

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

November 1, 2003

THE NEWS RESOURCE FOR THE BUS AND MOTORCOACH INDUSTRY

Coach USA units reborn in Southeast

LAKE WORTH, Fla. — The eight motorcoach operations that formerly formed the Southeast region of Coach USA are being woven into a brand-new corporation that will be known as American Coach Lines.

The new company gets its name from one of the operations being acquired in the deal, American Coach Lines of Norcross, Ga. Before it was purchased by Coach USA in the late 1990s, American Coach Lines was owned by long-time industry stalwart Calvin Cooper.

The primary owner of the new corporation is an equity fund managed by Lincolnshire Management Inc., a New York-based investment company.

When the new American Coach Lines is finally knit together it will be one of the largest coach operations in the U.S., with a fleet of 500 vehicles, including 390 motorcoaches, and more than 900 employees. It will operate out of 14 locations and have annual revenue of more than \$50 million.

Headquarters for the new company will be in Lake Worth, Fla., where another of the operating units, Midnight Sun Tours, is based. The new corporate office is expected to be opened by the middle of this month.

Mark Kontinen, most recently president of Midnight Sun Tours, has been named CEO of America Coach Lines and will work from the corpo-

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Coach Security Greyhound Lines unveiled an innovative driver security compartment, featuring a swing-out gate, at a press conference in Washington last month. Story page 3.

Web site for bus customers to be launched by FMCSA

WASHINGTON — The federal government is developing a Web site with potentially enormous implications for the motorcoach industry.

The site is the brain child of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and will provide a wide range of consumer-type information for buyers of passenger transportation services. Helping the FMCSA develop the Web site is the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center in Cambridge, Mass.

"We're trying to give con-

sumers and buyers of passenger-transportation services a user-friendly place where they can find information and guidance," said Peter Chandler of the FMCSA commercial passenger carrier safety division.

Basically, the on-line information service will do three things:

- Provide the buyer with guidance on what type of vehicle — motorcoach, school bus, van or limousine — best meets the buyer's needs.

- Provide the buyer with a list

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UMA, ABA partner on coach security training initiatives

WASHINGTON — In a landmark agreement, the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association have agreed to jointly develop and deliver a comprehensive security training program to the nation's motorcoach operators.

The agreement means the two associations will not be creating separate programs designed to help operators deal with criminal or terrorist attacks aimed at their passengers and buses, and vying for operators to adopt them.

Instead, the associations will come up with a single, comprehensive program and deliver it to thousands of coach companies at little or no cost to the operators.

In August, both associations

were awarded separate grants by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Transportation Security Administration to develop security training programs.

The TSA awarded UMA a grant totaling \$841,330, while the ABA received \$773,614.

The associations had submitted lengthy applications to the federal government last March, competing for a share of \$20 million in bus industry security grants that had been put up for grabs by the TSA. (See stories in the Sept. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*)

Fifty-seven motorcoach operators in 24 states won the lion's share of the grant money, with the \$1.6 million going to the two asso-

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ABA, UMA differ over new federal driver rule

WASHINGTON — The American Bus Association and the United Motorcoach Association have come down on different sides of a proposed new federal safety rule that would expand training requirements for entry-level commercial bus and truck drivers.

The ABA says the proposed rule is "long overdue and will contribute to a safe operating environment." The association lauded the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration for "moving this important matter forward."

UMA, on the other hand, blasted the proposed rule saying it is based on faulty assumptions and logic, and will be a costly and

unnecessary burden to hard-pressed operators. UMA contends the motorcoach industry should be exempted from the proposal, just as transit operators have been.

In August, the FMCSA proposed that training requirements for new commercial bus and truck drivers be greatly expanded. (See Sept. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.) The proposal would apply to all bus and truck drivers who hold a CDL and have less than two years experience operating a commercial vehicle for a business.

The FMCSA said new-driver training needs to be beefed up in four areas: driver qualifications,

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THE DOCKET

Knowing the Language

The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance strongly urges federal regulators to revisit the issue of English language requirements for commercial

vehicle drivers. **Page 4**

Critical Issues

CVSA's passenger carrier committee wrestles with all sorts of key safety issues. **Page 4**

Who's more secure?

Detroit Department of

Transportation, the city's public transit agency, claims transit buses are more secure.

Baloney, says UMA. **Page 5**

Charter Notices

Two public transit agencies serve up charter service notices. **Page 5**

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Coach security takes center stage in D.C., driver shield unveiled

WASHINGTON — Since 9/11, airline security has become a national obsession.

At the same time, security for over-the-road buses has been largely ignored.

That changed for one day last month when the nation's top transportation security official conducted a press briefing in Washington with members of Congress and executives from Greyhound Lines.

"TSA is committed to protecting America's freedom of movement," said Transportation Security Administration Administrator, Adm. James M. Loy. "Great achievements have been made in the skies and now we are bringing that commitment to the roads. The enhancements that are being demonstrated today will help ensure that whether you travel by air, train or bus you will arrive safely at your destination."

The Greyhound-TSA press

event was designed to demonstrate prototype security measures Greyhound is employing at some of its terminals and has installed on one of its MCI G4500 coaches.

The coach on display at the press conference, No. 7211, had been outfitted with a clear plastic driver protection shield, plus GPS tracking and telecommunications equipment.

The driver shield is designed to present an obstacle to a passenger who might want to harm a driver, as well as give the driver time to bring the coach to a stop.

Attached to the shield is a plastic gate that swings out into the aisle. The two-foot-tall gate, essentially the distance from an individual's chest to mid-thigh, is designed to be both a passenger deterrent and to reinforce the white line at the end of the aisle.

For its security system, Greyhound has chosen not to have a



This is how Greyhound's driver shield system appears to passengers with the security gate deployed.

completely enclosed driver compartment for two reasons:

- In case the driver has a medical emergency of his or her own, or the driver needs to attend to a passenger. The driver can exit his or her seat quickly.
- The driver is the only cus-

tommer service representative on board the bus and must be accessible for passengers to ask questions.

Greyhound expects to spend \$5 million during the next year or so installing driver shield systems on 1,700 of its 2,400 coaches.

The Global Positioning System

on the demonstrator coach and an on-board cell phone allows a driver to immediately alert authorities to an incident and rapidly transmit the bus's position anywhere.

Other Greyhound security initiatives include:

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THE DOCKET

CVSA meeting wrestles with critical issues

SAVANNAH, Ga. — The economy may be short on growth, and consumers may be short on confidence, but there's no shortage of safety-related issues facing the commercial passenger industry.

That means there was plenty of fodder last month for the annual fall workshop of the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance passenger carrier committee. The two-day meeting was in Savannah.

Among the key long-term issues under discussion was the integration of security into the safety culture that dominates CVSA and its members.

It is widely believed the U.S. Transportation Security Administration will be pressing the CVSA in the months and years ahead to get its arms around transportation security, as well as safety.

"TSA doesn't want to see two organizations on the state level, one dealing with highway safety and the other with highway security," said one workshop participant. "Safety and security from an insurance standpoint are indivisible. After all, passengers expect to be delivered safely and securely."

