of this year, this act raises the mileage deduction for Katrina aid workers to 34.2 cents per mile. It further states that if a volunteer is reimbursed for his or her mileage by the charity, he or she will not have to pay income tax on the amount.

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CUSA unit picked to operate Disney Resort Express

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Coach USA/Gray Line of Southern California has been named the “preferred transportation provider” by Disneyland Resort, and has introduced Disney-themed liveries on new buses it is operating between the resort and two major Los Angeles-area airports.

Coach USA/Gray Line is providing shuttles between Los Angeles International Airport, John Wayne/Orange County Airport and the Disneyland Resort on what has been named the Disneyland Resort Express, a transfer service featuring dedicated buses and schedules.

Bryan O’Connell, general manager of Coach USA/Gray Line in Anaheim, said the company has purchased 12 vehicles for the new shuttle and is committed to on-time service.

The coaches operate on a regular schedule between LAX and the resort from 6 a.m. to midnight, and from John Wayne/ Orange County Airport to the resort from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. The shuttle provides non-stop service between the airports and the Disneyland Resort hotels for arrivals and departures, then proceeds to other area hotels for pick up and delivery.

The resort is providing training for Coach USA/Gray Line drivers on entertainment events and attractions, so drivers can act as well-informed representatives.

Coach USA/Gray Line also has been named the exclusive provider of optional tours for Walt Disney Travel Company vacation packages. The optional tours include trips to San Diego, Hollywood and Las Vegas.

Coach USA/Gray Line of Anaheim is part of Dallas-based CUSA, the nation’s largest motorcoach charter, tour and sightseeing company.



Creative Mobile to expand

GROVE CITY, Ohio — Creative Mobile Interiors, a luxury motorcoach conversion company, has purchased six acres south of Columbus, Ohio, for consolidating and expanding its business.

The land is a half-mile from the company’s current headquarters in Grove City, and includes 517 acres fronting along Interstate 71.

The company plans to build a headquarters and operations facility, which will allow it to consolidate the four separate plants it leases.

Construction is expected to start during the second quarter of next year.

“We are truly thrilled to be one step closer to moving into our very

own facility,” said CMI President and Founder Owen Connaughton.

CMI began in a 4,500-square-foot shop on Columbus’ west side. It moved into its current facility about three and one-half years ago.

Since then it has added a service center, a plant that focuses on Sprinter van conversions, and a plant that builds cabinetry for Airstream, the travel trailer company.

Creative Mobile counts motorcoach operators among its customer base, including Free Enterprise System of Jeffersonville, Ind., which added two new luxury conversion coaches early this year that had been outfitted by Creative Mobile.

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Calendar

OCTOBER 2005

23-26 Ontario Motor Coach Association Conference & Marketplace, Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel, Toronto. Info: (416) 229-6622 or go to www.omca.com.

Hurricane

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

temporary maintenance center outside of New Orleans in La Place, La., which has been a staging area for hundreds of coaches used for the recovery effort.

National Football League broadcaster and well-known bus rider John Madden volunteered the use of his personal conversion coach to help MCI assist drivers whose equipment needed servicing.

Madden has two MCI cruisers. His MCI E4500 model is often seen at televised sporting events. The Madden Cruiser I, his first MCI, is a 1987 96A3 that he maintains for personal use.

MCI Dallas Fleet Support technicians Darryl Johnson and Felix Osuna volunteered to go to La Place, with a fully equipped MCI service truck. The Madden Cruiser was used to house Johnson and Osuna while they worked in Louisiana.

Impact to spread

Hurricane Rita, and Katrina before it, severely disrupted diesel fuel production by gulf refineries.

Along the Texas coast, 16 of 21 refineries — with a combined daily capacity of about 4 million barrels a day — were closed because of Rita. That represents 23.5 percent of the nation's total refinery capacity.

With refineries closed, even temporarily, most pipelines carrying crude or refined products also were shut, reducing the flow of diesel fuel, gasoline and jet fuel, especially into the Midwest.

The Environmental Protection Agency extended a temporary emergency waiver, for 20 days, allowing the continued sale of some high-sulfur diesel fuel in the wake of shortages caused by Katrina.

However, engine manufacturers warned that running vehicles with off-highway fuel for long distances or for prolonged periods could lead to engine damage.

The Internal Revenue Service also extended the penalty relief when dyed diesel fuel is sold for use or used on the highway. The nationwide relief extends through Oct. 5, and any dyed diesel fuel held by retailers or users on Oct. 5 can be used on the highway after that date, the IRS said.

25 North Carolina Motorcoach Association Coach Rodeo, Christian Tours, Maiden, N.C. Info: (434) 376-1150 or go to www.ncmotorcoach.org.

29-Nov. 1 32nd annual California Bus Association Convention & Trade Show, LaQuinta Resort & Club, Palm Springs, Calif. Info: (800) 664-2877 or go to www.cbabus.com.

NOVEMBER 2005

1-3 Southeastern Regional Motorcoach Operators Meeting, Hilton Myrtle Beach, Myrtle Beach, S.C. Info: (434) 376-1150 or e-mail info@ncmotorcoach.org.

4-8 National Tour Association Annual Convention, Detroit. Info: Go to www.ntaonline.com.

8-10 BusCon Midsize Bus Equipment & Technology Show, Las Vegas Convention Center. Info: (800) 576-8788 or go to www.BusConExpo.com.

