

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY



Even more Prevost coaches in Greyhound's fleet seems more likely after latest order.

Greyhound orders 140 Prevost X3s

DALLAS — Greyhound Lines has ordered an additional 140 X3-45 motorcoaches from Prevost Car.

All of the coaches, which will have capacities ranging from 50-54 passengers, will be equipped with seatbelts. The brand of seatbelt-equipped seats to be used on the coaches was not revealed.

The order is the largest coach buy by Greyhound since it purchased a total of 290 MCI G4500 models, starting in 2001.

Greyhound's purchase of X3-45s is the company's second. Last winter, the nation's largest line-run carrier ordered 50 X3-45s to establish the fleet for BoltBus, the intercity curbside service Greyhound launched jointly last spring with Peter Pan Bus Lines.

Thirty-three of the X3-45s were dedicated to Bolt, while the re-

maining 17 were added to Greyhound's line-haul fleet. BoltBus has used its X3-45s to provide service between New York City, Boston, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

BoltBus and Greyhound received their first Prevosts last March and the final coach in that order was delivered in May.

Coaches delivered under the new order will be used by both Greyhound and BoltBus operations. The first buses are to be delivered in February, with the remainder coming during the following four or five months.

The initial BoltBus' Prevosts were equipped with Detroit Diesel engines and ZF transmissions, but Greyhound reportedly has not yet decided how to equip the buses for the new order. One source suggested that some of the buses could

have Volvo engines and/or Allison transmissions.

All of the newest buses, like the first order, will be equipped with Prevost's Swap & Plug removable Ricon wheelchair lifts.

"I am delighted to see that Greyhound has decided to join the long list of repeat Prevost customers," said Prevost President and CEO Gaétan Bolduc. "... This order reflects our efforts to make Greyhound a satisfied Prevost customer."

David Leach, president and CEO of Greyhound, said the choice of Prevost coaches ties directly into Greyhound's mission to offer "a new and improved image of safe, reliable and enjoyable travel to nearly 25 million passengers each year."

Since Greyhound's plan to pur-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15 ►

Texas officials say state will examine complaints of poor driver treatment

AUSTIN, Texas — State officials here say they will look closely at complaints voiced by numerous motorcoach operators who say their drivers were mistreated during the evacuation last month of thousands of people threatened by Hurricane Ike. (See Oct. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Ted Maddry of the governor's division of emergency management said staff members and others will huddle soon to review the concerns and develop solutions to prevent similar problems from reoccurring.

"We will look at how we performed, identify the areas of concern and take corrective actions so they don't happen again," he said.

A number of the 140 coach companies who took part in the massive movement said many of their drivers were forced to sleep on their buses without air conditioning, did not have adequate toilet and shower facilities, were not fed regularly, and were forced to drive for as long as eight hours without breaks.

Some of them warned that if the issues are not resolved, they

likely would not take part in future evacuations.

"I think they'll get it right eventually, and they better because a lot of drivers won't want to go again if they don't fix the problems," said Autumn Dipert Brown of Dan Dipert Coaches in Arlington, Texas.

The coach companies were hired by the state to help evacuate people from Galveston and a number of other Gulf Coast communities before Ike reached shore during the early morning hours of Sept. 13. The storm caused an estimated \$27 billion in damage in Texas and Louisiana.

Maddry said he has heard most of the complaints and acknowledged that some of those raised by the operators and drivers were warranted. "Some of the situations were beyond our control, while others may have been justifiable and not to our liking," he noted.

And, he added, state officials realize if the problems are not addressed, the next time motorcoaches are needed for another mass evacuation, they may not be there.

He noted, too, that people

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ►

Presidential race tightens in Indiana, Sodrel remains upbeat

JEFFERSONVILLE, Ind. — Although Indiana voters have long been big-time backers of Republican presidential candidates, there are growing signs that GOP presidential hopeful Sen. John McCain may not be able to keep them in his corner in next month's general election.

And to most political observers,

that would seem to spell trouble for Republican Mike Sodrel, the long-time motorcoach operator who is trying to regain the 9th Congressional District seat he held two years ago.

But, they could be wrong.

According to statewide polls, McCain has lost substantial ground in recent weeks to Sen. Barack

Obama, a surprising drop off that is turning Indiana into a battleground state and threatening the Hoosier State's string of 10 consecutive Republican victories in presidential elections.

At the same time, Sodrel, who has been counting on a strong McCain showing in Indiana to help send him back to Washington D.C.,

trails his Democrat opponent, according to the latest independent and internal polls.

Still, Sodrel's camp remains upbeat, contending that the southern Indiana district that Sodrel calls home is so conservative and dislikes Obama so much that tightening of the presidential race likely will not have much of a negative

impact on the congressional race.

"In our district, no matter what McCain and Obama do in the state, it won't really matter to us," said campaign spokesman Ryan Reger.

To support his optimism, he emphasized that in the state's primary election, Obama won only one of the 20 counties in the district

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Magic Carpet Ride's lavatory dumping solution minimizes coach moving and chances of getting dings.

Operator solves common problem

VERO BEACH, Fla. — Operating a motorcoach company is akin to running most any business.

You need good employees, computers and other specialized equipment, an office, a bank account, business licenses, regulatory approvals, industry specific knowledge, federal tax ID number, and, if you're lucky, a bookkeeper or accountant to help keep track of all your money.

Motorcoach companies, like trucking outfits, also have a handful of unusual characteristics, like

requiring mammoth pieces of rolling stock that can cost an arm and a leg, and a place to park and maintain these behemoths.

But motorcoach operations have one unique requirement that practically no other businesses have: they must have a (legal) place where they can dump bus lavatories.

"I know of operators who do not own their own property, but have solved their parking situation by parking behind shopping centers, filling stations, or renting space in a storage yard — what-

ever it takes," says George Childers, owner and operator of Magic Carpet Ride, a company he founded here four years ago.

"Finding a convenient and close-by location to dump is another matter."