Motor-carrier inspectors who are members of CVSA already have some security-related requirements, including checking hazardous materials shipments.

Quite possibly on the horizon will be security documentation for passenger carrier drivers and a requirement that drivers log on-board security incidents.

Other issues served up at the



It was all business at CVSA's passenger carrier forum in Savannah, Ga.

workshop included:

- Fire suppression systems, and the need for better driver training to get passengers out in the event of a fire. And a related issue: What happens when there is a crash and there is fire and the driver is injured.

- Wheelchair lifts, and the issue of getting passengers in wheelchairs off in the event of an incident. There was discussion of requiring an emergency handle inside the coach that could be used to open the wheelchair lift access door in an emergency.

- Safety standards for limousine converters. SUVs and automobiles of every description are being converted into limousines and there are no standards to assure these

vehicles are safe. It is believed that the major auto manufacturers want standards to put shoddy limousine builders out of business.

- LED light defect standards. A resolution was adopted calling for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to require manufacturers to spell out the impact on brightness when individual diodes burn out in LED lights.

- New-entrant inspection program. There was grumbling about the touted program that requires all new commercial carriers be inspected within 18 months of starting operations. FMCSA state inspectors apparently are saying they aren't finding enough shortcomings to justify the program.

CVSA raises issue of language skills

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The language proficiency of commercial drivers, an issue the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration relegated to the trash heap barely three months ago, has resurfaced.

The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance has petitioned the FMCSA to revisit the issue, saying it is a "major safety concern."

In July, the FMCSA dumped a six-year-old proposed rule that would have upgraded the rule in the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations involving English.

Currently, under the driver qualifications section, the rule provides that a driver must be able to "read and speak the English language sufficiently to converse with the general public, to understand highway traffic signs and signals in the English language, to respond to official inquiries, and to make entries on reports and records."

Members of CVSA and others consider the rule imprecise and subject to different interpretations, making it difficult to comply with and enforce.

After looking at the issue off and on since early 1997, the FMCSA concluded this past summer that there was no quantifiable data on which to propose modifying the existing rule to require a more stringent or definitive English-speaking standard, or to require state motor vehicle agencies to administer a specific test for English proficiency.

The issue became a hot button in the debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement and gained new impetus as implementation of NAFTA got under way. The primary concern has focused on the language skills of Mexican and French-Canadian drivers coming into the U.S.

But the CVSA now insists the issue extends well beyond NAFTA and concerns about Spanish-speaking drivers from Mexico and French speaking drivers from Canada.

Just as critical, says CVSA, are the language skills of new

residents of the United States who do not speak English but are behind the wheel of commercial vehicles. Highway safety, as well as the safety of law enforcement and vehicle safety officials, is being jeopardized, according to the CVSA.

"There have been instances where the inability of commercial drivers to adequately communicate with and understand officer instructions has compromised the inspection process," the CVSA says in its petition filed with the FMCSA. "Additionally, there have been instances where this has compromised highway safety."

The most egregious example of the problem occurred earlier this summer, however. "The problem came to the forefront when, on July 8, 2003, in Slippery Rock, Pa., a truck driver from Utah drove through a stop sign and killed five people. He did not speak English."

CVSA says immigrants from all parts of the world are coming to the U.S., seeking employment in the over-the-road bus and truck industries. Many of these individuals have difficulty speaking English, posing serious implications for highway safety.

In its petition, CVSA recommends the FMCSA do two things:

- Work with CVSA to develop a standard test procedure for law enforcement to administer in determining whether commercial drivers meet a minimum standard for communication.

- Revise the current federal safety regulation to make it the responsibility of foreign drivers and motor carriers to be able to communicate in English when they come into the U.S., so safety is not compromised.

The CVSA noted that Canada already has adopted the second recommendation.

"We strongly encourage the (FMCSA) to take on this problem before more persons are injured or killed," said CVSA Executive Director Stephen F. Campbell.

Oklahoma imposes taxes on coach travel

OKLAHOMA CITY — Oklahoma has become the second state this year to begin imposing sales taxes on motor-coach travel.

The Oklahoma Legislature adopted a law that extends the state sales tax to motor transportation companies of virtually every description, including buses, shuttle services, limou-

sines, and even Pullman car companies.

The only exception is for transportation services provided by a "tourism service broker," which is defined as any person which, for a fee, arranges or offers to arrange trips, tours or other vacation or recreational travel plans for customers.

The Oklahoma sales tax is 5.5

percent on gross receipts. Collection of the tax began last month.

Earlier this year, Ohio brought motorcoach operators under its sales tax laws. However, the Ohio law is more limited than that in Oklahoma. The Ohio tax is only collected on in-state travel; Oklahoma makes no such distinction.

Faulty claim used by Detroit transit agency in bid for FTA waiver

DETROIT — The public transit agency in Detroit tried — and failed — to dust off an old excuse to win a waiver from federal charter service rules.

Detroit Department of Transportation claimed that transit buses are less vulnerable in the event of a terrorist incident.

When it learned what the Detroit transit agency was claiming, the United Motorcoach Association blew the whistle, making sure both the Federal Transit Administration and the U.S. Transportation Security Administration were disabused of the notion that transit buses have some sort of security superiority.

The issue surfaced when the Detroit DOT wrote to the FTA seeking a waiver from federal charter rules so it could provide buses for an Arab-American conference that was taking place in Detroit. In its letter to the FTA, DDOT noted that in the past it had been asked to provide services that can assist in “combating terrorist threats (that is, buses that are fully visible and do not have concealed areas for luggage).”

When UMA saw the DDOT letter, it did a little dusting off of its own, pulling out a study it had commissioned in 1996, comparing the relative security

features of transit buses and motorcoaches.

A few months before the study was done, the FTA had granted a charter-service waiver to MARTA, the public transit agency in Atlanta, based in large part on an

unsubstantiated claim that transit-style buses were better suited to the security needs of the Olympics.

The detailed study completed for UMA by a leading security consulting firm concluded that both types of buses are suitable for

secure transportation, but motorcoaches have a number of features which make them more favorable than transit buses.

The FTA rejected the DDOT waiver request, saying it wasn't justified based on the evidence.

“Broad allegations such as the one made by DDOT against private motorcoaches must be substantiated by fact,” said Norman Littler, UMA's senior vice president of government and industry relations. “They weren't.”



Public agencies seek private charter firms

The following public transit providers have informed the United Motorcoach Association of their intent to provide charter service unless willing and able private charter operators step forward to offer their services, or to bid on contract opportunities. The UMA urges operators to take the time to respond to these public notices:

Columbus, Ga. Deadline: Nov. 14, 2003. Write: Sandra Hunter, Grants Management and Planning, Department of Transportation/METRA, P.O. Box 1340, Columbus, GA 31902-1340. Phone: (706) 653-4409.

Monterey County, Calif. Deadline: Nov. 25, 2003. Write to: William Morris, Contract Transportation Manager, One Ryan Ranch Road, Monterey, CA 93940. Phone: (831) 899-2558.

