

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Biodiesel fuel mandates are worrisome to industry

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Motorcoaches running low on fuel in Minnesota these days are having to fill their tanks with diesel fuel mixed with a pinch of soybeans.

That's because a three-year-old law has finally taken effect, requiring that all diesel fuel sold in Minnesota be blended with 2 percent biodiesel, eliminating 100 percent petroleum-based diesel from

fueling stations across the state.

The mandate is the first of its kind in the United States and is being watched closely by the entire motor carrier industry as well as a number of other states that appear to be on the verge of adopting legislation designed to boost the use of biodiesel.

Motorcoach operators and over-the-road truckers have been cau-

tious about burning the fuel, which is made from vegetable oils and fats, including soybeans, because they are uncertain what the long-term impact might be on diesel engines.

The biodiesel issue has become common fodder for discussion at state motorcoach association meetings in recent months.

The move by Minnesota comes a month after Illinois ordered all

state and local governments, public transit agencies, school districts, community colleges and universities to burn 2 percent biodiesel, or B2 as it is known, in all of their diesel-powered vehicles. Illinois also gives a tax credit to motorists who burn a blend of 20 percent or more biodiesel.

"There's a lot of momentum building up at the state level right

now and I anticipate even more next year," said Scott Hughes of the National Biodiesel Board, a trade association founded by soybean commodity groups.

He said Michigan could act on legislation similar to the Minnesota mandate and New York is likely to introduce legislation in response to a call by Gov. George Pataki to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

Rule for new drivers should be revamped, says UMA, coalition

WASHINGTON — The U.S. District Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia is weighing whether federal training standards for new commercial drivers are inadequate.

The court could decide any day on arguments by a coalition of safety and driver interest groups — that includes the United Motorcoach Association — that the rule is fatally flawed because it does not require on-the-road training.

The rule, which was adopted by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration in May 2004, sets minimum training requirements for entry-level commercial vehicle drivers, including motorcoach operators.

Almost from the day the rule was unveiled, UMA, the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association and the Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety have been trying to have it reconsidered, rescinded or relegated to the trash heap.

Attorneys for the three groups appeared before the D.C. appeals court last month, telling a panel of judges that the rule should be overturned because it is arbitrary and capricious in addressing driv-

er training needs, ignores the realities of the motorcoach industry, and does not require behind-the-wheel training.

"The record showed that current levels of training are not adequate to ensure that drivers actually know how to operate a truck," said Adina Rosenbaum, an attorney with the Public Citizen litigation group, which represents the advocates in its challenge. "We think adequate training has to include training in the actual operation of a truck."

As the rule currently stands, it requires commercial drivers with less than one year of experience to receive classroom training in hours of service, driver medical qualifications, health and wellness issues, and whistle-blower regulations. There is no requirement for behind-the-wheel training.

An attorney for the Owner-Operator Independent Driver Association, an organization of truckers, said the four areas of training required by the rule were not singled out as particular areas that needed attention during the course of the rulemaking and public

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

NTA, UMA work toward closer ties

LEXINGTON, Ky. — The National Tour Association and the United Motorcoach Association are discussing ways they can work more closely to develop new business opportunities for members of both organizations.

Discussions between the associations have been going on for some time and have focused on a number of short- and long-term issues offering possibilities for UMA and NTA to better coordinate their activities.

"Generally speaking, we see an opportunity for bringing about a greater degree of interaction between UMA and NTA members to increase mutual understanding and benefits," said NTA President Hank Phillips.

"We look forward to exploring ways to enhance the interests of both our memberships," added Victor Parra, president and CEO of the United Motorcoach Association.

The first concrete development from the discussions is an invitation from NTA for UMA members who operate motorcoach tours and charters to attend the NTA Annual

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►

New Orleans recovery shows progress signs, mayor floats big idea

NEW ORLEANS — The rebuilding of the tourism and visitor industry in New Orleans is moving forward with hotels beginning to reopen at a more rapid pace and an upbeat assessment of city attractions being issued.

At the same time, the city is struggling on other fronts, prompting Mayor Ray Nagin to propose creation of a downtown casino district that would generate new revenue and represent a massive increase in the amount of legalized gambling in the city.

Nagin says his "out-of-the-box" idea will "jump-start" New Orleans' ravaged economy.

The mayor envisions a gaming district that would encompass Canal and Poydras streets between Claiborne Avenue and the Mississippi River. Every hotel with 500 rooms or more would be permitted to offer casino gambling.

Currently, state law limits land-based gambling in New Orleans to a single casino, now operated by Harrah's at the foot of Canal Street.

Admitting he is desperate to bolster New Orleans' depleted treasury, Nagin said the casino dis-

trict would allow more than a half-dozen large hotels to open gambling halls that would compete directly with Harrah's. He reiterated that the city faces dire financial straits and needs a huge expansion of legalized gambling to generate needed revenue.

Without drastic action to spark development in the city's port and tourism industries, Nagin said, "we're going to limp along (financially) for the next three to five years."

Asked whether he feared his idea would put New Orleans' cultural traditions at risk, turning the city into a southern Las Vegas, Nagin said he's not worried. He said New Orleans has much more to offer than Las Vegas, citing its food, architecture, the French Quarter and Mardi Gras, among other cultural touchstones.

"I don't ever see a scenario where New Orleans becomes Las Vegas," he said.

Separately, the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau reports that the French Quarter and most of the city's hospitality infrastructure have largely survived

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 ►



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Mike Hillard of Tri-State Tours in Galena, Ill., drives away in Cadillac XLR his company won in an MCI sales contest.

XLR joins fleet at Tri-State Tours

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — Mike and Rick Hillard, owners of Tri-State Tours in Galena, Ill., have captured the top prize in a contest operated by Motor Coach Industries this past summer, winning a two-year lease on a Cadillac XLR sports roadster.

The MCI Experiences Event allowed coach operators that

bought new and pre-owned coaches, parts, MCI Signature Shop items, training, maintenance or repair services from MCI to enter a series of drawings. Operators received one entry for every \$1,000 they spent with MCI.

“It’s exciting to win a prize of this magnitude,” said Mike Hillard as he took the keys to the XLR

from Tom Sorrells, president and CEO of MCI.

The drawing for the car was last month, with preliminary drawings in July and August.

The first-round winners were Pacific Western Transportation of Calgary, Alberta (Michael Colborne, chief operating officer), and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 ►

Future of motorcoach travel appears headed to Internet

Most motorcoach operators have their own Web site.

Many have the latest digital entertainment systems on their buses.

Some have installed advanced communications equipment.

Others have added complex sound-and-sight security gear.

A few have invested in sophisticated satellite-tracking devices.

And, soon, many operators may be using new technology to help them bid for charter work without having to answer the phone, check the availability of coaches, or calculate quotes.

Those routine but often time-consuming tasks, instead, will be performed by computer software and technology being developed for Group Travel Planet, a Pigeon Forge, Tenn., company that operates two Web sites that book motorcoach charters and other travel business.

“It’s where the future of the industry is going,” asserts Scott Harness, president of Group

Travel. “It can be a huge step for the industry to bring it into the 21st century in terms of using the power of the Internet.”

Harness’ company is partnering with a large bus industry software firm — Harness declined to reveal the name, yet — that will put the new technology on Group Travel’s Web sites, *CoachQuote.com*, which is used by professional tour operators, and *GroupTravelPlanet.com*, which serves the group market.