After four years of continually dealing with parking and dumping issues, Childers acquired a 100 feet-by-100 feet parcel.

However, with a fleet of five buses, turning a coach around in his new yard — because of its size

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

Motorcoach Council hires national promotional firm

DENVER — The Motorcoach Council, the fledgling organization that wants to promote motorcoach travel to a national audience, has hired a Bloomington, Ind.-based marketing firm.

The council's board and early financial supporters met here last month to review materials submitted by public relations and marketing firms that responded to the council's request for proposals.

Picked from the 20 firms that submitted bids was an outfit called Finelight, which specializes in direct response, branding and health care marketing.

While the company calls Bloomington home, it also has offices in Chicago, Louisville and New York.

Finelight bills itself a full-service agency, serving both national and international clients, staffed by "leading-edge strategists, award-winning creatives, and some of the savviest marketing executives in the business."

"We create marketing campaigns and experiences that con-

nect with consumers and motivate them to respond," says the agency.

Most of Finelight's business is with health care-related organizations but it also counts as clients such firms as Bombardier Aerospace, Brunswick, Fidelity National Financial, Nippon Life Insurance, and two manufacturers of large RVs, Georgie Boy Manufacturing and Newmar Corporation.

Initially, Finelight account executives plan to get smart on the coach industry and work with the council on goals and objectives.

Key nonindustry individuals working with the council are: Heather Horton of Admin on Demand in Erie, Colo., who has been acting as the council's spokeswoman; Leslie Hawk of Finelight's Louisville office, Elizabeth Blevins of Finelight's Bloomington office and Anne Goetz of the firm's office in Chicago.

Launched in January, the Motorcoach Council expects to start a member recruiting campaign in the next few months.



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THE DOCKET

USDOT tackles border congestion

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation says there will be less delay at U.S. border crossings in California, Texas and Washington thanks to a department effort to prioritize and accelerate projects that ease congestion.

“Congestion at our borders is choking both travelers and commerce with excessive wait times and negatively impacting air quality,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters. “By prioritizing the projects, we can improve

the movement of people and goods across our borders and help to maintain these important economic lifelines.”

Peters said the projects would receive priority access to discretionary programs, including innovative financing.

At the southern border, San Diego’s Otay Mesa East Port of Entry project will create a new port of entry and a 2.7-mile, four-lane highway that links to the existing California highway system to provide more capacity for traf-

fic through the region.

At the northern border, in Blaine, Wash., the Cascade Gateway Expanded Cross-border Advanced Traveler Information System project proposes to provide real-time border-crossing wait-times and other travel information through a combination of technologies.

All projects will explore public-private partnerships, which combine traditional federal and state funds with private-sector expertise.

Bus border crossings rose in '07

The number of buses and motorcoaches crossing U.S. borders increased slightly in 2007, figures compiled by the U.S. Department of Transportation Bureau of Transportation Statistics show.

A total of 401,582 buses and coaches entered the U.S. from Canada and Mexico last year, up 2.4 percent from the 392,295 that entered in 2006, according to bureau figures.

And while the number of buses increased, those buses also carried more passengers. The number of passengers crossing U.S. borders

in coaches last year rose to 7,073,686, up nearly 6 percent from the 6,686,385 who rode buses in 2006.

The heaviest border crossings for buses were those on the U.S.-Mexico frontier. Six of the 10 busiest bus crossing points were on the southern border, and all but one of those entry ports posted increases.

The busiest port of entry on the Canadian border was Buffalo-Niagara Falls, which saw a big increase in crossings last year.

Here are the top 10 points of

entry for buses and motorcoaches in 2007 vs. 2006:

Border Crossings	2007	2006
Calif., San Ysidro	97,726	100,632
Calif., Otay Mesa	47,258	44,793
N.Y., Niagara Falls	37,529	30,295
Texas, Laredo *	37,106	37,105
Mich., Detroit	36,457	33,615
Texas, Hidalgo	28,942	27,344
Texas, El Paso	18,530	14,843
Wash., Blaine	14,405	12,776
Ariz., Nogales	12,376	11,521
Alaska, Skagway	11,309	10,405

*Actual figures reported by USDOT.

Florida driver license rules become tougher this month

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Beginning this month, Florida has changed its rules for obtaining a driver’s license and for keeping a commercial driver’s license.

CDL holders convicted of driving under the influence — even in their personal vehicle — will have their licenses revoked for one year. Second offenses would result in permanent disqualification.

Penalties are based on the date of convictions, not the date of offenses.

Also, Class A, B and C commercial licenses now will be valid for eight years — up from six years — except for drivers 80 and older. All licenses for drivers 80 and older are valid for six years.

At the same time, the rules for obtaining a Florida driver’s license have been altered to comply with the controversial Real ID Act of 2005. Florida joins a small group of states that have taken steps toward compliance with Real ID, including Indiana, Michigan, Nevada and Tennessee.

Real ID is a federal law that requires states to enhance their driver license systems and security by

Jan. 1, 2010.

The Florida Department of Motor Vehicles decided to go ahead and enforce new identification requirements intended to make it more difficult to obtain driver’s licenses or identification cards. The agency now requires applicants for driver’s licenses to provide proof of a valid Social Security number.

Proof of a Social Security number can be provided by showing a Social Security card, tax return, W-2 form, paycheck, DD-214, or school records.

Licenses from other states now will longer be accepted as primary identification.

Advocates for the licensing changes say they will strengthen the state’s ability to verify identities and legal presence.

Driver ‘texting’ banned in Calif.

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law a bill prohibiting text messaging while driving in California. The law takes effect Jan. 1.

“Banning electronic text messaging while driving will keep drivers’ hands on the wheel and their eyes on the road, making our roadways a safer place for all Californians,” Schwarzenegger said.

The new law, previously SB28, complements an existing law that took effect July 1 that requires drivers to use hands-free devices while talking on a cell phone.

As is the case for violating the new cell phone law, police will be allowed to pull over adults found texting. Violators would face at least \$20 fines. Subsequent offenses would result in up to \$50 fines.