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THE DOCKET

Proposed rules changes by South Jersey agency give operators a scare

HAMMONTON, N.J. — The South Jersey Transportation Authority may be close to scrapping plans to begin scrutinizing the safety performance of motorcoach operators that send coaches to Atlantic City, including requiring operators to report all their traffic safety violations to the authority.

The mechanism for moving the authority into bus safety oversight is contained in extensive rules revisions being considered by the authority.

The draft rules, published last month, contain a provision that would require all companies sending motorcoaches to Atlantic City on a fairly regular basis to report every single traffic safety citation to the authority regardless of where the violation occurred.

Industry sources said the safety oversight proviso likely will come out of the final document that goes before the authority board later this year.

Directors of the Atlantic City Bus Operators Association reportedly met with South Jersey Transportation Authority officials and others to urge restraint, and repeated the request at public hearings late last month.

"I think that (the safety reporting and oversight provision) is probably coming out," said one well-placed source close to talks.

While the proposed changes also include a substantial increase in the cost of annual fleet and single-bus medallions, the daily permit fees for buses entering Atlantic City will remain unchanged at \$2. The daily permit is the one most operators purchase.

The annual fee for a fleet medallion is being increased to \$40,500 from \$30,000, while the annual fee for a single-bus medallion is being raised from \$550 to \$675. There reportedly are only four holders of fleet medallions.

When operators along the eastern seaboard learned of the

original safety oversight and reporting proposal they were outraged.

"Insanity. More insanity," was the reaction of one high-profile New York operator. "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to stop taking reservations for Atlantic City."

"We don't need one more level of regulation," said a large Pennsylvania-based operator. "We're already regulated by the federal government, the New Jersey DOT and the New Jersey State Police. We don't need this."

Said a New Jersey operator: "You know what Atlantic City needs? A one-day boycott. That would straighten them out in a hurry."

Added a fourth operator: "This is crap. They have no business getting involved in that."

To a person, other operators contacted by *Bus & Motorcoach News* reacted with similar indignation. Many, like the New York operator, vowed to direct customers to other gaming destinations. "There's always Foxwoods," said the owner of one large New Jersey coach operation.

In the past three years, there has been a 30 percent drop in daily motorcoach traffic in and out of Atlantic City. The decline is attributed to a number of factors but New Jersey's reputation as a "motorcoach unfriendly" state is believed to be a primary reason.

An information vacuum

Until contacted by *Bus & Motorcoach News*, most operators were not aware of the extensive rules changes being planned by the authority, which was set up a dozen years ago to coordinate the region's transportation system, including addressing the highway network, aviation facilities and the transportation problems of Atlantic County.

The authority's move into motorcoach safety oversight certainly stretches the purpose for which it was set up, judging by information contained on its Web

Diesel prices slide, outlook still fuzzy

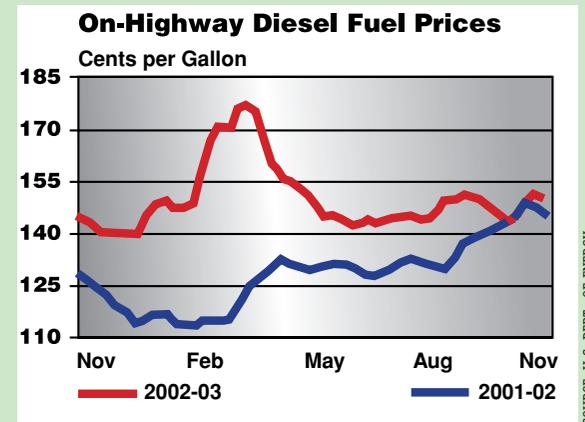
Diesel fuel prices moderated during the last week in October but remained 2 to 7 cents a gallon higher than they were a month ago.

The latest price survey by the Energy Information Agency pegged the average U.S. price of diesel at more than \$1.49 a gallon during the last week of October. That's down about a penny a gallon from the week before but nearly 7 cents a gallon higher than at the end of September.

Compared to a year ago, the U.S. average price is about 4 cents a gallon higher. The best place to buy diesel is in the Lower Atlantic states — not the Gulf Coast, as usual — where the average price was \$1.43 per gallon during the most recent survey. The high-price leader was California, naturally, where the price averaged about \$1.63 per gallon.

In other words, operators in Southern California are paying 20 cents a gallon more than operators in South Carolina. The price survey was taken just before the wild fires in Southern California went super nova and began severely disrupting traffic, never a good situation for stable fuel prices.

Meanwhile, diesel prices in other regions of the U.S. remain above year ago levels, but the price spread varies widely. For example, in New England, the average price of diesel was nearly \$1.59 a gallon, which is more than 9 cents a gallon higher than it was a year ago. On the Gulf Coast, the price averaged \$1.44 a gallon, which is



Diesel Fuel Prices

	Cents per Gallon	Change from	
		Price	Week Ago Year Ago
U.S.	149.4	▼-0.7	▲ 3.9
East Coast	148.6	▼-0.6	▲ 4.4
New England	158.7	▼-0.1	▲ 9.1
Central Atlantic	159.3	▼-0.1	▲ 8.0
Lower Atlantic	143.1	▼-0.9	▲ 2.4
Midwest	149.8	▼-1.0	▲ 4.1
Gulf Coast	144.1	▼-1.1	▲ 2.4
Rocky Mountain	153.5	▼-0.3	▲ 2.6
West Coast	157.3	▼-0.4	▲ 4.9
California	162.7	▼-0.6	▲ 7.8

up 2.4 cents a gallon from last year.

Oil analysts say it's still too early to predict how high diesel fuel prices will climb this winter. Diesel inventories are plentiful but inventories of home heating oil are below five-year averages.

site — www.sjta.com.

Only one operator contacted by *Bus & Motorcoach News* was aware the authority was conducting public hearings Oct. 23-24 on the proposal. The authority did not publish a notice regarding the hearings on its Web site until Oct. 10, 14 days before the hearings. And, the Web notice barely hinted at the scope and significance of the proposed changes.

The only other known notice about the hearings was an announcement printed Oct. 6, in a state legal publication called the *New Jersey Register*.

One group that obtained a copy of the proposed rules in mid-October was stunned to find that the deadline for being included on the list of speakers for the Oct. 23-24 hearings was Sept. 15.

ACBOA acts

Among those who knew about the proposed changes were directors and members of the Atlantic City Bus Operators Association, a 22-year-old association that represents operators providing service to Atlantic City.

Thomas Dugan, president of the association and president of

Safety Bus Service in Pennsauken, N.J., said the association, along with its attorney, planned to make statements at the hearings.

"We don't think there is any necessity for them to get into that (regulatory oversight)," said Dugan. "We don't like the idea of any regulatory additions."

Dugan was reluctant to directly criticize the rules, noting the association did not want to appear to be against safe bus operations.

According to the South Jersey Transportation Authority, the overall intent of the rules overhaul is to eliminate unnecessary reporting requirements, streamline certain processes and provide more flexibility.

