

# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

## Economy to pose challenges for motorcoach industry

The next several quarters could be challenging for many tour-and-charter bus operators as consumers rein in spending as the crisis in the financial sector spreads to the rest of the economy and the U.S. slides into its first recession since 2001.

The economy probably shrank at a 0.2 percent annual pace during this year's third quarter and that will ac-

celerate to 0.8 percent in the final three months of the year, according to the median estimate of 52 economists surveyed in October.

"The U.S. is going to have a long, deep, painful recession," says a senior economist at Wachovia Corp. The 2008-09 recession will be more like 1981-82 than the last two — in 1991-92 and 2000-01, the

Wachovia economist predicts.

A "longer, deeper" recession would extend for at least 16 months — like in 1981-82, nearly twice the length of a typical downturn.

Other economists agree. "You have to be prepared for the cycle to get worse before it gets better," said one.

With a record 56 cents of every

dollar of Americans' money going for basic food, energy and health-care costs, the battle for what's left is escalating and that is not good news for businesses that rely on discretionary spending. Talbots is competing with TGI Friday's, Target stores and travel providers for the same consumer dollars.

There are a few silver linings,

however. Here are some:

Tour operators eager to find effective selling tools may be able to emphasize cost to an extent they haven't been able to in recent years.

Some analysts believe hotel room availability and pricing could improve as occupancy rates dip later this year. "Both corporations and

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## MCI financing OK'd; vendors mighty unhappy

WILMINGTON, Del. — Motor Coach Industries has picked up a busload of unhappy campers on its peddle-to-the-metal trip through Chapter 11 proceedings, but so far there have been only minor bumps on the road to gaining bankruptcy court approval for its plan of reorganization.

The disgruntled passengers are MCI's unsecured creditors, mostly vendors, who stand to lose millions of dollars from going unpaid for the supplies, services and equipment they provided North America's largest coach builder.

The unhappiest of the lot is MCI's one-time biggest customer, Greyhound Lines, which is the holder of a claim against MCI — for damages related to defective G-model coaches — that Greyhound says exceeds more than \$100 million.

Greyhound, plus a large group of unsecured creditors, filed strenuous and strongly worded objections to MCI's bankruptcy reorganization plan.

Still, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Brendan Linehan Shannon announced he would approve MCI's request to borrow as much as \$315

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'Demand' for a motorcoach from IC Bus may be coming from its school bus customers who want to do charters.

## IC Bus plans to introduce coach in '10

SAN DIEGO — IC Bus, the largest manufacturer of school buses in North America and producer of small and midsize commercial buses, has unveiled plans to enter the motorcoach market in two years.

IC said it expects to introduce intercity bus models that leverage parent company Navistar's strengths of aerodynamic design, quiet and fuel-efficient engines, and safety.

The announcement by IC Bus was made at the American Public Transportation Association EXPO here last month. An IC "concept coach" — basically a bus shell — was on the EXPO show floor to get feedback and reaction.

"IC Bus has responded to customer and environmental demands for more fuel-efficient, cleaner and safer buses in the motorcoach market," said John McKinney, vice president and general manager of IC Bus.

"Motorcoaches are the next logical step in product development for IC Bus and are a tangible example how Navistar leverages design elements across its businesses," McKinney added.

Two years ago, IC made some-

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## megabus.com adding 96 Van Hools

CHICAGO — megabus.com, the intercity curbside service operated by Coach USA, has decided to nearly triple its fleet of double-decker Van Hool coaches.

Chicago-based megabus confirmed it's purchasing 96 more of the Van Hool T925s, bringing its total double-deck fleet to 131 coaches. The latest order represents

an investment of \$60 million, making the average price of the coaches \$625,000.

Meanwhile, Silverado Stages of San Luis Obispo, Calif., is adding two of the T925s to its fleet, becoming the first California operator to use the Van Hool double-decker.