“We’ve seen it coming for the last five years and it is the route we need to go,” says Harness, a former hotel sales manager who founded the business in 2000 when he sought to streamline the process of bidding for hotel bookings requested



Scott Harness

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THE DOCKET

N.J. Police can ticket buses idling illegally

TRENTON, N.J. — The State Police and other law enforcement officials in New Jersey now have the power to ticket bus drivers who exceed the state's tough three-minute idling law.

The authority was granted under a diesel-emission reduction plan signed last month by acting Gov. Richard Codey.

Previously, only officials from the state Department of Environmental Protection had the authority to enforce the idling law.

Andrea Malamut of the Greater New Jersey Motorcoach Association says the association has not received any reports of increased ticketing under the broadened authority — but it's early yet.

Citations for violating New Jersey's anti-idling law can be given to both the coach driver and the property owner where the violation occurs. First-offense fines are \$250 but can escalate to \$3,000 for repeat offenders.

While the New Jersey law generally limits bus and truck idling to three minutes, there are exceptions. But the best policy remains to caution drivers to either limit idling or eliminate it.

With diesel fuel costing more than \$3 a gallon in many parts of the U.S., an engine idling just one hour daily, six days each week will cost an operator nearly \$2,000 annually.

New Jersey's emissions reduction plan also mandates that municipal vehicles like transit and school buses be retrofitted with cleaner particulate-trap systems.

Voters will decide whether the state should allocate part of a corporate tax to help pay for the retrofits. The proposed constitutional amendment — Ballot Question No. 2 — will be voted on Nov. 8.

Owners of both public and private transit buses could be reimbursed for installing the emissions-reduction technology.

Traffic warning goes high tech in Maryland

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Electronic-sensor and data-collection technology is being deployed on Maryland roadways to provide travelers with real-time, actionable traffic information, plus it will give warnings when fog rolls into mountainous western Maryland.

The Maryland State Highway Administration signed an agreement with Traffic.com, which specializes in traffic data collection and reporting, for a network of wireless roadside traffic sensors.

The project will provide coverage from north of Baltimore to south of Washington, D.C., including the stretch of Interstate 95 that connects the city's two beltways. Traffic congestion is a serious issue in Baltimore, as in most major cities.

Traffic.com's system is being deployed as part of a public-private partnership funded by the

federal government. Signs will enable drivers to make decisions about which routes to travel.

Meanwhile, bus operators and other drivers heading into the mountains of western Maryland will see a new kind of warning when fog obscures a notorious stretch of Interstate 68 near Hagerstown.

A \$230,000 system will automatically activate flashing signs when visibility drops below 1,000 feet on Keyzers Ridge or Big Savage Mountain, where two people died in an 89-vehicle pileup two years ago.

When roadside sensors, using infrared technology, detect thick fog on the 2,800-foot peaks, they send radio signals that activate yellow flashers on permanent signs three to seven miles away on either side of the ridge tops.

The signs read: "Reduced visibility possible when flashing."

Tunnel provides updates via Web

DETROIT — The Detroit-Windsor Tunnel has expanded the availability of tunnel traffic information.

Travelers between Windsor, Ont., and Detroit are now able to obtain real-time traffic conditions at the tun-

nel by going to www.dwtunnel.com.

The Web service provides a real-time camera view of the tunnel's Detroit and Windsor plazas.

The tunnel is evaluating adding text-messaging and e-mail notifications as service to its customers.

Massive road plan is up for vote in N.Y.

ALBANY, N.Y. — New York voters will be asked next month to approve the largest state DOT highway and bridge construction program in history.

The \$2.9 billion Rebuild and Renew New York Transportation Bond Act of 2005 has the strong backing of New York Gov. George E. Pataki.

Pataki says the act is a comprehensive and fiscally responsible plan that will make critical improvements to New York's transportation infrastructure, create more than 120,000 jobs, and promote economic growth and energy conservation.

The bond act is part of a five-year, \$35.9 billion transportation capital improvement program the governor and legislative leaders agreed to this past summer. The plan includes a total of \$17.96 billion for the state Department of Transportation and \$17.99 billion for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Among the roadway and bridge construction projects included in the act are the continued conversion of State Route 17 into Interstate 86 across New York's so-called Southern Tier; construction of the U.S. Route 219 freeway in Erie and Cattaraugus counties; construction of a four-lane Fort Drum connector roadway that will link Interstate 81 directly with the Fort Drum complex, one of America's largest military installations; capital improvements to the Cross Westchester Expressway (Interstate 287) in Westchester County; interchange improvements on the Van Wyck Expressway in Queens, and border crossing improvements in northern and western New York.

Other programs in the bond act include money for purchasing approximately 250 clean-fuel vehicles, the majority of which will be hybrid-electric transit buses; \$65 million for congestion-reducing intelligent transportation systems, and \$50 million to preserve and rehabilitate New York's historic canal system and construct bicycle and pedestrian lanes.

Nevada operators file suit to halt regulation by state, feds' pre-emption is issue

RENO, Nev. — Motorcoach operators in Nevada have made good on a promise to seek help from the courts in a feud they're having with state regulators.

The Nevada Transportation Coalition and Nevada Transportation Association filed suit in U.S. District Court in Reno against the Nevada Transportation Services Authority (TSA), claiming that the agency is regulating the motor carrier industry beyond federal laws that preempt state authority.

In August, the operators said they were considering the legal action because state lawmakers failed to resolve the dispute during their regular session this year and they could not wait until their next session in 2007 (see Aug. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*).

In the court documents filed late last month, the operators ask for a declaratory judgment that would hold that the state's regulatory policies are unconstitutional and inappropriate and that the TSA is in violation of federal pre-emption and deregulation laws.

Although they are not seeking a specific monetary award, the operators do ask the court to order the state to pay their attorney fees and court costs.

The suit maintains that in 1998, the federal government preempted state regulation of motor carriers in areas other than safety and insurance, and that the TSA is illegally regulating the industry by requiring certification, financial filings, nonsafety procedures, doc-

ument verifications and other measures.

"Clearly it is the belief of many carriers that the Nevada TSA is regulating well beyond what the federal preemption allows it to do," said Ellen J. Winograd, a Reno attorney who filed the suit on behalf of the motorcoach operators.

Several state lawmakers tried to settle the dispute earlier in the year, but failed in their efforts to get the Legislature to pass two proposals that would have reined in the TSA. A third measure was passed but had been reworked so drastically that rather than limiting the powers of the TSA as initially proposed, it actually gave the agency additional regulatory authority. A fourth proposal that would have done away with the TSA also passed, but was vetoed by the governor because it contained a last-minute addition that would have hurt the taxi industry.

Winograd said the legal action against the TSA could take as long as nine months to resolve. If the carriers win, the TSA would be prohibited from continuing to regulate the carriers in the same manner that it now does and would be required to follow the federal deregulation laws.

"This is an issue of much larger significance than any one carrier or one coalition bringing this action," said Winograd.

"It is about how far a state may go where the federal government has chosen to legislate in a certain area."

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:

Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery counties and Philadelphia, Pa. Deadline: 4

p.m. Oct. 21, 2005. Write to: John F. McGee, Chief Revenue and Market Development Officer, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, 1234 Market St., 9th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19107. Phone: (215) 580-7930.

Lancaster County, Pa. Deadline: 2 p.m. Oct. 31, 2005. Write to: James J. Lutz, Executive Director, Red Rose Transit Authority, 45 Erick Rd., Lancaster, PA 17601. Phone: (717) 397-5613.

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Dang diesel prices

It's hard to be optimistic about the outlook for diesel fuel prices during the next six months.

With the price of retail diesel topping the never-before-seen-\$3-a-gallon level earlier this month, most oil industry analysts are forecasting more of the same — or worse.