For example, penalties for violating authority rules are being streamlined: \$250 for a first offense, \$400 for a second offense and \$500 for any subsequent offense.

The proposed rules include dozens of amendments and updated regulations, plus the controversial increase in the authority's "oversight of bus operator safety performance."

Specifically, the authority proposed that bus operators holding a

daily permit or a medallion and making 10 or more trips to Atlantic City during a preceding 90-day period to "notify the authority of any summons, citation, complaint or other written notice of a traffic safety violation issued to the holder or its employee."

This requirement, said the authority, is intended "to promote operator safety and to inform activity center operators (i.e. casinos) of bus operator performance."

From all indications, however, this provision is being sent to the authority dumpster.

Written comments on the proposed rules must be submitted by Dec. 5 to: Laura McAllister Cox, Cooper Levenson April Niedelman & Wagenham, 1125 Atlantic Ave., Atlantic City, NJ 08401.

The authority has a deadline of Dec. 23, to adopt new rules.

To contact the executive director of the South Jersey Transportation Authority, write to: James A. Crawford, South Jersey Transportation Authority, P.O. Box 351, Hammonton, NJ 08037.

Cypress Gardens park may (yet) bloom again

WINTER HAVEN, Fla. — Cypress Gardens may be back on the list of motorcoach destinations before long.

The long-time Florida tourist attraction that was shut down in April because of dwindling attendance is being sold to a nonprofit land conservation organization with the goal of reopening it to tourists.

The \$22 million sale of the 142-acre park by First Gardens L.C. to the Trust for Public Land includes a stipulation that a conservation easement be sold to the State of Florida, which will permanently protect a portion of the property from development.

In August, Gov. Jeb Bush and his cabinet placed the 67-year-old landmark on the Florida Forever list, which made state money available for purchase of the easement.

The property sales agreement also provides that Trust for Public Land will have four months to find a buyer who will own and manage the park on a long-term basis.

Two possible buyers — Central Florida time-share mogul David Siegel and amusement park owner Kent Buescher — have expressed interest in acquiring the park.

Siegel says he would retain

the gardens and its famous water ski show, and add educational programs and several unique museums. Buescher, owner of

'Cypress Gardens is a state treasure and we look forward to seeing it open again.'

Wild Adventure theme park in Valdosta, Ga., said he would keep the gardens and ski show, too, but would install amusement park-type rides in hopes of

widening its appeal.

"Cypress Gardens is an unusual case because of its history as an attraction and the great interest the community has in preserving that use," said Greg Chelius, Florida director of Trust for Public Land. "It may be that the best outcome for the gardens will be a public/private partnership."

Gov. Bush agrees. He said he was pleased with the agreement between First Gardens and Trust for Public Land. "Cypress Gardens is a state treasure and we look forward to seeing the gardens open again."

Closure of the gardens was a blow to numerous coach opera-

tors who for years had been taking thousands of charter customers to the park. The facility includes spacious botanical gardens, a water ski arena, a butterfly conservatory and several historic structures, including a radio museum.

The gardens was founded in 1936 by Florida real estate salesman Dick Pope Sr. and his wife, Julie, who developed it into a showplace of more than 8,000 varieties of plants from more than 90 countries. The water ski show was added in 1943. The Pope family sold the park in 1985 and it was sold again in 1989. First Gardens bought it in 1995.

Alabama commission blocks airport shuttle expansion

MOBILE, Ala. — Alabama motorcoach operators, working with limousine and cab companies, have succeeded in blocking the Mobile Regional Airport from expanding its shuttle service.

The Alabama Public Service Commission voted to deny the airport's application to extend its van service from metropolitan Mobile to seven counties surrounding Mobile. Some of proposed locations are more than 100 miles from the airport.

In a 2-to-1 vote, the commission decided the existing service is adequate.

The director of the airport wasn't pleased by the decision and immediately attacked the Public Service Commission, saying the state's regulatory process is broken.

"It's not designed to provide service to the customer," one newspaper quoted airport Director Bay Haas as saying. "It's designed to protect transportation companies from excessive competition."

In Alabama, the state PSC regulates intrastate passenger transportation services. To be granted a license under the 1939 law governing passenger carriers, the airport had to prove the existing services are inadequate to meet reasonable public needs. The airport also had to demonstrate it proposed to provide a superior alternative.

It failed to meet those tests.

PSC Commissioner George Wallace Jr., who voted against the airport, issued a statement in

response to the carping by Haas: "All of our actions are designed to protect the consumer and, in this instance, give them a choice of transportation options."

Among those opposing the airport were three Mobile-based coach companies: Mobile Bay Transportation Inc., Wright Tours Charter Service Inc., and Colonial Trailways, and McIntosh Charters & Tours Inc. of Spanish Fort, Ala.

Margie Wilcox, president of Mobile Bay Transportation, was quoted as saying it would be unprecedented for a quasi-governmental agency like the airport authority to compete against private business.

Travelers using the regional airport have plenty of transportation choices, including the airport shuttle, private shuttles, taxicabs, limousines, rental cars and coaches for larger groups.

For more than a decade, the airport had contracted exclusively with Mobile Bay Transportation to offer rides to incoming passengers but it ended the arrangement three years ago after complaints that shuttles were not available after all flights.

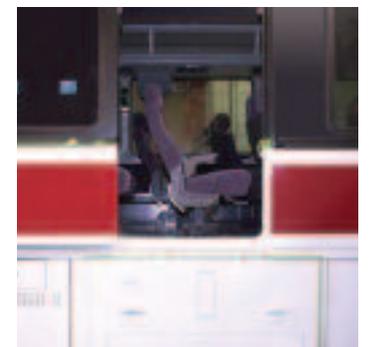
In 2001, the authority contracted for a time with an Ohio company to provide the shuttle service but that collapsed. After that the airport grew its own three-van shuttle fleet.

"We're just looking for the best way to get the customer's journey completed," Haas was quoted as saying. "All airports our size struggle with this."

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OPINION

Death and taxes, or death by taxes?

If there has been one constant in an otherwise unsettled period since the new millennium began three years ago, it has been the willingness of state and local officials across the U.S. to impose new and higher taxes, and new and higher fees, on businesses, including the motorcoach operators. Too frequently, the coach industry has been singled out for special attention by money hungry public officials.

The latest to feel the pain are coach operators in Oklahoma where the legislature extended the state excise tax to commercial passenger carriers. Starting last month, bus companies, limousine operators and shuttle services in Oklahoma began collecting sales tax on their gross receipts.

Two months ago, the same thing happened in Ohio. There, private coach services must now collect a 6 percent sales tax on all in-state bus travel.

Clearly, what has happened in Oklahoma and Ohio represents a dangerous trend for the industry. Can there be any doubt it will spread?

The good old boy network among tax spenders and collectors is something to behold.

But the problem doesn't stop with sales taxes. The growth rate of business taxes generally is accelerating.

State and local business taxes grew 1.6 percent in fiscal 2001, 2.1 percent in fiscal 2002 and a discouraging 5.3 percent in fiscal 2003.