Efforts to curb electronic wireless devices, such as a BlackBerry-type device, while driving have picked up following a survey that found one in five drivers texting while driving. Nearly three-quarters of drivers use cell phones.

California, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Washington ban all drivers from using handheld phones. The New Jersey and Washington state laws also prohibit text messaging. Alaska and Minnesota recently approved their own bans on text messaging.

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UCRA enforcing begins for 2009

INDIANAPOLIS — Most states that are members of the Unified Carrier Registration Agreement plan to begin enforcing payment of 2009 UCRA fees Jan. 1.

That deadline is earlier than has been typical since the UCRA system went into effect two years ago.

The Unified Carrier Registration Agreement is the process that replaced the old Single State Registration System.

Indiana, which administers the national on-line system through which most carriers pay their UCRA fees, has readied its system to begin accepting '09 registrations. Fees for next year are the same as those in 2007 and 2008.

Congestion issue on ballot in Wash.

OLYMPIA, Wash. — There will be a measure on Washington state ballots in November (Initiative 985) that would require the state to find and implement solutions for traffic congestion.

Among other things, approval of the measure would provide money to the state department of transportation to spend to ease congestion, with the money coming from the transfer of 15 percent of the current state sales tax on new cars to this purpose.

Among other things, the initiative also would provide that high-occupancy lanes be opened to all traffic after rush hours and that all stoplights be synchronized.

For text of the initiative, go to: <http://www.secstate.wa.gov/elections/initiatives/text/i985.pdf>.

Diesel tax grows as issue in Canada

QUEBEC CITY — Canadians vote in national parliamentary elections Oct. 14 and that country's tax on diesel fuel has become an issue.

During his campaign for reelection, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has promised to cut the tax on diesel fuel from 4 cents to 2 cents a liter. (See Oct. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

His promise is in contrast to the Liberal Party's plan to raise the tax to 11 cents a liter (that is, to about 41 cents a gallon) as a part of its Green Shift promotion.

Some Canadian ground transportation organizations are supporting Harper's plan since the proceeds from the Canadian tax, unlike federal fuel taxes in the U.S., are not directed to transportation.

UMA Safety Management Seminar in December

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The 5th annual United Motorcoach Association Safety Management Seminar, which tackles topical and critical coach safety issues, will be Dec. 3-4 at the National Transportation Safety Board Academy in Ashburn, Va.

Building on the success of the four previous seminars, this year's

session will cover a variety of subjects, ranging from USDOT compliance audits, to driver hiring and management, to maintenance innovations, to developing a risk management program.

The sessions are designed for owners, managers, safety directors and other professionals responsible for risk management at

motorcoach companies.

Featuring two concurrent tracks, basic and experienced, the seminar also will present updated safety information related to regulatory issues, catastrophic accidents, and working productively with your insurance company and broker.

There also will be briefings by officials from important safety or-

ganizations, the FMCSA, NTSB, CVSA, TSA and NHTSA.

Registration fees are \$235 for UMA members; nonmembers can attend for a higher fee.

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Driver treatment

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

should understand they're participating in an emergency and they should always be prepared for the worst case scenario. "I have been involved in enough military operations and emergency operations to know that despite how well you plan, some things can go astray," he emphasized.

Kudos for official

Maddy, who directs logistics for the emergency division, won the praise of Brown, who said he tried to help each time she called with a complaint during the evacuation operation.

"He was very, very helpful and he deserves kudos," she said. "He even called some of our drivers personally."

Brown, who dedicated six coaches and drivers to the operation, said most of the problems could have been avoided had there been better communications between state personnel running the evacuation and the drivers. "I think 99 percent of the problems were because of the lack of communications," she said.

She maintained that drivers were not told where and when

Hurricanes: \$222 million in Louisiana road damage; bus tab is \$27 million

BATON ROUGE, La. — State transportation officials estimate hurricanes Gustav and Ike caused \$222 million in damage to roads, bridges and other transportation infrastructure.

The state transportation department expects the federal government to pick up most of the tab for road repairs.

The preliminary tab for damages and costs is \$127 million for

Hurricane Gustav and \$94 million for Hurricane Ike.

That includes: \$75 million for debris removal, \$68 million for repairs to roads and bridges, \$20 million to repair drawbridges and

\$6.5 million in traffic signal damage repairs.

Another \$27 million was paid by the department for buses to help residents evacuate before the storms.

they could get food and that shuttles were available to take them to town to buy supplies or clean their clothes.

"Our drivers were told they would be there for three days so they brought clothes for three days. They ended up staying six days and were not allowed to take their coaches into town to get their clothes cleaned. Had they been told about the shuttles, they would have gladly jumped on one of them," she said.

Brown said her drivers were given bag lunches as they were leaving on one trip, but the food turned out to be barbeque ribs, beans and coleslaw, none of which can be eaten while driving. "Had they been given a sandwich and an apple they would have been happy," she said.

Her complaints were among dozens received by the United Motorcoach Association, according to

Victor Parra, president and CEO. "I got a lot of complaints, and they (Texas state officials) need to understand if they are going to get our assistance again, they'll have to do something about them," he said.

Among those who voiced complaints was Bill Austin of Dallas-based Buses by Bill who said he was most concerned because drivers were treated differently than others involved in the rescue operation.

His drivers, he said, were turned away from food lines where state police, medical personnel and others were being fed and instead were fed cookies and pretzels.

In addition, he said, medical personnel on the scene refused to treat one of his drivers for a spider bite, telling him he had to be an evacuee to receive treatment.

Brown said she plans to get together with her drivers to discuss

the situation and come up with suggestions that will be passed on to state officials. An early proposal, she said, is to have a daily newsletter to distribute to drivers so they are aware of what services are available and other helpful information.

The governor's office, meanwhile, said the most difficult challenge in putting together the operation was rounding up the 1,000 buses in time to help with the evacuation.