Just around the corner may be \$3.50 a gallon, and you don't have to dig very deep to find experts who are saying that some states could witness the unthinkable — a diesel fuel price of nearly \$4 a gallon. A year ago, prices were at about half that.

Scarier still have been the reports of spot diesel shortages around the country.

So, what's driving diesel prices higher? Basically, high crude-oil prices, concerns over reduced refining capacity in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and heavy demand.

Around 56 percent of the price of diesel comes from the price of crude. Crude oil futures have been averaging 45 percent or more higher this year than last. At the same time, Gulf Coast refiners are processing about half of what they were before Rita.

Meanwhile, demand for diesel has been strong. In fact, diesel has been the oil industry's most spectacular growth product in recent years. Robust truck traffic has pushed demand for diesel up by 5 percent or more this year from 2004.

Currently, diesel fuel supplies are slightly above last year. Even so, forecasters are warning of a deficit, beginning this month, and based on current production, the deficit could be very, very substantial. Dang.

Good News: Jerk 'n jolt doctrine reaffirmed

By Gary N. Stewart
Rawle & Henderson LLP

PITTSBURGH — The Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court has upheld the “jerk or jolt” doctrine, which has been the law in Pennsylvania for nearly 100 years. And that's good news for bus operators.

The court affirmed a decision by the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County that rejected a case brought by a woman who claimed that the transit agency in Pittsburgh, which is called Port Authority Transit, was negligent in causing her to fall while riding one of its buses.

In doing so, the court confirmed that the “jerk or jolt” doctrine is still good law.

The essence of the jerk or jolt doctrine was summarized 65 years ago by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in *Staller v. Philadelphia Rapid Transit Co.*, 339 Pa. 100, 14 A.2d 298 (1940). The court said:

“It is well established, by a long line of decisions, that testimony indicating that a moving trolley car jerked suddenly or violently is not sufficient, of itself, to establish negligence in its operation. There must be a showing of additional facts and circumstances from which it clearly appears that the movement of the car was so unusual and extraordinary as to be beyond a passenger's reasonable anticipation, and nothing short of evidence that the allegedly unusual movement had an extraordinarily disturbing effect upon other passengers, or evidence of an accident, the manner of the occurrence of which or the effect of which upon the injured person inherently establishes the unusual character of the jolt or jerk, will suffice.”

In *Asbury v. Port Authority Transit of Allegheny County*, No. 2546 C.D. 2003, Leslie Asbury sued the Port Authority for an accident that occurred on Nov. 26, 1999, when she boarded a Port Authority bus. At the time of the accident, Asbury was 29 years old and she was 34 weeks pregnant. After boarding the bus, she proceeded to a seat. As the bus pulled away from the stop, Asbury not yet seated, lost her balance, and fell in the aisle fracturing the

femur in her left leg. Asbury was transported to a local hospital and an orthopedic surgeon performed surgery to place a stabilizing rod in her leg.

At trial, Asbury testified that at birth, she suffered from clubbed feet and shortened heel cords. Although surgery had partially corrected the defects, she still had flat feet, walked with a limp, and had some trouble climbing stairs. She testified that as she boarded the bus, she was carrying her purse and a knapsack. She did not speak to the bus driver.

‘A carrier which accepts as a passenger a person known to be affected by either a physical or mental disability ... must exercise a greater degree of care.’

Asbury walked down the aisle to the first seat, facing the front of the bus. As she placed her belongings on the seat, and was about to sit down, the bus “lurched with a sudden force.”

Specifically, Asbury testified: “I was grabbing for the bar to keep from falling. It was too late. I landed on my right hip and the force of the fall snapped my femur; left thigh bone.”

The Port Authority driver testified he offered whatever assistance was necessary to blind or wheelchair-bound passengers, but he did not scrutinize each individual for disabilities or special needs. The driver noted there was no formal policy about when a bus driver may begin moving the bus after passengers have boarded, and on the day of the accident there were only a handful of people on the bus.

At the conclusion of the plaintiff's case, the trial court granted Port Authority's motion for a compulsory nonsuit. The court concluded that Asbury's suit was governed by the “jerk or jolt” doctrine. The trial court ruled that Asbury failed to prove that the alleged jerking or jolting of the bus had a disturbing effect on other passengers or the nature of the accident inherently established the unusual character of the jolting movement.

Asbury argued on appeal in the commonwealth court that the trial court erred because the bus driver, by pulling away from the bus stop before Asbury was seated, failed to exercise the highest degree of care under the circumstances.

She maintained that the bus driver should have perceived and accounted for her limp and advanced pregnancy, and he had a duty to wait until she was seated before moving the bus.

The commonwealth court disagreed and relied on the case of *LeGrand v. Lincoln Lines Inc.*, 384 A.2d 955 (Pa. Super. 1978). In that case, the plaintiff was a 70-year-old woman who was partially blind and wore an eye patch. The court indicated that not only was the plaintiff obviously handicapped, but the bus driver apparently accelerated immediately after the woman boarded the bus while she attempted to show the bus driver her Medicare and Social Security cards.

The Superior Court instructed that the following legal principle was controlling: “[a] carrier which accepts as a passenger a person known to be affected by either a physical or mental disability which increased the hazards of travel must exercise a greater degree of care for that passenger than is ordinarily required.”

The Commonwealth Court found that the difference between the passenger in *LeGrand* and Asbury was that Asbury and the bus driver both testified that when Asbury boarded the bus, she did not have any problem ascending the stairs or proceeding down the aisle; Asbury may not have appeared pregnant through her heavy coat; she was carrying a considerable amount of baggage; and she did not request that the driver wait until she was seated before proceeding.

Thus, to establish negligence against a bus company the plaintiff must prove that there was a “sudden or violent jerk or jolt,” so unusual and extraordinary as to be beyond a reasonable passenger's anticipation. Expert witness testimony may be required to establish this fact.

Gary N. Stewart is an attorney in Harrisburg, Pa. He can be reached at (717) 234-7730, or at by e-mail at gstewart@rawle.com.

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Morgan Coaches Indiana is all new

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Hall-Mark Tours, a 22-year-old central Indiana motorcoach operation, has a new name, a new owner and a new location.

Cliff Hall, who founded the company in 1983, has sold the business to Carl Bergman, who has renamed the company Morgan Coaches Indiana. The company takes its name from Bergman's daughter, Morgan.

Bergman has been involved in

transportation for nearly 40 years, including 10 years in the motorcoach industry. Most recently he was general manager of the Indianapolis operation of the defunct Illini Swallow Lines.

The company provides charter, sightseeing and airport services in an area that extends from Chicago, to Indianapolis to Kankakee, Ill.

Hall built a new, 160,000-square-foot building for his company last year after a fire badly

damaged the facility it had shared with two other businesses. Bergman took over the six coaches Hall had operated — four 40-foot MCIs and two 45-foot Neoplans. The buses have new livery, reflecting the name and ownership change.

Meanwhile, Hall is phasing out of the business. "I'm 75," he says, "and that's a lot of stress. I've got \$1 million invested in here, but it's a younger man's game. There's a lot of pressure in this business."

Bridgestone Firestone to hike tire prices

NASHVILLE, Ten. — Bridgestone Firestone North American Tire and Bridgestone Firestone Canada are raising prices next month on Bridgestone, Firestone, Dayton and private-brand tire lines because of higher raw materials costs.

The increases — of up to 8 percent — will take effect Nov. 1. They will affect bus, passenger car, light and heavy truck, agricultural and off-road tires.