19-23 Canadian Urban Transit Association TransExpo, Vancouver, British Columbia. Info: (416) 365-9800 or go to www.cutaactu.on.ca.

20-22 Motor Coach Canada Connections West annual meeting, The Fairmont Waterfront, Vancouver, British Columbia. Info: (416) 229-9305 or go to www.motorcoachcanada.com.



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See www.motorcoachexpo.com for details.

Preliminary Program Schedule

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

- ◆ State Association Summit (1:00PM - 5:00PM)
- ◆ Welcome Reception (6:00PM - 9:00PM)
The Tampa Aquarium

Thursday, January 19, 2006

- ◆ UMA Active Member Meeting and Continental Breakfast (8:00AM)
- ◆ Maintenance Interchange (8:00AM - 4:00PM)
- ◆ Education Sessions (9:00AM - 4:15PM)
- ◆ Operator Luncheon
- ◆ Exhibit Hall Open – “Sneak Preview” (4:30PM - 7:15PM)

Friday, January 20, 2006

- ◆ Education Sessions (8:00AM - 10:30AM)
- ◆ Exhibit Hall Open (10:30AM - 5:30PM)
- ◆ Lunch on Exhibit Floor
- ◆ Vision Awards Banquet (6:30PM - 11:00PM)

Saturday, January 21, 2006

- ◆ Exhibit Hall Open (9:00AM - 12:00PM)
- ◆ Brunch on Exhibit Floor

Sunday, January 22, 2006

- ◆ 2nd Annual Ray Dupuis Memorial Golf Tournament (8:00AM)

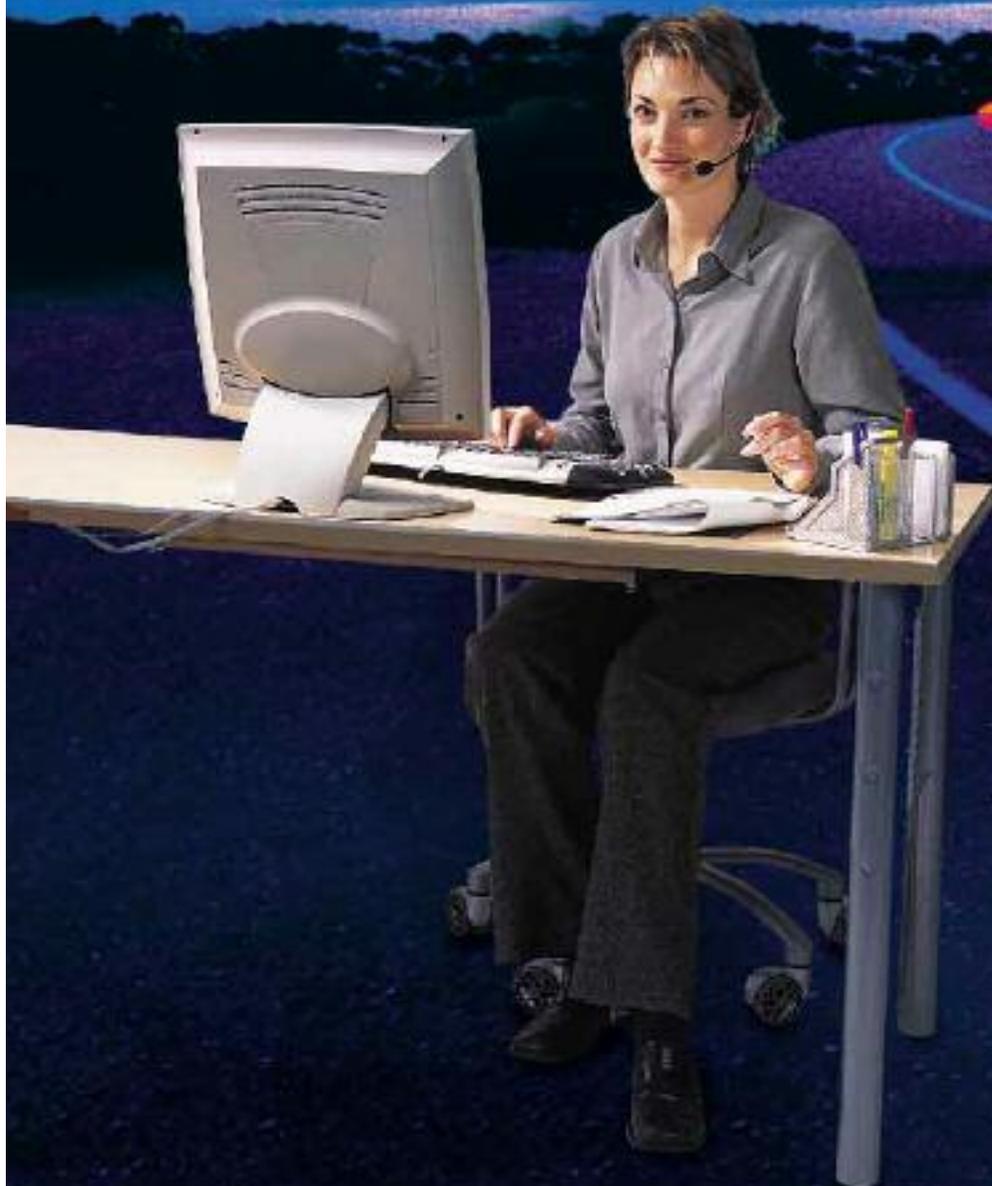
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