Spokeswoman Allison Castle said there were several major events going on in other parts of the country that tied up large numbers of buses that otherwise could have been used. "The number of buses each company can provide is written into their contract to ensure business aspects are taken care of," she said.

Still, she said, the entire operation went well.

"Considering the magnitude of the storm, there was never a shortage of buses or related resources," she noted.

Another problem?

One coach operator accused Texas of operating throughout the Hurricane Ike evacuation with a "total disregard to hours-of-service restrictions, making all drivers illegal."

The operator urged UMA and other organizations to send an e-mail to all their members reminding them that until an exemption is granted by federal officials "we are still bound by hours-of-service restrictions."

"Remind (the drivers) that when on a bus they are required to log on-duty, not driving.

"The state of Texas is doing nothing to improve the terrible and unsafe conditions the drivers are exposed to," the operator asserted.

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Coach industry backs call for tourism office

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Three more travel and tourism associations, including two motorcoach industry groups, have joined with the National Tour Association in its call for the creation of an executive office of travel and tourism policy.

Uniting with the United States Tour Operators Association and the NTA are the United Motorcoach and American Bus associations, along with the World Religious Travel Association.

“The momentum is growing as NTA and its allies call attention to the importance of an executive office of travel and tourism policy,” said NTA Chairman and CEO Bob Hoelscher, CTP.

“This office will provide the United States with more coherent, dynamic and world-leading travel and tourism policies generating excellent growth in this sector of the national economy.”

Victor Parra, president and CEO of UMA noted that “the entire industry needs to get behind this effort. Regardless of who the next U.S. president is, the tourism economy is vitally important to the interests of the entire country.

“The tourism economy deserves executive level attention and it is only appropriate to have someone in the White House designated accordingly,” Parra added.

Kevin J. Wright, president of the World Religious Travel Association said the tremendous economic and goodwill benefits that tourism brings to the United States are vital to our country’s interests. “With the presidential campaigns in full swing, now is the time to make our unified voice heard by the candidates — and America at large,” said Wright.

Trucking industry seems to tilt to McCain

As the U.S. presidential race heads into its final few weeks, the bus industry’s bigger and richer brother, the trucking industry, finds that both Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain offer pluses and minuses for truckers.

For example, Obama appears to strongly favor more highway and other infrastructure spending, while McCain seems to lean trucking management’s way on labor and safety issues.

“Our business is so complicated now that it doesn’t matter who controls Congress or the White House,” American Trucking Associations President Bill Graves told a leading industry publication.

“You’re always going to have challenges with some of these complex issues.” With that said, Graves tilts toward McCain.

“There’s something to like and something to dislike in the positions of both candidates,” Graves said, adding “it would be fair to say that we believe that a McCain presidency would overall be more positive for trucking than an Obama presidency.”

Graves told *Transport Topics* that both McCain and Obama hold various positions that may not be in line with some of ATA’s policy goals.

“There is genuine concern about what an Obama presidency would look like, relative to its impact on our industry,” he said. “What would the perspective of [the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration] be relative to our industry under that administration? What would the outcome of issues like card-check and some of the more pro-labor kinds of things? Will we revisit ergonomics under an Obama administration with a Democratically controlled Congress?”

During the Clinton administration, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration issued rules aimed at limiting repetitive stress injuries in the workplace. The trucking (and bus) industry opposed the rules, and Congress overturned them early in the Bush administration.

While Obama may present challenges for trucking on labor and regulatory issues, McCain may make things more difficult on the issues of highway funding and infrastructure, Graves said.

“You get the sense that Sen. McCain might be inclined more toward the current administration’s thinking on privatization, more inclined to get more private-sector involvement as a way of sort of changing the whole dynamic of infrastructure finance, but also as a way of avoiding talking about raising taxes as a way of supporting infrastructure,” he said. “That would be a concern for us.”

Earlier this year, a bipartisan commission recommended a 25-cent to 40-cent fuel-tax increase to repair and improve the nation’s roads and bridges.

During the primary campaign, McCain proposed suspending the federal gasoline tax, a position Obama rejected, indicating he would back more highway funding as part of an economic stimulus plan.

In August, Obama said he’d spend \$25 billion to “invest in our national infrastructure, replenish the Highway Trust Fund, rebuild our crumbling roads and bridges and repair our crumbling schools.”

And during the first debate between McCain and Obama, Obama again voiced support for a beefed up highway and infrastructure program.

If McCain were president, his stance against

“earmarks” would be particularly important to trucking, said one trucking executive. Earmarks are congressionally directed spending on specific projects.

Many people, like the trucking executive, see earmarks as wasteful spending.

McCain’s stances on clean air and safety also fit well with trucking’s outlook, say industry executives.

Transport unions back Obama

The executive committee of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO, says it plans to “educate transportation union members on Sen. McCain’s poor transportation record and Sen. Obama’s vision for a safe and expanded transportation system in America.”

“The worst transportation presidency in modern history is coming to a close,” said TTD President Edward Wytkind. “John McCain promises us four more years of the same: neglect, under-investment and a lack of leadership. Barack Obama wants to expand and rebuild our transportation system and will support and empower the men and women who operate, build and maintain it,” he said.

Alaska suspends fuel tax

Legislation signed into law by Gov. Sarah Palin suspended Alaska’s fuel tax — levied at 8 cents a gallon on both gasoline and diesel — for a year.

The legislation, which the governor originally proposed, provides for a grant of \$1,200 to every Alaska resident to help them cope with the increased costs of energy.

With its taxes on oil and gas extraction, Alaska is one of the few states where the budget is not in trouble.

Initiatives would cut income tax in Mass., N.D.

Massachusetts and North Dakota will have questions on their ballots next month that would make major changes to the states’ personal income tax.

Voters in Massachusetts will decide whether the state continues to collect its personal income tax. The referendum provides for a decrease in the tax rate for 2009 and full repeal in 2010.

A similar question appeared on the Massachusetts ballot in 2002, and although it failed, the margin was closer than had been anticipated.

Political observers say that citizens with an interest in seeing the state stay solvent will oppose the measure strongly.