"The astronomical increases in petroleum prices are driving up the

cost of synthetic rubber and carbon black," said Duke Nishiyama, president of Bridgestone Americas Holding. "That, combined with rising natural gas costs and natural rubber prices, has given us no choice but to take this action."

New product cleans air in buses

MINNEAPOLIS — Thermo King Corp. has introduced a new product to deal with the most frequent complaint from bus riders: odors.

"Bad smelling buses can be found everywhere, and you can only clean them so often," says Steve Johnson, Thermo King direc-

tor, bus product management. "So, why not treat the buses continuously while they are in service?"

To do that, Thermo King has introduced EnviroFresh.

The new product is applied through the HVAC system and neutralizes the microbes that cause odors without using caustic chemi-

cals as is sometimes done during bus cleaning, says Johnson.

"Independent laboratory tests found our EnviroFresh product to be 100 percent effective against staph and strep growth," adds Johnson.

For more information, go to www.thermoking.com or contact a Thermo King representative.

National Interstate to buy dormant casualty insurer

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Insurance Co., the No. 2 auto liability insurer in the motorcoach industry (after Lancer), is buying a largely dormant property and casualty insurer called Triumphe Casualty Co.

National Interstate is a subsidiary of National Interstate Corp., while Triumphe is owned by Triumphe Insurance Holdings LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Volvo Commercial Finance of Greensboro, N.C.

Triumphe Casualty, which is domiciled in Pennsylvania, holds licenses for multiple lines of insurance authority, including auto-related lines, in 24 states and the District of Columbia.

While Triumphe has maintained its insurance licenses, the company has not written any new policies for the past 18 months. According to a spokesman for National Interstate, Triumphe stopped writing insurance in April 2004, after Volvo made a strategic decision that underwriting insurance risks was not a part of its core business.

In response to a query, the

National Interstate spokeswoman said the operating licenses the company is acquiring through the purchase will allow National Interstate to gradually "reduce our historic dependence on affiliate fronting relationships."

Alan R. Spachman, chairman and president of National Interstate, said his company was "excited about the opportunity" to acquire the additional operating licenses.

As of Sept. 30, Triumphe had 302 policies in force. In 2002, Triumphe produced about \$45 million in written premiums.

Under the agreement in principle signed by National Interstate and Triumphe, the purchase price will be the "statutory surplus" of Triumphe as of Sept. 30, 2005, subject to certain adjustments.

On June 30, Triumphe's surplus amounted to roughly \$12.8 million.

The closing of the sale will be Jan. 1, contingent on regulatory approvals and customary closing conditions.

National Interstate said the acquisition is not expected to have a material impact on its earnings.

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New Orleans

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The CVB also announced plans to move back into its headquarters at 2020 St. Charles Ave. on Oct. 15. The CVB Web site is www.neworleanscvb.com.

Meanwhile, the list of hotels reopening in the city continues to grow.

The city's flagship Marriott, the JW Marriott New Orleans, officially reopened. Marriott is one of the largest hotel operators in New Orleans with 15 properties. Six more Marriotts are expected to join the JW Marriott in reopening shortly to welcome guests and help return tourism to New Orleans.

Here are the projected reopening dates for other New Orleans' area hotels: DoubleTree New Orleans and the Hotel Monteleone (this month); Holiday Inn French Quarter (November); Chateau Le-moyne (November); Hotel Monaco (December); Maison Dupuy (January); Omni Hotels (this month); Sonesta Hotels (this month); Hilton Hotels (this month); InterContinental Hotel (January); Sheraton New Orleans (this month); W French Quarter (this month); W New Orleans (this month); Hyatt Regency (January 2007); LePavillon (Open), and Le Cirque (open with availability).

Limited taxi, shuttle and rental car services are available in the city.

Most observers do not expect New Orleans to begin regularly hosting overnight visitors and tourists until early next year.

One of the principal reasons for the delay is because more than 400,000 people left homeless by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita will remain in hotel rooms well beyond the Oct. 15 deadline set for their relocation. In fact, the relocation program is being extended indefinitely.

Efforts to move and house evacuees in mobile homes, on cruise ships or in market-rate apartments have largely failed. Instead, people have migrated from shelters into hotel rooms that are arranged by the Red Cross and paid for by the federal government. Earlier this month, the Red Cross reported that 438,030 people were living in 141,300 hotel rooms, with most of those rooms closest to the areas of devastation.

The Travel Industry Association reports that Hurricane Katrina could cost the Gulf Coast region up to \$5 billion in lost tourism revenue by the end of the year. About 260,000 travel-related jobs are expected to be lost either temporarily or for the long term in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, the TIA said.

I-10 bridge in Mississippi reopens early

PASCAGOULA, Miss. — The Interstate 10 bridge in Pascagoula has been reopened to four lanes of traffic after a barge battered the bridge's eastbound span during Hurricane Katrina.

Department of Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta said the bridge was not scheduled to reopen until the middle of this month, but a flexible contract that contained

an incentive clause helped get the repairs done quickly.

T.L. Wallace Construction of Columbia, Miss., won the \$5.2 million contract and restored normal, two-lane traffic in each direction, resulting in a \$1 million bonus for early job completion.

Damage from Katrina had closed the eastbound span, causing traffic backups with only one lane

open in each direction on the westbound span.

Repairing all roads and bridges damaged by Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast states is expected to cost as much as \$5 billion, according to Mineta.

One wire service quoted Mineta as saying Katrina's fallout was the nation's worst-ever transportation disaster.

The two key arteries damaged by Katrina, U.S. 90 and Interstate 10, remain severed at various points in both states. Transportation officials in Mississippi say U.S. 90 from Waveland to Ocean Springs is the only state highway closed indefinitely due to damage from the storm.

Work is under way in earnest to repair the badly damaged I-10.

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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 (9:00AM - 4:15PM)
- ◆ Education Sessions (9:00AM - 4:15PM)
- ◆ Operator Luncheon
- ◆ Exhibit Hall Open - "Sneak Preview" (4:30PM - 7:15PM)

Friday, January 20, 2006

- ◆ Education Sessions (8:30AM - 10:30AM)
- ◆ Exhibit Hall Open (10:30AM - 5:30PM)
- ◆ Lunch on Exhibit Floor
- ◆ The 3rd Annual 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)

For more detailed schedule information, please visit www.motorcoachexpo.com

Early return of cruise ships to New Orleans not likely

WASHINGTON — The CEO of the Port of New Orleans has dashed hopes of an early return of cruise ships to the port.

Testifying late last month before Congress, Gary LaGrange, president and CEO of the port and also chairman of the American Association of Port Authorities, said the impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on his port "was considerable."

Katrina, for example, completely shut down the port, and both storms and subsequent flooding badly damaged the port's terminals and other infrastructure.

LaGrange says some port facilities may need to be relocated, "and it will take months if not years to fully recover."

Currently, the Port of New Orleans is roughly 20 percent

operational, and most of the rebuilding effort is focused on restoring cargo activity, along with the flow of agricultural products from Midwestern states, and movement of oil and chemicals.

Prior to Katrina, cruises also were an important component of the activities at the New Orleans port. In fact, New Orleans was the fastest growing cruise port in the

world before the hurricane, LaGrange told members of the Senate Finance Committee.

Upwards of 700,000 cruise-line passengers sailed from the port last year, providing significant tourist trade, jobs and income for New Orleans and the region. Many of those passengers arrived at the port by motorcoach, and coaches shuttled thousands of others around

New Orleans on sightseeing trips.

The rebound of the cruise ships, said LaGrange, "will depend heavily on the ability of New Orleans to rebuild."

"Without adequate infrastructure for longer-term housing and family needs, workers will not be able to return. Cruises will wait to return until hotels and tourist attractions are restored," he said.