In sharp contrast, non-business taxes, including individual income taxes, have increased by less than 2 percent over the last three years. As a result, business taxpayers have accounted for more than 80 percent of all of the increase in state and local taxes collected since fiscal 2000.

Although the corporate income tax has been the focus of intense debate in a number of state legislatures in the past couple of years, it accounts for only 9 percent of total state and local business taxes.

However, due to the combination of modest growth in business profits, discretionary corporate tax changes in rates and bases, and expanded collection efforts, state and local corporate income taxes increased more than 18 percent in fiscal 2003.

While motorcoach industry profits have generally lagged in recent years, many coach operators have nevertheless seen their corporate tax payments expand as a result more aggressive collection programs by individual states.

Seemingly every week there is a coach operator reporting it has been contacted by tax collectors in another state and informed it has some outlandish tax liability.

Earlier this month, an operator in Iowa reported he had been notified his company owed taxes in Minnesota. After spending days trying to plumb the depths of the Minnesota tax bureaucracy, the operator was informed by the Minnesota Department of Revenue that he needed to get with the program and pay the Minnesota corporate franchise tax or he would face enforcement action.

The operator ended up paying nearly \$6,000 in taxes and penalties. But here's the kicker: For the small amount of tax liability each year, it wasn't worth it to him to amend and refill the returns for all of those years in Iowa and other states where the company currently pays income taxes.

Many operators have had the same experience in dealing with New Jersey,

which stepped up its collection efforts last year in the face of a huge budget deficit.

Often, the tax liability is relatively small compared to the cost of paying an accountant or tax specialist to complete tax returns for several years.

One operator said last week he spent \$2,500 in accountant fees to find out he owed New Jersey \$50 in quarterly tax payments. He said it would have been cheaper if he had just donated \$500 to New Jersey every year.

The upshot of all of this is that operators and their state associations need to be just as aggressive as the tax spenders in monitoring their state legislatures and taxing agencies.

One of the biggest threats to business today is the belief by state officials that it is okay to increase business taxes on a targeted basis—like the new sales taxes in Ohio and Oklahoma, and indiscriminately on what they believe is discretionary spending.

There have been scores of examples during the past year of states increasing taxes on nonresidents through new and higher taxes on hotels, meals and entertainment.

Coupled with actions and proposals to impose, increase or eliminate exemptions on vehicle sales taxes or increases in corporate taxes, the risk is great for coach operators.

The industry cannot afford to wait until state officials decide to change the tax code or introduce legislation. Operators and their state associations must act proactively by partnering with others and by meeting with legislators and public policy officials to explain the implications of such actions.

To wait is to lose.

To the Editor

I had occasion to see a copy of your recent newspaper, which makes reference to certain "frustrated" New York operators who are eyeing a new association. (Oct. 15 issue.) I thought I should set the record straight.

The Bus Association of New York, founded in 1935, has done phenomenal work for the people who are in our organization and to the benefit of other nonmembers. Through BANY, legislation was passed in Albany and signed that gives a sales tax exemption on the purchase of new buses. That saves our members thousands of dollars each year on the purchase of any bus needed for their charter operations. Nonmembers have benefited from this as well.

In addition, BANY has vigorously fought the efforts of regional transportation authorities to invade the charter bus industry through improper competition. This is a strong upstate issue. On average, BANY defeats upwards of 20 to 30 bills each year which would be harmful to the industry and gets all of its legislation approved.

On the subject of liability insurance, the association has held a series of meetings with Greg Serio, superintendent of insurance, with individual members of our organization who needed the intervention of the department where they were being charged excessive liability insurance premiums. In fact, two people who attended the meeting of "frustrated" New York operators also attended meetings with the superintendent and as a result of those efforts they received help in connection with their high premiums.

The fact of the matter is that while there may be some "frustrated" operators in New York, if they are members of the association they clearly are not active participants in our activities.

As an outgrowth of the meeting of "frustrated" operators our organization has been contacted by at least 10 of the attendees who have indicated a desire to join the association as a means of strengthening our membership base.

I recognize that we cannot make everybody happy but it is clear to me that the vast majority of our members have benefited financially and in many other ways as a result of their membership and the payment of dues.

Arthur J. Kremer
Executive Director
Bus Association of New York State

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Greyhound drivers, mechanics reject latest contract offer

DALLAS — For the second time this year, drivers and mechanics at Greyhound Lines have overwhelmingly rejected a new labor agreement.

The current Greyhound-Amalgamated Transit Union contract expires Jan. 31.

The latest rejection was a foregone conclusion. The union leadership had opposed the contract, and the “last, firm and final offer” from the company proposed freezing wages for nearly three years, with a 2 percent hourly increase on Nov. 1, 2006.

The executive board of ATU Local 1700 had voted unanimously in mid September to reject the offer, and strongly recommended its members do likewise. They did.

Nearly 87 percent of the Greyhound drivers and mechanics who participated in the balloting voted no. Fewer than 14 percent checked yes in voting that concluded late last month.

The union said the 37-month contract proposal included more than \$2.7 million in employee concessions, or givebacks.

The company says all of the concessions will be absorbed by employees hired after Jan. 1.

The latest contract offer is measurably different from the proposal turned down by Greyhound drivers and mechanics in May. That agreement, which had been recommended for approval by the union executive board, was rejected by the 62-to-38 percent margin. Highlights of the proposal:

- Wage increases of 4 percent in August of this year, 2 percent

in January 2005 and 3 percent in April 2006.

- A 67-33 percent split on premiums for health benefits, with Greyhound paying the higher percentage. The latest proposal calls for a 65-35 split of healthcare pre-

mium costs.

Since the May proposal was rejected, Greyhound has reported it lost almost \$112 million in 2002, and has furloughed 175 drivers and more than 60 maintenance employees. In addition, roughly 300 man-

agers have been fired, including 150 headquarters' employees.

The company and union are scheduled to meet again Nov. 15. “We expect the (latest) vote to be a topic of discussion,” said Local 1700 President Greg Herbold.

In a statement, Greyhound spokeswoman Kim Plaskett said: “This vote is part of the ongoing contract renewal process. We are currently assessing the results of the vote and determining our next steps.”



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* These figures are based on yearly statistics and may vary depending upon the number of years your coaches operate and actual number of miles driven.

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COMMERCIAL COACH

Greyhound

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

- Random wandering of passengers and hand searches of carry-on baggage in 30 Greyhound terminals.

- Cell phones with preprogrammed emergency numbers.

- Zero tolerance policy with respect to unruly or aggressive passengers, expanded pre- and post-trip checks on all coaches, more security guards, and new digital surveillance cameras.

Greyhound is receiving more than \$9 million this year in federal security grants. In addition, the company expects to spend \$11 million of its own money to improve security on its fleet.

Tara Sheehan contributed to this article.

INDUSTRY NEWS

American Coach

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

rate office.
A native of Finland, Konttinen has 30 years experience in the domestic and international tourism, hospitality and motor-

coach industries. He was vice president of Midnight Sun Tours when it was acquired by Coach USA from himself and former company President Raimo Nikunen.