Measure No. 2 on the ballot in North Dakota would cut the rate of the state income tax in

half, and reduce the state’s corporate tax by 15 percent.

North Dakota, because of oil and gas extraction, is one of the few states with a financial surplus, which supporters of the measure hope to oblige the state to return to taxpayers.

However, some observers say the ballot question is so poorly drawn that it may be doomed.

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How a little cheating can have major consequences

FRESNO, Calif. — Imagine for a moment you own a trucking company, instead of a motorcoach operation, and want to show your wife how much you love her by buying her a new BMW.

Also imagine you're having a tough time paying for the fuel your company uses when the price seems to jump a little every day; meanwhile, you need a little extra income.

On the other hand, maybe you're just greedy and want to make more money.

To satisfy all these needs you ask — and then require — your drivers to falsify their logbooks so they can run longer than allowed.

So far so good. But then, a problem appears in the form of a DOT officer knocking on your door. The DOT is doing an audit when word comes to the officer that one of your drivers has been involved in a fatal accident.

Of course the DOT becomes very interested in what caused the fatality and since they're already there, they soon discover what you have been hiding.

A few weeks ago, such a scenario played out in California.

Surinder S. Nijjar, owner and

president of Nijjar Brothers Trucking Inc. of Madera, was sentenced in U.S. District Court here to serve 12 months in prison and 36 months supervised probation and fined \$5,000 for false statements, aiding and abetting.

Amritpal Singh, co-owner of Nijjar Brothers, was sentenced to

12 months probation and fined \$5,000 for the same offenses.

As it turned out, Nijjar Brothers Trucking routinely encouraged its drivers to falsify logbooks, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General.

The same day USDOT agents executed the first of two search

warrants on Nijjar Brothers, one of the company's drivers had caused a four-vehicle collision, killing a father and his 13-year-old son and seriously injuring his 17-year-old son. The driver had been driving for at least 19 hours; he was convicted and sentenced for falsifying logbook entries and served time in jail.

As part of the sentencing agreement, the two owners also are required to inactivate their DOT numbers, dissolve their companies, not have any ownership or interest in a trucking company during the periods of their probation, and each pay a fine of \$50,000 on behalf of their companies.

Bill: Home office deductions easier

WASHINGTON — Rep. Charles Gonzalez, D-Texas, has introduced a bill aimed at simplifying the annual tax deduction for a home office.

Gonzalez' proposed Home Office Tax Deduction Simplification and Improvement Act (H.R. 7074) would create a standard home-office deduction for small business owners.

It is companion legislation to S. 3371, introduced earlier this year by Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine.

Claiming a home-office tax deduction can be a cumbersome and burdensome process. Last year, the National Association for the Self Employed and others identified the home office deduction as a tax provision that is unduly complex.

Thomas M. Sullivan, chief counsel for advocacy of the U.S. Small Business Administration, has found that tax compliance is 67 percent more burdensome for the smallest businesses compared to their larger competitors. And the complexity of the home-office deduction is a contributor to the burden.

Gonzalez' and Snowe's bills could use support from coach owners who operate businesses out of their homes.

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Credit Crunch: What kind of impact on the industry?

By Dave Millhouser

In ye olden days, when entire species were facing extinction, dinosaurs didn't scurry around yelling "the sky is falling, we're all gonna die!"

I wasn't actually there — but I'm pretty sure what they really said was "Gee, it's dark for this time of year and I'm getting chilly."

Darwin works slowly. When you're in the middle of great changes, it's difficult to know what's really happening, and how it's going to turn out.

The sky may not be falling but right now the credit outlook is a bit dark and chilly.

Clearly we're in the midst of an upheaval in the financial markets, and it will have an impact on our business. None of the smart folks I speak with are certain just how much of an impact.

Several problems seem likely, but there may be some preventative measures available.

Lenders are nervous. For years they assumed that a loan guaranteed by an asset — like real estate — was a safe bet. They're rethink-

ing that assumption, as well as their other asset-based loans. If they can't believe in real estate, what can they trust?

In our industry most of the loans are supported by the value of buses. Since lenders know even less about buses than they do about mortgages, we're likely to experience a tightening of credit. With less money to lend, finance companies are going to place it carefully.

This could have a Darwinian effect, and drive weaker companies to extinction. You can decide whether that's bad, or good, based on where you are in the food chain.

Lenders will be more demanding with regard to underlying financial strength. If you're one of those folks who tries to shield profits and assets from the IRS you might want to make some adjustments. If the IRS can't see it, neither can the lender.

Weak companies (or ones that look weak) are going to endure high down payments, shorter terms and pay more interest — if they can borrow at all. Lenders are squirrely because they're being watched, too.

Anyone with a history of paying late will suffer mightily. Do your best to stay current. You'll see more demands to sign personally on business loans, so keep your personal credit up to snuff. You might want to delay that divorce.

CitiBank just swallowed Wachovia. According to one source, that means that 30 percent of the credit available in the U.S. is concentrated in just three big companies. Even if you're dealing with a broker, manufacturer or smaller lender, the finance they offer is undoubtedly derived from one of these big institutions.

Their decisions will ripple through our industry, and fewer lenders may mean fewer options for unique businesses (like motorcoaches). It's reasonable to expect them to be conservative.

It behooves you to adjust the accounting of your successful bus operation to fit their generic business expectations.

Many well-run coach operators don't bother with sophisticated financial statements. When more money comes in than goes out, they're happy. It won't work in this

environment. When you borrow, present your information in a polished manner. Don't think of it as makeup on a hog, but rather as accentuating your inner beauty.

To perform this sort of magic, while retaining your honor (and freedom), it's important to work with a sharp accountant. Until the dust settles, the ability to survive may depend on how you appear to lenders.

Try to reduce debt. Delay or eliminate elective expenses and overhead. Credit crunches can be advantageous — if you're not borrowing.