La. Trailways is in business in New Orleans

MARRERO, La. — Louisiana Coaches Trailways has announced it has returned and reopened its headquarters facility in Marrero on the Westbank of New Orleans.

The coach company was forced out of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina and it operated for nearly a month from its parking facility in Lafayette, La., which is about 135 miles west of New Orleans.

"Our power, telephones and Internet have been fully restored and we are completely operational," said company director of operations Louis Sanders.

Louisiana Coaches Trailways' Westbank maintenance facility is fully operational, meaning the service department and staff are available, along with roadside service.

"We are facing many challenges in the upcoming days and months ahead but with the support of our families, friends and clients, we will persevere," said Sanders.

Still of concern is the absence of some company drivers who were forced to evacuate New Orleans with their families.

Louisiana Coaches can be contacted at www.louisianacoaches.com, or by e-mail at info@louisianacoaches.com, or call (504) 348-1177.

Special Notice

Other Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas motorcoach operators that were displaced by Hurricanes Rita and Katrina are invited to let their peers and suppliers know the status of their operations through the pages of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

E-mail us the kind of information that's printed above.

Send e-mails to BusNews@qwest.net, or call toll-free to (866) 930-8421, or fax information to (623) 930-8426.

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- Wheelchair Accessible Minibus Wheelchair Accessible Van Wheelchair Accessible School Bus Other



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IMPORTANT - PLEASE READ: Children under 10 are free. Child rates are for ages 10-17. Anyone who wishes to gain entry to all Motorcoach Expo exhibits and functions must be fully registered and in possession of a name tag administered by show management. Loss or destruction of a badge will result in a \$20 replacement fee. Package Deal and Expo discounts cannot be used retroactively and cannot be combined with any other offer.

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Or register online at www.motorcoachexpo.com

PHOTO: TREVOR

Internet

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

by tour operators and motorcoach carriers.

The company entered the electronic travel booking business as *CoachQuote.com* by signing up motorcoach companies and hotels that were interesting in bidding on charter business and then marketing the site to professional tour operators.

Under the system, the tour operators feed the vitals of charters they are planning into the Web site. The information is then faxed or e-mailed to the hotels along the route and to the motorcoach carriers that have indicated an interest in working the geographical area. The bus companies and hotels then file bids for the charters and lodging, giving the tour operators multiple-choice bids for their trips.

The process for the motorcoach companies includes Group Travel providing the tour operators with other valuable information about the carriers, including how long they have been in business, their insurance coverage and photographs and seating diagrams of the coaches that would be used on the

trip. "We encourage the tour operators to look at more than just price when booking a motorcoach company because all of them are not alike," Harness says.

The company, which charges the carriers and hotels nothing to join its Web site and bid on the charters, makes its money through a markup on the bus and hotel bids.

Group Travel took a major growth step four years ago when it began partnering with trade associations, including Motor Coach Canada last year. Carriers that belong to its partner trade groups are automatically placed on the company's Web site and given the opportunity to bid on charter work.

The arrangements with the trade organizations helped push the number of tour operator requests

Tri-State

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Callahan Bus Lines of Oxford, Miss (James Callahan, president). The August winners were Latin Express of Miami (Rosa Alvarez), and Premier Coach of Colchester, Vt. (Ron Charlebois).

The contest, administered by a consulting company, drew more than 100,000 entries from 2,600 ac-

counts, with an average of 27 entries per account over a three-month period. Companies increased their chances of winning by purchasing more MCI products. Tri-State had the sixth-most entries driven by its purchase of new coaches.

Pete Cotter, senior vice president of coach sales at MCI, said the contest was a chance for the company to reward customers for the support.

for charter quotes to more than 200 a day. "In our opinion, that still is low and we know we can drive more traffic to the site," says Harness.

Group Travel widened its reach last year when it opened the service to groups – schools, churches, civic organizations, family reunions and others. Groups now can plan, book and manage their entire trips online, including making payments and making late changes to their itineraries.

It also got extra punch earlier this year when it partnered with online travel service giant *Orbitz.com*. Visitors to Orbitz who are looking for prices for more than five hotel rooms now are seamlessly transferred to the Group Travel site.

"It has been really driving up our requests," said Harness, adding that

while the Orbitz focus is on hotels, plans to bring motorcoach bidding to the site as well are being developed and will be introduced soon.

Meantime, Group Travel is looking forward to introducing the high-tech process that will make it easier and faster for motorcoach carriers to respond to bid requests for charter work.

The technology being developed will enable Group Travel to transfer the bid requests directly into the computer networks of the motorcoach companies. The operators then would have the option of allowing their own software to handle the research and deliver an immediate bid or use the tools in their software to prepare the bid personally.

"It will depend on each operator's comfort level," Harness explains.

The company's biggest hope, he notes, is that bus operators come to understand the power of technology and how it can drive their business and grow their revenues. "Whether they are going through us or they chose to do things on their own, we hope they will fully understand what the Internet can bring to them."

Movie industry supplier seeks old, new buses

NEW YORK CITY — A two-year-old company that supplies vehicles for movies and commercial photo shoots is looking for new and vintage buses that can be rented for film projects.

Company co-owner John Ficarra said his firm, Creative Film Cars, is looking to expand its database of buses available for short-term use.

He said any bus rented to the firm for filming is fully insured and use of the bus is paid immediately at the end of the project. The rental fee depends on several factors, including how long the bus is used, where the filming occurs and when it takes place.

Ficarra said he is a classic auto collector and his partner has a film industry background; they combined their interests to form Creative Film Cars.

For more information, go to www.creativefilmcars.com, or contact Ficarra at (212) 864-4060. E-mail Ficarra at info@creativefilmcars.com.

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MCI's Glen Collins (left) hands Jim Thrasher and his wife, Barbara, keys to a new J4500 coach

Spirit Coach Madison, Ala.

Spirit Coach, a five-year-old charter and tour coach operator, has taken delivery of two Prevost H3-45s, bringing its fleet to a total of 12 Prevost coaches.

Robert "Clip" Coates, president and general manager of Spirit Coach, says "we are exclusively Prevost because they're as good as it gets. We've been with them from the beginning and we've hopefully created a relationship that will stay exclusive for a long time.

"Their attention to details is what I like most about doing business with Prevost," Coates adds.



Spirit provides charter bus service and motorcoach tours to destinations throughout the U.S. and Canada from departure points in the southeast. Schools, churches, sports teams and family reunion planners also use the company.

The two fleet additions are equipped with 435-horsepower Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines,

Allison B500 transmissions, Firestone tires mounted on Alcoa wheels and Gerffloor flooring. The REI A/V system has a DVD players and uses five flat-screen monitors. Other specifications include Isringhausen driver seat, Prevost Ultra seating for 56 passengers, Scenic View camera and on-board battery charger.

Thrasher Bros. Birmingham, Ala.

Thrasher Brothers, which has been offering bus services for more than 35 years, has taken delivery of its fourth MCI J4500 motorcoach.

The company was formed in 1969, when Jim Thrasher and one of his brothers bought a pair of used Silver Eagles from Trailways and used them to transport workers building a power plant in northwest Alabama. Charter service was soon added.

Jim Thrasher and his wife, Barbara, became owners in the company in the mid-1980s and brought in their son, Alan, who is vice president.

Today, Thrasher Brothers has a fleet of 17 coaches and operates coach service for Silver Star Casino in Choctaw, Miss.