Joining Konttinen in the new corporate headquarters will be company Chairman Joseph

Vittoria, who for 10 years was chairman of Avis Inc., the rental car giant, guiding that company through its famous employee buy-out in the late 1980s.

Vittoria is a principal of VSC Partners LLC, which is a limited equity partner in the investment

group put together by Lincolnshire Management to purchase the Coach USA companies from Stagecoach Group PLC of Perth, Scotland.

Lincolnshire completed the buyout last month after the U.S. Department of Transportation

Surface Transportation Board rubber-stamped the deal.

While corporate offices will be in Lake Worth, administrative and operational headquarters will be in the Norcross building of American Coach Lines.

Bill Bergstrom, former regional vice president of Coach USA's Southeast region, has been named president and chief operating officer of the new company and will work out of the Norcross location. Accounting, safety and human resources functions also will be based in Norcross.

The other units that comprise American Coach Lines are:

- America Charters Ltd. of Charlotte, N.C.
- Dillon's Bus Service Inc. of Millersville, Md.
- Cruise Connection of Sarasota.
- Golden Isle Coaches of Florida Inc. in Jacksonville.
- Southern Coach Company of Durham, N.C.
- Coach USA Orlando.

Golden Isle and Coach USA Orlando will be getting new names. The legalities of changing the names are being expedited and are expected to be completed early this month.

American Coach Lines has formed a new subsidiary to grab a share of the Miami market. American Coach Lines of Miami begins business with 50 coaches.

Coach USA's troubled former Miami operation was shutdown at the end of July and was not included in the sale to Lincolnshire.

FMCSA Web site

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

of passenger carriers in a given geographical area.

- Provide "concise, easy-to-understand safety information" about each carrier.

A "draft" version of the Web site has been completed, and during the last week of October the FMCSA and Volpe Center began showing it on a limited basis to representatives from the passenger carrier industry.

A small focus group was contacted by phone, provided a Web link and walked through the Web site during a telephone conference call. Those participating were asked to provide feedback as they were shown the Web site during the hour-long briefing session.

Chandler said the Web site has been under development for about a year and is expected to be ready for public unveiling by the end of the year.

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Company Name _____

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Phone _____ Fax _____ E-mail _____

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What equipment does your company operate? Bus/Coach Wheelchair Accessible Equipment
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Your primary purchasing role is: Buy Recommend N/A

I am interested in: Coaches Other Related Equipment Services Destination Info

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*Non-members can join UMA for only an additional \$175 and save on registration costs. Call 800-424-8262 for more details.

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- D.** To meet up with their favorite colleagues and have fun.

Answer:

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Flxible buses are topic of new photo archive

SPOKANE, Wash. — The motorcoach industry's most prolific book editor, William A. Luke, has published another photo archive, this one on Flxible Intercity Buses 1924-1970.

The book is at least the eighth in a series Luke has published during the past four years on various makes and styles of buses — from the first motorized passenger carriers, to today's luxury motorcoaches.

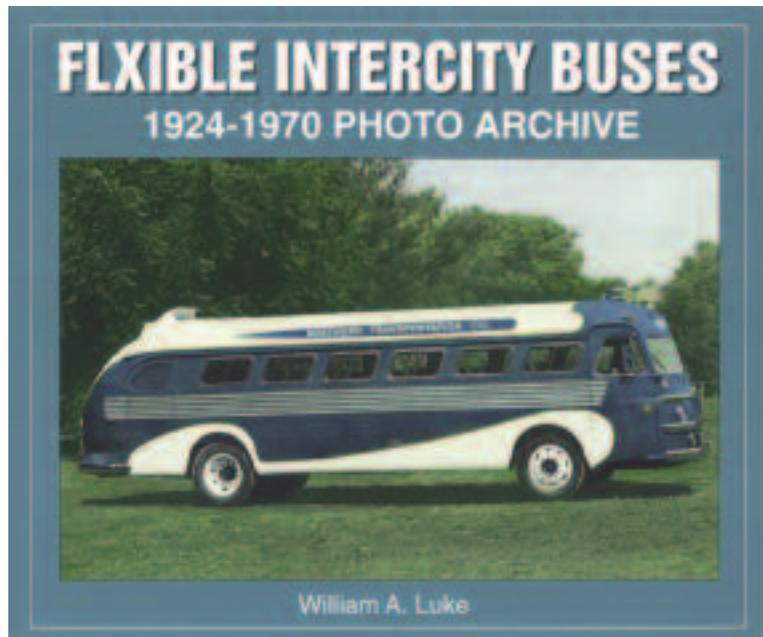
The 46-year history of Flxible buses is traced through text and scores of vintage photographs in the book's 128 pages. The book features such Flxible coaches as

the Airway, Clipper, Visicoach, C-37, Starliner, Vistaliner, Flxliner and Hi-level models.

The softbound, 10-by-8 inch format of the book lends itself to the publication of bus photographs.

The book's editor, William Luke, is a semi-retired bus industry publisher, editor and writer. He founded and published *Bus Ride* magazine from 1965 to 1997. He continues to be an active writer and is executive director of Buses International Association.

Flxible Intercity Buses 1924-1970 Photo Archive is available at book, hobby and specialty stores,



or from the publisher Iconografix Inc. Write to Iconografix Dept. PR, P.O. Box 446, Hudson, WI 54016, or call (800) 289-3504.

The price is \$29.95, plus \$4.95 for shipping and handling when ordered from the publisher.

People

Larry Wickkiser, president of *Airporter Shuttle/Bellair Charters* in Ferndale, Wash., has been honored by the U.S. Small Business Administration as one of the leading small business executives in the nation. Wickkiser was named Small Business Person of the Year for both Washington and the SBA's western region. He was in competition for the national Small Business Person of the Year award. *Bellair Charters* and *Airporter Shuttle* have been in business 20 years and operate a fleet of 30 buses.

David Eaton has been promoted to general manager of *Conway Tours/Gray Line Rhode Island*. Eaton has been with *Conway Tours*, which is based in Cumberland, R.I., for 12 years and most recently was the company's director of sales. In his new post, Eaton will be responsible for all phases of the business. *Conway Tours* is a 77-year-old company that operates more than 30 coaches.

Calbert Allen Freeman, Virginia operator, dies

RUTHER GLEN, Va. — Calbert Allen Freeman, owner of Silver Star Bus Line of Ruther Glen, Va., died last month.

He was 70 years old.

Mr. Freeman and one of his sons founded Silver Star almost 20 years

ago and operated the charter company from Ruther Glen, which is about midway between Fredericksburg and Richmond on Interstate 95.