This climate may affect insurance, too. Coaches are lumped in with other risks (like hurricanes) and premium dollars are invested by insurers in an effort to make money. If investments earn lots of money, they lower rates, in order to attract dollars to invest. Right now, interest rates are low, and the stock market has tanked.

Unless I'm missing something, the way they cover losses is to raise premiums, and get picky about who they insure. Now seems a good time to stress safety, and be

nice to your insurance company.

The bright spot here is that, once Darwin has his way, there will be survivors. When dinosaurs were out of the way, mammals did great. They were intelligent and adaptable, more able to control their environment.

Mammals are also warm and fuzzy — not a bad way to be. Now's a good time to cuddle up with lenders and vendors. Keep them informed, work with them so when problems crop up, they're rooting for you.

It's too early to tell if the sky is falling or this is a passing cloud. It's reasonable to assume that we're going to end up with fewer carriers, but the survivors will be efficiently run and more profitable. Not a bad thing — IF you're a mammal.

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



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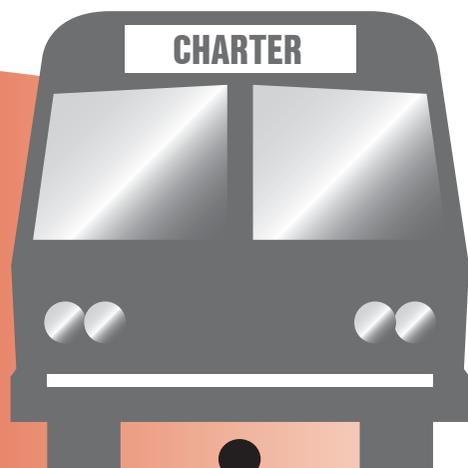
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Mike Sodrel

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and lost to Sen. Hillary Clinton by a whopping 34-point margin. His only win in the district was in Monroe County where Bloomington and Indiana University are located. Across the country Obama did well in college towns much like Bloomington.

"With Obama at the head of the Democratic ticket, it will help us for sure," said Reger.

Sodrel, the former owner of the Free Enterprise System motorcoach company is attempting to oust Rep. Baron Hill, a political foe he has faced on three other occasions and who unseated him in the 2006 election. Sodrel won the district seat from Hill in 2004 after losing to him in 2002.

Early on in this year's match up, Sodrel was given a good chance of winning back the seat.

"Hill is the incumbent and has the early edge, but the likelihood that McCain will significantly outpace Obama in the conservative-leaning territory has kept the GOP hopeful that Sodrel can benefit from presidential coattails in much the same way that Sodrel's winning campaign in 2004 was aided by (President) Bush's strong victory among district voters," the Congressional Quarterly reported in August.

Since then, however, McCain

New hybrid bus chassis is introduced by Freightliner

GAFFNEY, S.C. — Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. has introduced a hybrid-electric commercial bus chassis designed to reduce fuel consumption, as well as emissions.

The MB-HEV, introduced last month at BusCon 2008, features a Cummins diesel engine hooked up to an Eaton drive system and lithium batteries.

has dipped in the polls and voter support for Sodrel faded some, too. An independent poll by SurveyUSA conducted last month showed Hill with a comfortable 11-point margin, 50 percent to 39 percent. A third candidate, Libertarian Eric Schansberg, drew 5 percent.

And early this month, newspapers and television newscasts across the state began reporting that Obama had surged and the state appeared to be slipping away from Republicans.

"Indiana Becomes Battleground State" the headlines declared as the media began noting new polling results that gave McCain just a three-point lead over Obama. A WSBT/South Bend Tribune poll even had it tighter with McCain leading by just a single point.

The Evansville Courier & Press, one of several newspapers that headlined the battleground issue,

"Freightliner Custom Chassis developed the prototype MB-HEV aiming to be the most fuel-efficient bus chassis on the market," said Tony Sippel, product manager for Freightliner commercial bus chassis.

According to Freightliner, the Eaton hybrid-electric system can cut fuel consumption by as much as 40 percent over conventional drivetrains.

was quick to note that the Republican National Committee was taking the issue seriously and almost immediately began running a series of television ads for McCain.

Because the state had been considered safe for so long — Bush beat Sen. John Kerry by a 21-point margin four years ago and the state has not voted Democrat in a presidential election since 1964 when it went for Lyndon Johnson — the party had planned to spend very little advertising money there.

Despite the turn of events in the statewide picture, Sodrel still likes his chances of winning in the district.

"The campaign is going very well," he said. "We're hearing great things from all over the district."

He said many Democrats in the district were unhappy with Hill endorsing Obama in the primary election in May and have said they plan

The chassis' lithium-ion batteries capture and store energy during regenerative braking, as well as charging throughout the operation of the diesel engine. Both the engine — a Cummins ISB 6.7-liter with up to 300 horsepower, and the chassis' electric motor provide power to the drivetrain.

The chassis also features a 55-degree wheel cut, a 10 percent im-

provement over similar models.

The MB-HEV chassis features a maximum GVWR of 32,000 pounds, and it is designed for both shuttle and big bus applications.

The hybrid chassis is expected to be available for order in the fourth quarter of next year, with production set for early 2010.

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

to vote for him (Sodrel) in the congressional race. "If that holds true, we're very optimistic," he added.

New polling, too, has boosted his optimism.

He said a poll taken for him by Wilson Research Strategies in late September gave Hill just a three-point advantage, 44 percent to 41 percent, a big turnaround from the SurveyUSA poll that was done two weeks earlier.

"Despite a growing drumbeat of doubts about Sodrel's chances in a horrendous political climate for Republicans, the Wilson poll gives Sodrel a reason for hope," noted Howey Politics Indiana, the Internet site of syndicated columnist Brian A. Howey.

Sodrel said he also is looking forward to increasing his numbers in a long-awaited debate with Hill planned for Oct. 21 in Jasper.

"The Jasper debate very well

could be the only debate we have so it will be a good opportunity for voters to compare and contrast the candidates," he said.

The debate was finalized after Hill, who had refused numerous invitations from Sodrel for a face-off, dropped a demand that Sodrel apologize to district constituents for the way he handled his office's transition to Hill two years ago.