The company's new J coach is equipped with a Detroit Diesel Series 60 engine, Allison B500

transmission, Amaya seats for 56 passengers, Isringhausen driver seat and R.C.A. flooring. The A/V system is from REI with six monitors and the bus has Alcoa wheels mounted with Michelin tires. It also has a Ricon wheelchair lift.

To salute the Thrasher Brothers induction into the Alabama Music Hall of Fame this past summer and to acknowledge the delivery of the J4500, MCI presented Jim and Barbara Thrasher with a three-foot replica of their J coach decaled with a personal tribute.

"We wanted to show how much MCI appreciates Thrasher Brothers' continued business, while congratulating Jim Thrasher and his brothers on their achievement," said Glen Collins, MCI regional sales manager. The sale is Collins' first for MCI.

Reston Limousine Sterling, Va.

Reston Limousine, a 17-year-old company that says it's the Washington, D.C. area's largest private shuttle service, has taken delivery of its first motorcoach, a Van Hool C2045.

Reston has a fleet of 90 vehicles — sedans, limousines, van and mid-size buses, and a staff of 175 drivers and 25 administrative personnel. It provides a variety of services, including wine tours, sight-seeing, dinner packages, shuttles and traditional limo services for



weddings, proms and corporations.

Founded by William Bouweiri with five limousines, the company CEO is now Kristina Bouweiri, who joined the company in 1991.

Reston's new C2045 is equipped with a Detroit Diesel

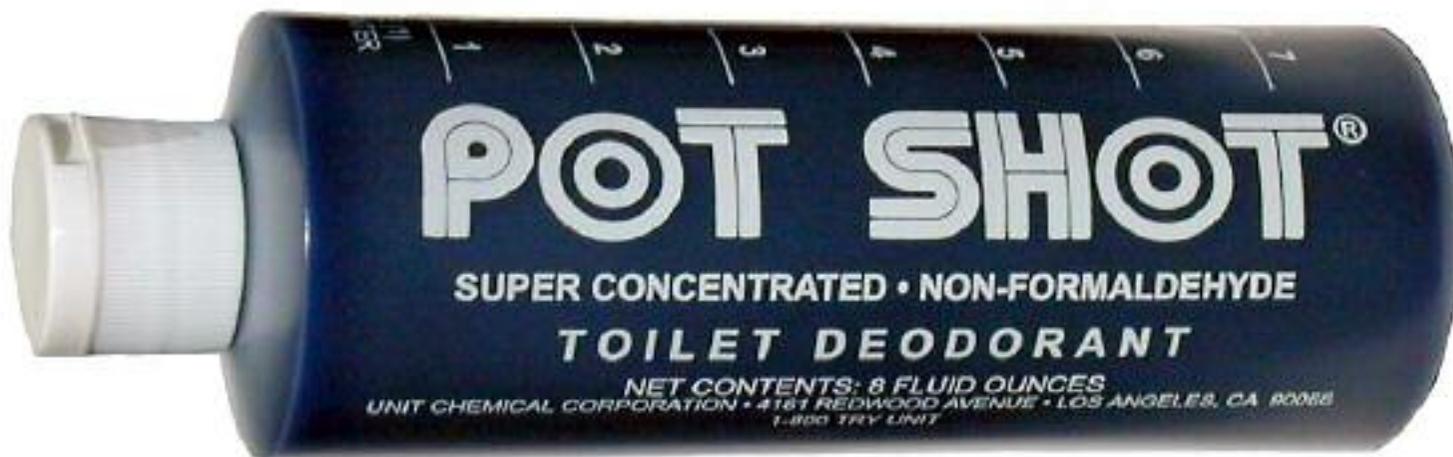
Series 60 engine, Allison B500 transmission, REI A/V systems with DVD, Amaya seats for 57 passengers, Alcoa wheels and Goodyear tires.

Learn more about Reston Limousine at www.restonlimo.com.

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Skiing travel course is launched

WELLESLEY, Mass. — The Travel Institute has announced a new addition to its “Lifestyle Specialist” courses: Skiing.

The course covers types of skiing, ski-trip characteristics, destinations and ski resorts, marketing strategies, selling tips, valuable resources and other related topics. It contains relevant data that travel professionals can use to reach and

sell to the ski market.

The course was written by Kate Rice, who has 20 years experience covering the travel industry, and skiing and adventure travel for trade and consumer media.

“Because skiers are twice as likely to come from affluent households as the general population, this is definitely a niche worth pursuing,” says Maureen

Kennedy, executive vice president and general manager of The Travel Institute.

Those wanting more information or wishing to enroll in the skiing course can do so by going to www.thetravelinstitute.com, or call (800) 542-4282.

The Travel Institute offers two levels of its Lifestyle Specialist designations.

Oregon publishes first culinary travel guide

PORTLAND, Ore. — Oregon has a new pitch for motorcoach tour operators: Come taste our state.

The Oregon Culinary Tourism Association has released what it says is the first comprehensive culinary-themed travel guide published for a U.S. state.

The 48-page, full-color, digest-size book encourages visitors to “Come to your five senses... in Oregon.” It asserts that cuisine is the only art form that evokes all five human senses — sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. And it maintains that cuisine has a greater chance to make long-lasting memories than other forms of culture or recreation.

The culinary escapes guide is a

compilation of the “best eating and drinking experiences in Oregon,” and lists many of the state’s “best restaurants and wineries” and unique tours and trails (such as a chocolate lover’s tour and the “Oregon Ale Trail.”

The guide also is peppered with information about cooking schools, local foods, discounted lodging packages, and articles and factoids. The content is aimed at coach and packaged tour operators, meeting and convention groups, as well as leisure travelers.

Free copies of the guide and other Oregon travel brochures are available at www.OregonCuisine.com/free. Information about the culinary tourism association also is available on the Web site.

National Parks fee increase is clarified, thanks to NTA

LEXINGTON, Ky. — There will be no change in the entrance fees the National Park Services charges motorcoach and group tours next year, the National Tour Association has confirmed.

At the end of last month, the National Park Service announced that 17 sites in the Park Service’s Intermountain Region, which covers eight states, would raise entrance fees next year.

However, after the NTA con-

tacted the Park Service, a clarification was issued and the increase only applies to individual park visitors. The NTA has a long-standing agreement with Park Service that requires at least 12 months notice to the commercial tourism industry for any fee increases.

“The 12-month notice is a critical factor in computing the basic costs for a tour package to any national park sites,” the NTA noted.

NTA-UMA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Convention next month in Detroit. UMA operators will be able to attend the Nov. 4-8 event free of any admission charge.

UMA has reciprocated by extending an invitation to NTA members to attend Motorcoach Expo 2006 in January in Tampa at a discounted early-bird registration rate.

Phillips said UMA members attending the NTA meeting would benefit from business appointments with NTA suppliers (hotels, restaurants, attractions, etc.) and destinations.

Additionally, they could participate in the Operator-to-Operator Partnering Session which uses a fast-paced “speed dating” concept for tour and motorcoach operators to learn about each other and identify mutual business opportunities, Phillips noted.

The NTA convention has an open exchange floor, meaning there are no barriers to networking and building contacts; it has more than 40 educational sessions, and the association has lined up “affordable” hotels and transportation discounts to save attendees

money.

Complete information about the convention can be found at www.ntaonline.com. UMA members interested in attending NTA’s convention should contact Christy Stigall of NTA by calling (800) 682-8886, or e-mail Christy.Stigall@ntastaff.com.

Beyond the two conventions, the associations are exploring the development of other coordinated efforts, including expanded government relations.

“Good coordination (between NTA and UMA) already exists on matters of mutual importance, such as the federal highway reauthorization bill, but closer ties are possible,” said Phillips.