The coach company was Mr. Freeman's second career. He retired from Ogden Aviation Fueling Co.,

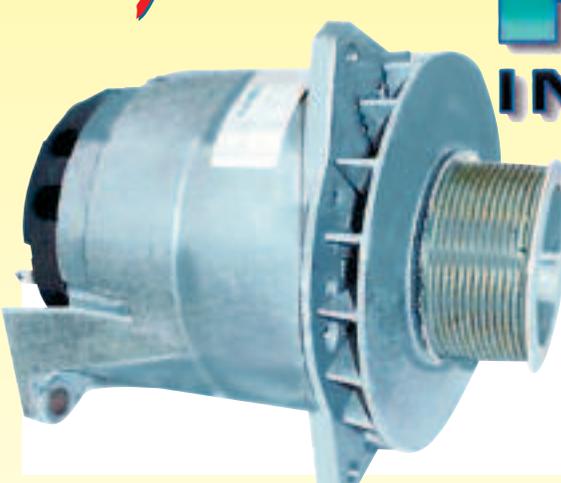
where he was an aircraft refueler for 35 years and the first African American to be an aircraft fueler.

Mr. Freeman is survived by his wife of 47 years, Laura; a son, Kenneth, of Trabuco Canyon, Calif.; a daughter, Karen, of

Charlotte, N.C., and five grandchildren. His son Gregory preceded him in death.

Gifts in Mr. Freeman's name may be sent to the Oxford Mount Zion Baptist Church, 25215 Zion Road, Ruther Glen, VA 22546.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

MCI names Gene Hall to top coach sales post

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. - Gene Hall has been promoted to the top sales position at Motor Coach Industries.

As vice president of private-sector sales at MCI, Hall will be responsible for new- and pre-owned-coach sales in both the U.S. and Canada.

He reports to Tom Sorrells, president and chief operating officer of MCI.

Since joining MCI five years ago, Hall has held regional vice president positions for the Northeast and Southeast territories.

He also served as vice president of preowned coaches last year.

Hall has spent more than 20 years in the bus industry with sales, management and maintenance experience.

Prior to MCI, he was with Metrotrans and was associated with Laidlaw from 1985 through 1989.

He currently serves on the board of directors of the Trailways Transportation System.

In his new job, Hall assumes many of the responsibilities formerly held by Greg Berg, who left MCI last month.

For the previous two years, Berg had been vice president of sales and marketing at MCI.

Before being promoted to the senior sales job at MCI, Berg was



Gene Hall

with MCI Financial Services. Berg has a background in financial services having worked at Conesco Finance Corp. and GE Capital.

Berg, who resides in Texas, is considering career options, including investigating going back to school to get his MBA.

MCI captures top awards in APTA ad competition

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — Motor Coach Industries took two Grand Awards in the print and electronic media categories at the annual American Public Transportation Association AdWheel Awards competition.

In the print category, the "Commuter Dream" ad created by MCI's Marketing Department won the top award. The ad promotes MCI's commuter cruiser D 4500 model, focusing on its comfort and reliability.

MCI's "Miles Ahead" video commemorates the company's 70th anniversary, as well as highlighting the markets MCI serves and its manufacturing expertise. The video has been shown extensively at trade shows; used for customer and employee events, and

included in sales presentations and media kits.

The awards were presented to John Andrews, MCI vice president of public sector, at APTA's annual conference in Salt Lake City.

The AdWheel Awards honor organizations for excellence in advertising, marketing, promotion and communications. Nearly 750 entries were submitted this year. Grand Award winners were selected from the first-place winners for each of the four main categories: print, electronic media, campaign, and special event for each of the five entry groups.



John Andrews

Driver rule

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

hours-of-service limitations, driver wellness and whistle-blower protection. The FMCSA said increased driver knowledge in these areas is critical to large bus and truck safety.

More hours of training

Although the proposal does not specify a required number of hours for the new training, the agency estimates it will take roughly 10-1/2 hours for motorcoach drivers and 4-1/2 hours for school bus drivers.

In comments filed with the FMCSA, the ABA said that specifying minimum time requirements for training is unnecessary. "We suggest the final rule emphasize specific training content, including basic defensive driving topics, including space management, proper lane changes/merging, vehicle dynamics, adverse weather driving, etc., and require that the carrier be able to provide documentation that all elements of the training have been met."

Other key points included in the ABA statement:

- Requiring further drug and alcohol training is repetitive and costly with no additional benefit.
- Training regarding fatigue management should be included as an element of basic hours-of-service training.
- The whistle blower provision should be removed.
- Employers should not be required to retrain an already trained new employee.

• The FMCSA should consider incorporating training requirements into the commercial driver license process. "To receive a CDL, a driver would need to have received certain training" that meets FMCSA standards, the ABA said.

"This would ensure that all CDL holders have received the necessary training and allow training to be conducted by sources other than motor carriers," the association added.

"We believe minimum training requirements for entry-level drivers are long overdue but believe that the suggestions we have made will streamline the process and provide the flexibility needed for operators to properly implement the new training requirements," ABA President and CEO Peter Pantuso told the FMCSA.

Ten years ago, when the proposed rule first surfaced, ABA's position was measurably different: It opposed federal training rules for new drivers. At that time, ABA said training was not the issue. "The measure of adequacy should be passing the CDL examination. If the CDL standard is not adequate, the requirements should be strengthened," ABA said in 1993.

Faulty assumptions?

UMA, on the other hand, contends that many of the premises on which the new rule is based are seriously flawed, and the proposal represents an unacceptable financial burden for most motorcoach operators.

Among other things, UMA says

the FMCSA once again has lumped motorcoaches together with truckers when it comes to rulemaking, ignoring the significant differences between the two industries and the superior safety record of the motorcoach industry.

"If training as proposed in the (rule) is to be conducted and no (motorcoach driver training) schools exist, the burden of conducting the training is placed squarely on the company owner," UMA writes in its response. "Since only the largest and most sophisticated motorcoach companies typically have in-house driver training programs, the proposed rule will force small company owners to hire training specialists whenever that company needs to hire even a single new driver. This is a cost that will greatly exceed the increased paper work burden (of the rule).

"The FMCSA needs to recognize the different conditions between how the trucking industry operates and how the motorcoach industry operates vis-a-vis training and training schools."

Training has merit

While acknowledging that "enhancing entry-level CDL training may have some merit," the UMA response also contends there is "no existing data to prove that any of the proposed training will improve safety in the motorcoach industry."

UMA says that "any attempt to include further training into the CDL program should be the sole task of the state licensing agencies and fully funded by the federal

government.

"This is at heart a driver licensing issue and as such should be controlled and run by the state licensing agencies. UMA suggests that any training proposed in the (rule) be conducted and operated at the state level at the local DMV training centers."

Pointed criticism

One of the most pointed criticisms in the UMA statement has to do with the exemption from the rule given to transit bus drivers.

A cost-benefit analysis included with the proposed rule combines crash data for transit buses and motorcoaches. However, when the data is parsed, motorcoaches have a better safety record than transit buses. Yet, the FMCSA has exempted transit bus drivers from the rule.

"Clearly, based on its safety record and the level of federal safety oversight, the motorcoach industry should be the one considered for exemption from the training provisions in the (rule) instead of the transit operators," UMA says in its statement.

"The agency's willingness to exempt transit operations is not necessarily flawed," the UMA statement continues. "Public mass transit is an extremely safe means of transportation. The motorcoach industry's record shows that we are even safer."