Hill claims that Sodrel failed to send letters to residents of the district seeking permission to transfer their casework to Hill. Sodrel has repeatedly denied the charge.

"Conventional wisdom says that an incumbent has nothing to gain from debating a challenger," Sodrel said in a statement. "Congressman Hill must be seeing the same poll numbers that we are or he would not be agreeing to any debates."

Hill told the Louisville Courier-Journal that he dropped his call for an apology because he did not want to commit a disservice to voters by not taking part in a debate.

Although Sodrel is high on the outcome of the election, he has been outpaced by Hill in campaign contributions.

As of the latest reporting period in June, Sodrel had raised \$635,830.78, less than half of the \$1,740,250.06 that Hill collected. A new report is due the middle of this month.

"We are ahead of where Mike was in any other challenger race he's had," said Reger, adding that the campaign is comparing contributions to the 2004 race because it was the last presidential contest and the last time Sodrel was a challenger. "Compared to 2004, we are doing very well and 2004 was the last time Mike won."

Meantime, Sodrel said he will be an advocate for issues that matter most to the motorcoach industry.



Mike Sodrel

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Calif. Bus Assn. show next month

RANCHO MIRAGE, Calif. — The 35th annual California Bus Association Convention and Trade Show will be Nov. 1-4 at the Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa here.

The show will feature a half-dozen education sessions, ranging from leadership development, to employee retention, to 2010 engine technology, to legislative issues, to California environmental regulations.

There also will be a panel discussion on insurance moderated by Michelle Silvestro of National Interstate and featuring Timothy Delaney of Lancer Insurance, Brad Schneeberger of National Transportation Insurance Solutions, Frank Ceraolo of Republic Indemnity, John Hill of John Burnham Insurance and Curtis Alkire of Buckman-Mitchell Inc.

Lancer Insurance also will be among the exhibitors at the event's vendor showcase.

Other highlights of the convention are the Dennis Easley Bus Rodeo, the Gala Awards and Installation Banquet where the Outstanding Driver of the Year is crowned, and an industry update presented by Victor Parra, president and CEO of the United Motorcoach Association.

Bus operators from throughout the western U.S. attend the CBA convention, which provides attendees an opportunity to exchange ideas and learn about the latest trends in the industry.

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

Dumping solution

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

— was (quite obviously) out of the question. Consequently, all of Childers' equipment had to be backed in.

That created another obvious problem: It increased the risk of damage that can come when backing up to a dump station, then moving the coach to a parking space.

"We solved this dilemma by constructing a 'bank' of dump stations — one for each of the six parking spaces we developed," said Childers.

"As sewer service was not available to the property, I had two 900 gallon storage tanks installed, tying them together and then running a pipe from the tanks (placed in the two middle spaces), to service the outside lanes.

"This arrangement may not be acceptable for everyone but for those operators with limited space and funds, it is a viable solution and something to consider," says Childers.

Bolt, megabus hit milestones; 'alert' launched by megabus

BoltBus, the curbside service operated by Greyhound Lines and Peter Pan Bus Lines, and megabus.com, the curbside operation of Coach USA, marked milestones last month.

megabus.com recognized its one millionth customer, Dana Bellers of St. Charles, Mo., a suburb of St. Louis. Bellers, 27, is an employee at Wachovia Securities in St. Louis.

Bellers was recognized by Coach USA President Dale Moser upon her arrival at the megabus Chicago stop near Union Station. She was given a Dell notebook computer and a pair of Chicago Double-Decker/Trolley Tour tickets. All travelers on Bellers' bus also received Trolley Tour tickets.

A video of Bellers getting the award was posted on YouTube.com. megabus.com began operating in April 2006.

FirstGroup plc, owner of Greyhound, announced that BoltBus is achieving revenue of more than \$1 million monthly as a result of strong demand. BoltBus was launched in March of this year.

Meanwhile, megabus.com has launched a mobile alert system, allowing the company to alert customers to delays and other service disruptions via automated voice messaging.

Customers can sign up for the mobile alert at www.megabus.com when booking their trip.

megabus says that although only five percent of arrivals and departures are delayed it thinks it important to let passengers know when there is a delay.

"The addition of the mobile alert system reinforces our commitment to delivering safe, reliable, value-added express bus service to all megabus.com customers," said Moser.

Separately, *Budget Travel* magazine announced that megabus.com has been selected as a winner of a 2008 Extra Mile Award, which honors travel companies that have done the most in the past year to make travel easier or more affordable.

In a statement, *Budget Travel* said it was recognizing megabus.com "for its devotion to reinventing bus travel for new generations with service to 25 cities, high-tech amenities and extremely low fares."

The magazine also said its editors chose megabus.com "for giving travelers an inexpensive alternative to driving or flying when they needed it most — and for simultaneously revolutionizing the way people think about bus travel."

Greyhound

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

chase Prevost X3-45 coaches was revealed in January, a follow-up order has been widely anticipated. (See Feb. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Prevost is owned by Volvo,

which has a strong relationship in Europe with Greyhound's parent company, FirstGroup plc of Scotland. FirstGroup is a Volvo customer in the United Kingdom.

Greyhound has an aging fleet and has not announced a major coach buy for a half-dozen years. It reportedly has scores of older buses parked that it doesn't make sense to fix but can't be scrapped because it would put the company out of compliance with Americans with Disabilities requirements.

Efforts by FirstGroup to sell Greyhound may have been hindered because of the need to replace huge chunks of Greyhound's fleet during the next few years. Fully 25 percent of Greyhound's fleet is anywhere from 12 to 15 years old, and many of the company's hundreds of DL3s are approaching 10 years old.

Announcement of the X3-45 order comes as FirstGroup reports that revenue at Greyhound grew by 5 percent during the six months ended Sept. 30.

FirstGroup said its efforts to increase revenue, tightly control costs and develop new and attractive markets at Greyhound helped produce a pleasing six-month period.