Joint educational initiatives are another area that will be examined. For example, NTA may conduct an educational session at Motorcoach Expo that focuses on the business opportunities available through tour and bus operators working together.

The NTA has nearly 4,000 tourism professional members from 28 countries. Its membership includes tour operators and the destinations and suppliers that partner with them.

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Rehabbing work on Greyhounds moves forward

RIVERSIDE, Calif. — A project to refurbish and install wheelchair lifts in nearly 200 Greyhound coaches is running full bore at Complete Coach Works' repair, retrofit and modification center here.

Complete Coach Works is installing Ricon F-9T cassette lifts in 187 late-model MCI DL3s from Greyhound's fleet.

In addition, CCW is installing new seats, replacing interior wall and bulkhead fabrics, performing minor body work, repainting the coaches, and applying the new graphics Greyhound adopted this year for its coaches.



The contract calls for completing the work by September.

"We're delivering one bus every other day — just like clockwork," said Macy Neshati, vice president of sales and marketing at

Complete Coach Works.

Ricon has been supplying wheelchair lifts to Greyhound for more than a dozen years, helping the carrier expand its fleet of accessible coaches.

Ricon to acquire Transit Care Inc.

PANORAMA CITY, Calif. — Ricon Corporation is purchasing the operations of Transit Care Inc. of Colton, Calif., the No. 1 maker of anti-graffiti bus windows.

Transit Care's "3 Minute" windows are used on thousands of buses across North America as a fast and easy way to combat graffiti vandalism. The company's

"Glass Guard" is an aftermarket product that also discourages graffiti vandalism to bus windows.

A third product from Transit Care is modesty panels that can be easily changed if vandalized.

Bill Baldwin, president of Ricon, the nation's leading maker of wheelchair lifts, said the proposed purchase "is an excellent

strategic fit with our long-term plans in the transit segment that include not only lifts and ramps, but also door systems."

Baldwin's take on the deal was echoed by Dale Carson, president and principal shareholder of Transit Care. He said "Ricon will be able to grow the Transit Care business significantly over the next few years."

Prevost revamps Web site, on-line services expanded

SAINTE-CLAIRE, Quebec — Prevost Car has given its Web site a major facelift.

The address for the new-look Web portal remains the same — www.prevostcar.com, but the site is now more interactive; has new content and upgraded navigation, and several useful quick links have been added to the homepage.

Prevost said it wanted to offer visitors a more interactive and better-organized Web site because the number of visitors had doubled in the past year.

Annie Pelletier, Prevost Web master, said there were a number of reasons for the makeover, but the most important goals were "to assure the Prevost Web site fits the company's image and better meets

the needs of our customers."

And because it is a strategic communications tool, Prevost wanted to make the Web site "as easy as possible to use and browse, while providing a wealth of information for all types of visitors."

The site features new services, including a photo gallery, a calendar of events, "what's new" and product launch information, promotions and other highlights.

Customers also can find more information about Prevost products, Prevost parts and service centers, and view and download fliers.

Perhaps the site's most popular feature is Prevost's on-line parts ordering system. Prevost does more than 35 percent of its parts business on-line.

Gray introduces support stands

St. Joseph, Mo. — Gray, the largest U.S. manufacturer of portable lifting equipment, has introduced new Motor Coach Vehicle Support Stands (Model 10-TMC).

Each stand is uniquely designed to support MCI Motor Coach models C, D, E, and J models coaches built by Motor Coach

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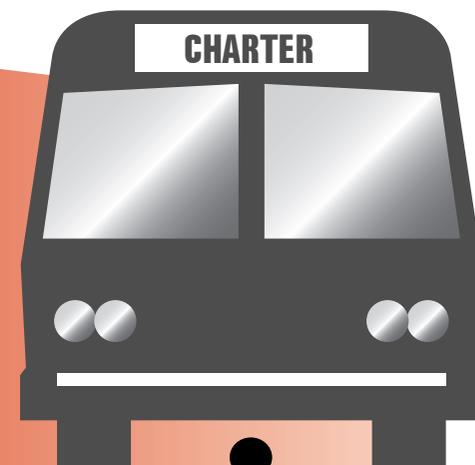
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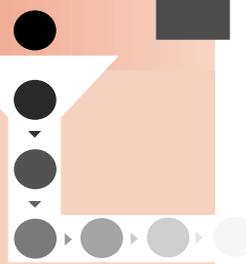
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Pennsylvania to get plant to turn waste coal to diesel

GILBERTON, Pa. — It looks like Pennsylvania will get the nation's first commercial plant to convert waste coal into no-sulfur diesel fuel and home-heating oil.

State officials say Waste Management and Processors Inc. of Gilberton, plans to start the \$612 million project next spring in Mahanoy Township, about 50 miles northeast of Harrisburg.

The state has agreed to buy 15 million gallons of diesel fuel produced by the plant annually to supply its vehicles and fuel oil to heat its buildings during the next 10 years.

Using an updated version of technology developed by German scientists in the 1920s, the plan will

turn waste coal — also known as culm — that has piled up in Pennsylvania's coal regions into diesel fuel and home heating oil.

The process involves mixing gasified waste coal with oxygen and water, then heating it to produce a synthetic gas. The gas undergoes another chemical process to become paraffin wax, which is refined into diesel fuel.

Pennsylvania has an estimated 258 million tons of culm that is creating environmental problems.

Language that effectively reserved the guarantees for the project was included in the federal energy bill that President Bush signed this past summer.

Biodiesel

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

make more alternate fuels available in the state. Additionally, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wisconsin and New Hampshire also are talking about legislation ranging from tax credits to mandates.

Even the federal government is pushing biodiesel and included in the energy bill passed by Congress two months ago a tax credit for distributors and others that blend the fuel. It amounts to a penny per percentage point of biodiesel blended with petroleum diesel and is intended to reduce the cost of the fuel to consumers.

Minnesota adopted its biodiesel requirement three years ago but delayed enforcing it until biodiesel producers in the state were able to turn out at least eight million gallons of biodiesel a year, a goal that the four plants in the state exceeded this year.

Legislators hope the mandate will not only help the country begin to reduce its appetite for crude oil, but also be a boon to the state's farmers who grow more than 260 million bushels of soybeans a year and who have invested heavily in three of the biodiesel plants.

"It's a very exciting time," soybean farmer Bob Worth said the day before the law took effect Sept. 29.

Promoters of biodiesel, which is marketed in various mixes from 2 percent to 100 percent, maintain it can be used safely in just about any type of diesel engine and generally costs only a few pennies a gallon more than conventional diesel.

Some motorcoach operators in Minnesota say they are not worried about the new regulation because the mix of 2 percent is so small it probably will not cause problems with their equipment, including their expensive bus engines.

"We don't believe it will be an issue with us," said Tom Hey, president of Southwest Coaches in Jackson, Minn., who ran several tanks of the biodiesel mixture through some of his buses in

advance of the mandate to see how it performed. "We didn't have any problems, nothing."

He said the fuel might even have a positive impact because biodiesel acts as a detergent and can clean injectors and other engine components, which could help increase fuel mileage.

Hey cautioned, though, that the fuel will get a big test this winter because temperatures below freezing tend to make biodiesel jell and that could affect engine performance. Still, he said he doubts even that will be a serious problem because of the low percentage of biodiesel. "Maybe if we were using a mixture of 20 percent, than that could be a problem," he said.

Other operators across the country aren't so sure of the long-term impact of biodiesel and worry that using it might affect their engine warranties if something goes wrong. So far, they've gotten little help from the engine makers, most of which appear to have adopted a "use-at-your-own-risk" approach to biodiesel.