UMA concluded by saying that rather than issue more rules, the FMCSA should better enforce existing rules, forcing rogue operators off the road.

ABA and UMA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ciations representing 8 percent of the total.

After the grants were announced, the two associations began discussions about joining forces and developing one program that could be extended to more operators. Nearly two months of negotiations produced a "teaming agreement" that will eliminate much of the duplication that would have occurred if the associations had continued down their separate paths.

"This partnership agreement joins both association security training proposals into a single complementary training program," said UMA President & CEO Victor Parra and ABA President & CEO Peter Pantuso in a joint statement. "It also means that over \$1.6 million, which the Transportation Security Administration provided in separate grant awards to the associations ... may be dedicated to this single effort.

"ABA and UMA have worked . . . to develop a combined, enhanced training program that will provide motorcoach operators and their employees with highly effective and efficient security training," Pantuso and Parra said in their statement.

"We anticipate that the first training kits will be shipped to applicant companies approximately four months after the TSA gives final approval to our revised proposals," the association executives added.

Calendar of Events

NOV 2003

8-12 Canadian Urban Transit Assn.: Fall Conference & Trans-Expo, Toronto. Info: (416) 365-9800 or go to www.cutaactu.ca.

10-12 Society of Automotive Engineers Int'l Truck & Bus: 2003 Meeting & Exhibition, Fort Worth Convention Center, Fort Worth, Texas. Info: (724) 776-4841 or go to www.sae.org.

14-18 National Tour Assn.: Annual Convention, Charlotte, N.C. Info: (800) 682-8886. E-mail: questions@ntastaff.com, or go to www.ntaonline.com.

JAN 2004

11 Prevost Car Maintenance Training Seminar (Canadian customers), Quebec. Info: Call (877) 520-7386.

16-20 American Bus Marketplace, American Bus Assn., New York City. Info: (800) 283-2877 or go to

www.buses.org.

16-17 Bus Industry Safety Council, New York City. Info: (800) 283-2877 or go to www.buses.org.

29-Feb. 1 North Carolina Motorcoach Assn.: Annual Meeting & Marketplace, Grove Park Inn, Asheville, N.C. Info: (336) 495-4970.

FEB 2004

1 Prevost Car Maintenance Training Seminar (U.S. customers), Quebec. Info: Call (877) 520-7386.

8-10 The 20th Anniversary Motorcoach Expo 2004, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta. Info: United Motorcoach Association, (800) 424-8262 or go to www.uma.org.

24-25 California Bus Association Spring Maintenance Seminar, Royal Coach Tours, San Jose, Calif. Info: (831) 633-1755 or go to www.cbabus.com.

Prevost wins labor peace with 3-year accord

SAINTE-CLAIRE, Quebec — Unionized employees at Prevost Car Inc. have approved new three-year labor contracts with the company.

The collective bargaining agreements cover both production workers and office staff at the Prevost manufacturing and headquarters facility in Saint-Claire, Quebec.

"Through the conclusion of these agreements, we are sending a very positive signal to our current and future customers of our readiness — with highly favorable con-

ditions in our plant — for the eventual market turnaround," said Prevost CEO Georges Bourelle.

Prevost employees will receive raises of up to 9 percent over the three-year life of the agreements. There also were non-monetary improvements made to the company pension plan. Workers ratified the agreements last month.

"Negotiations were held in a constructive mindset, with full respect for both parties' concerns," Bourelle said. "The result is good improvements over the term of the

agreements for our workers."

Bourelle said the agreements will help the company cope with the sluggish market, and he expressed optimism the coach business will recover in the medium term.

Prevost Car is the second-largest manufacturer of motorcoaches in North America and the world's leading producer of conversion bus shells for luxury motorhomes and specialty vehicles. It also owns Nova BUS, the transit bus manufacturer.

REI releases A/V system designed for shuttle buses

OMAHA, Neb. — Radio Engineering Industries Inc. has introduced a new Shuttle Bus Audio Video System.

The system features seven-inch, wide-screen LCD video monitors, REI mobile DVD player and AM/FM CD radio with integrated passenger address. The system includes a hand-held micro-

phone and is available with optional VHS video cassette player.

The system allows bus operators to provide their passengers with instructional content, such as emergency procedures; movies for entertainment, or informative videos for education.

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over other components within the system and automatically overrides the audio when switched on to make an announcement.

Additional information is available at www.radioeng.com, or by calling (800) 228-9275. Ask for Ext. 262, Ext. 229 or Ext. 219.

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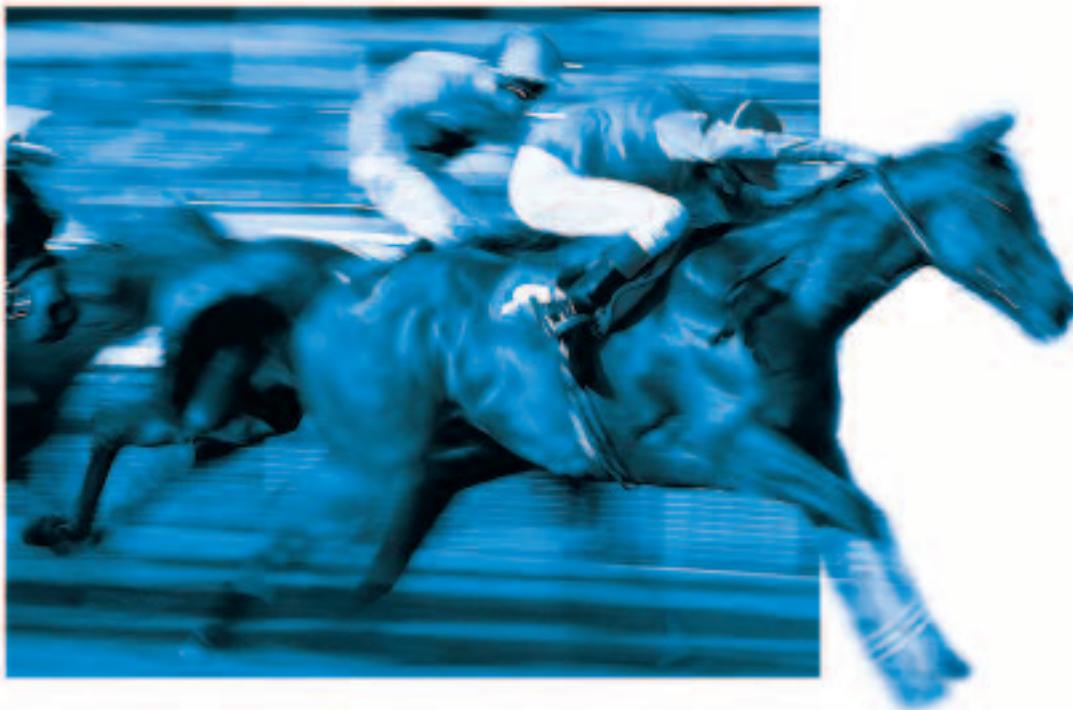
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