People

Stephen Story, president of **James River Bus Lines** and **Carey Transportation** of Richmond, Va., has been elected president of the **TRAX Insurance Group**. TRAX is the member-owned captive insurance program for larger ground passenger fleet operators. The program, which is in its 12th year, is sponsored by **National Interstate Insurance**.

Brendan McCullough, owner of **McCullough Coach Lines Ltd.** in Victoria, B.C., has been elected a director of the **British Columbia Trucking Association**. About 90 percent of the motorcoaches in British Columbia are operated by members of the trucking association's passenger division. Members of the association automatically become members of Motor Coach Canada.

Bus academy starts fall program

LA PLATA, Md. — Bus & Motorcoach Academy, the industry's premier web-based continuing education program, launched its fall classes this month.

Developers of the program's 10 courses, plus staffers at the College of Southern Maryland, which coordinates the academy, have updated and modified the program for this fall's students, said Ken Presley, vice president of industry relations at the United Motorcoach Association, which established the academy.

"Those learners who have taken courses in the past will notice many changes and an improved learning experience," said Presley.

For example, each learning module now concludes with a quiz. Upon completion of the quiz, grading is automatic. Incorrect answers are identified and students may take the quiz as many times as they like.

Once the quiz is passed, learners proceed to the next module.

"After all modules are completed...it's exam time," said Presley. "The exam is challenging and there is a time limit. But, (there's no need to) worry, the course content and quizzes prepare (the students)."

Bus & Motorcoach Academy students work at their own pace. The fall courses end Nov. 16, but the academy helps students to be mind-

ful of the deadline.

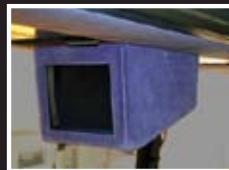
Another key aspect is that the course developers are available to answer questions, via e-mail. For technical issues, the "help desk" at the College of Southern Maryland provides assistance.

Bus & Motorcoach Academy offers continuing education courses, designed specifically for the motorcoach industry, in business and marketing; financial management; safety and compliance; driver qualifications; vehicle maintenance; safe driving, and security.

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

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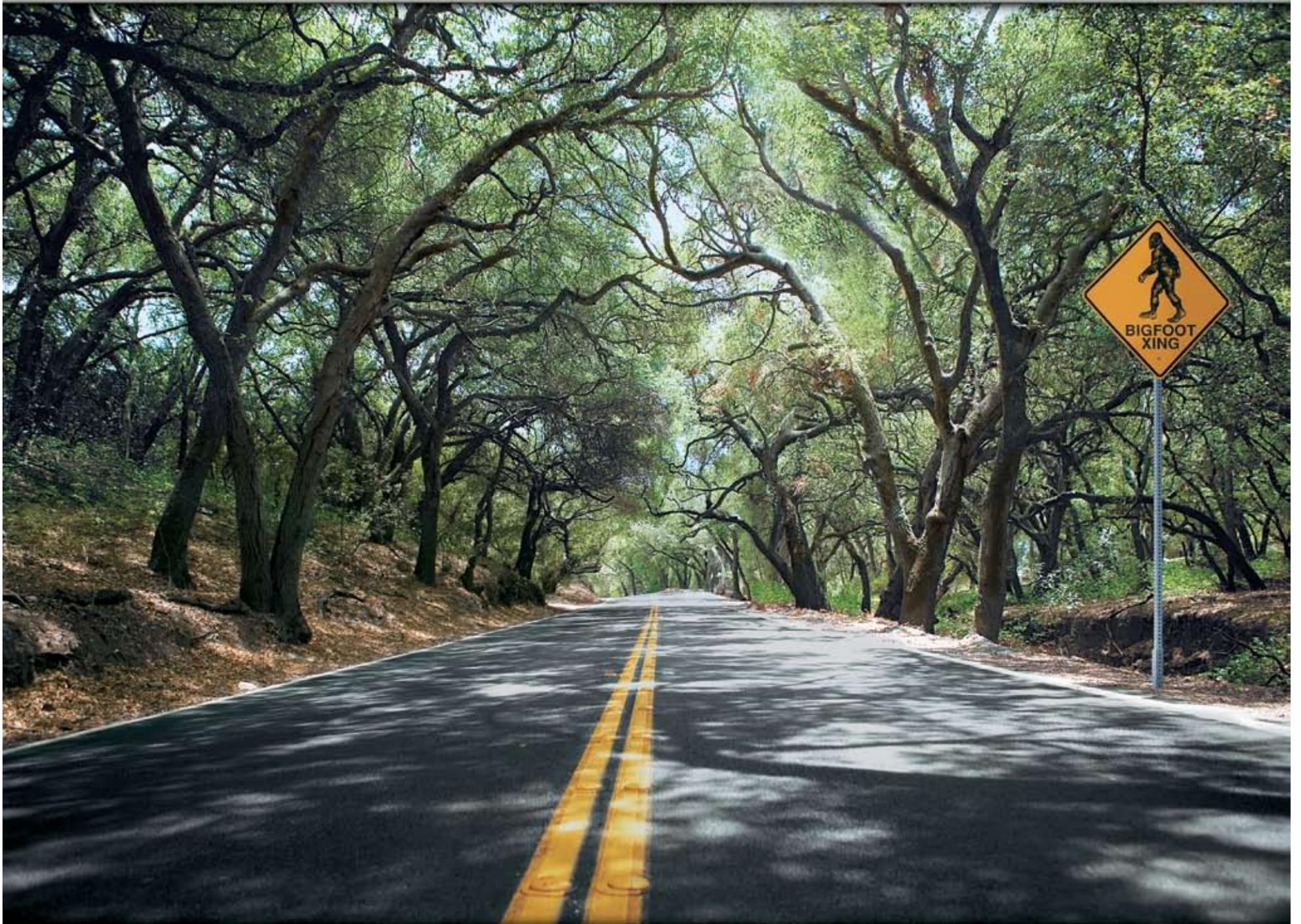
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