Caterpillar Inc. spokesman Jim Dugan said the company neither approves nor prohibits the use of biodiesel fuel in its engines, and that using the fuel would not affect the warranty on Caterpillar engines. However, he stressed that "failures resulting from the use of any fuel are not the result of Caterpillar factory defects and the cost of engine repair would not be covered by Caterpillar's warranty."

The Caterpillar Web site also indicates that biodiesel is acceptable in some of its engines — the C13 used in many motorcoaches is not among them — but warranties would not be honored if more than a 5 percent blend of biodiesel is used.

Detroit Diesel Corp., which refuses to discuss the issue, notes on its Web site that biodiesel fuel meeting certain specifications can be blended with regular diesel up to a 20 percent maximum, although "failures attributed to the use of biodiesel will not be covered" by its product warranty.

The Cummins Web site carries a similar message — the company does not approve or disapprove of the use of diesel, but engine failures caused by biodiesel fuel or other additives are not defects of workmanship or materials and would not be covered by the engine warranty.

"The engine manufacturers are slow about coming around with any endorsement at all," observes Rick Hittle of Arizona Petroleum Products, which markets biodiesel fuel in Tucson. "We don't have a warm and fuzzy feeling that the warranties will be upheld, and I wish they would just do something and endorse biodiesel."

Motorcoach manufacturers avoid the issue by having their customers rely on the engine builders for information about using biodiesel, which is available in every state except Wyoming and Alaska.

"We tell our customers to follow the recommendations of the manufacturers of whatever engines they have in their coaches," said Bryan Couch, vice president of product development at Motor Coach Industries.

Customers of ABC Companies, which markets Van Hool coaches, are given a similar message, said Louis Hotard, field technician administrator. "We don't make the engines or establish the policies, so we refer all questions about the use of biodiesel fuels to the engine manufactures," he said. "If the manufacturers say they can use biodiesel, then it's OK with us."

Hey said the warranty issue raises concerns with him and he points to Minnesota lawmakers for not resolving the problem before passing the mandate that only biodiesel be sold in Minnesota. "It gets to be a little frustrating from our standpoint to see something mandated by that state and for them not to have done their homework," he said. I understand the reason for the mandate, but if they are not going to support you, then you are really leaving a bunch of people hanging out there without any support."

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Rule

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

commenting periods.

In briefs filed by UMA and other members of the coalition, attorneys said that in issuing the rule, FMCSA failed to consider the significant safety and training differences between the motorcoach and trucking industries. It ignored these differences even though FMCSA had acknowledged them in documents issued preliminary to releasing the final

rule, the attorneys said.

The FMCSA also failed to take account of the fact that there are no dedicated motorcoach driver training schools in the U.S. as there are in the trucking industry which has a plethora.

Additionally, UMA criticized the rule because it says FMCSA's assessment of the rule's cost impact on motorcoach operators is grossly understated.

Finally, UMA said the FMCSA had failed to articulate a definable training standard and, as

a result, has arbitrarily exposed motorcoach operators to potential liability.

The FMCSA has declined to comment on the litigation but a spokesman contends the rules do enhance commercial vehicle safety.

"The entry-level training rules help ensure that (commercial) drivers are better prepared to safely operate large trucks and motorcoaches on our nation's highways and add value to the (commercial driver license) program," said spokesman James Lewis.

ABC hires ex-Cat exec to head customer care

WINTER GARDEN, Fla. — Charles Avery, former OEM group manager at Caterpillar Inc., has been hired by ABC Companies to head its Customer Care Group.

As a vice president at ABC, Avery will be responsible for overall management of customer-related support in the areas of technical service and warranty support. The newly-created position is designed to take advantage of Avery's expertise in customer relations, sales and operations management and strategic partnership development experience gained during his 39 years at Cat.

Avery's appointment presages the rollout of a number of initiatives from ABC's customer care group during this quarter and moving into next year.

"Chuck's seasoned experience ... will enable ABC to make a



Chuck Avery

greater impact in all customer support areas," said ABC President and CEO Ron Cornell.

"We already know that Chuck will be a great fit with ABC, having worked closely on the successful introduction of the CAT-enhanced M-1000 series and Van Hool equipment," added Dane Cornell, executive vice president of ABA. "He's a ... great asset for ABC and our customers."

Avery will be based at ABC's facility in Winter Garden, Fla.

Nova Bus bolsters sales team

SAINT-EUSTACH, Quebec — Nova Bus has created a new business development department that focuses a variety of company resources on sales and clients.

Operating under the direction of Jean-Pierre Baracat, the department integrates key sectors at the company with the goal of bolstering customer satisfaction.

The business development team has been strengthened with the promotion of Jean-Marc Landry to sales director. Landry retains his sales territories of eastern Canada and the northeastern U.S.

Wayne Feagan has joined Nova Bus as regional sales manager for Ontario and western Canada. Feagan has extensive customer management experience and has been working in transit-related industries for the past 11 years. He



Wayne Feagan

is an honors business administration graduate of Conestoga College, and is based in Welland, Ont.

Mathieu Nadon has been appointed internal sales representative.

Nova Bus is a division of Prevost Car, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Volvo Bus Corp., the world's second-largest motorcoach and transit bus manufacturing group.

People

William Mahorney, the stalwart director of safety and regulatory programs at the **American Bus Association**, has left the association and joined the Federal Highway Administration at the U.S. Department of Transportation in Washington, D.C. Mahorney has the title of transportation specialist in the Office of Freight Management and Operations. At the ABA, Mahorney was instrumental in the formation of the Bus Industry Safety Council and his departure leaves a significant void.

The **Transportation Security Administration** has named **Robert Jamison** as deputy administrator of

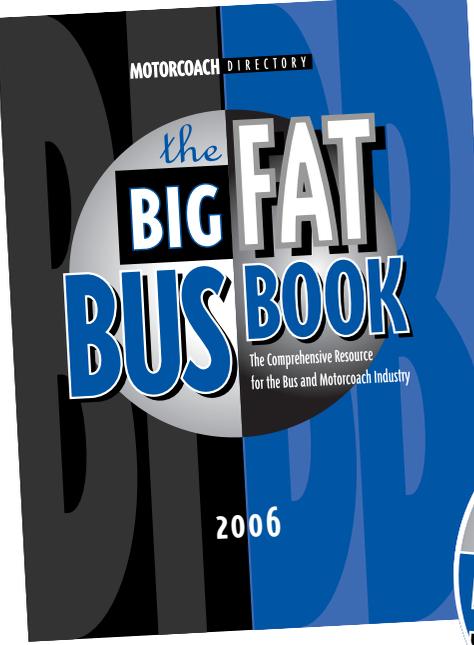
the agency. For the past three years, Jamison has served as deputy administrator at the Federal Transit Administration, which has management and oversight responsibility over roughly \$8 billion of annual federal investment in the nation's public bus, subway and light rail infrastructure. He joins the TSA at a critical point as it conducts a top to bottom internal assessment prompted by Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff's "Second Stage Review." Jamison's background includes administrative positions at the Federal Railroad Administration, the American Red Cross, and United Parcel Service.

Terri LaRiccia has joined **Creative Mobile Interiors** of Grove City, Ohio, as controller.



Bill Mahorney Barbara Wayman

LaRiccia joins **Creative Mobile** from **Liberty Tire Services** where she handled company finances. **Barbara Wayman**, director of marketing and vice president of corporate affairs at Creative Mobile, was honored late last month as one of central Ohio's "40 Under 40", an award that recognizes Columbus, Ohio's "rising stars."



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