The megabus.com order stems

from increased passenger demand that accelerated the company growth rate to 219 percent last year.

The coaches are being added to megabus' routes in the Midwest and Northeast from now through next August.

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## Capturing more foreign tourists is difficult task for motorcoach industry

The number of international travelers coming into the U.S. has been on the rise for most of this decade — until the recent economic downturn, but it has not been easy for bus operators to benefit from the increase. Yet, it can be done, say industry executives and government officials.

A marketing research analyst with the U.S. Department of Commerce, who asked not to be quoted directly because of departmental policy, said the rise in U.S.-bound international travelers began in the fourth quarter of 2003.

The weak dollar and stronger economies abroad were the key factors in the growth of international travelers coming to the U.S.

"The currency thing is not hurting at all, but the overall (overseas) economies being strong and that increased travel," said the research analyst.

At the start of the '08 travel season, the Commerce Department reported that 4.3 million international visitors came to the U.S. in May, an increase of 14 percent over May 2007.

International visitors spent a record \$11.8 billion during the month, an increase of 21 percent from May 2007. Spending by foreign tourists was up 22 percent during the 12 months ended May 2008.

So, how do coach operators reach potential international customers?

"No. 1, that customer is predisposed to riding our equipment," says Victor Parra, president and CEO of United Motorcoach Association. "People from Europe, Asians . . . that's what they're oriented to doing. And we've got the perfect equipment to meet their needs."

One of the ways to grab the international customer, says Parra, is through BusRates.com. "The internet transcends borders. Use that as a tool," he urges.

Also, the National Tour Association has been nurturing and developing a relationship with the Chinese government as a means of fostering inbound group Chinese tourism.

"They're going to be the booking agency for all the Chinese travel," notes Parra. "The memorandum they have with the Chinese government; that's a powerful tool. That will be a powerful marketing channel for us to reach the international customer."

Many coach operators have reached out to foreign travelers through their membership in marketing organizations like Trailways and International Motor Coach Group.

"They (IMG) have the global passenger network that has established contacts throughout the world," said Parra. "So there are a variety of sources they have access to to reach that international customer."

Parra says small operators need to keep in mind that for many international travelers their visit to the U.S. may be their first. So, having a callout on your website is a big plus. And no matter the size of your company, you have to have a website, he asserts.

Bob Hoelscher of Flemming Tours in St. Louis, who is president and CEO of the National Tour Association, suggests niche trade.

Flemming Tours, for example, specializes in Western tours and has a huge base of British customers. Now, the company is going after the French by adding a French-speaking tour guide.

Hoelscher also offers niche products: culinary tours, meetings planning, and cruises. "My company sells an awful lot of cruise business," he says.

"With any market, if you're a small operator and don't have a niche, you're in trouble. Partnering is also critical. Other tour operators in the NTA, we don't all try to do the same thing. We do what we're good at.

"You're never going to get the expertise to do everything. Work with your colleagues. . . . You can't look at it as we all have the keys to the kingdom."

There has been an issue with foreign tourists being taken advantage of by tour and bus operators in other countries.

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## Fees: Hotels are copying airlines

Hotel buyers beware.

Just as the airlines have gotten away in recent months with piling fees on top of fees, ranging from baggage-check fees to aisle-seat charges, now it appears hotels are beginning to adopt the same strategy.

Travel websites report that stiff cancellation fees, extra-person fees, parking fees and internet fees are becoming more commonplace as hotels get squeezed by the uncertain economic climate.

"It's kinda been floating under the radar a bit because the spotlight has been on the airline industry," says one hotel expert. "But it's definitely happening in the hotel business as well."

Adds the publisher of a business travel website: "Hotels saw the airlines getting away with it and they're just doing what airlines do."

Years ago, after their guests complained loudly about the proliferation of fees, many hotels reduced or eliminated some of them. But that is changing again and extra fees are coming back, say executives with websites that monitor hotel charges.

While 24 to 48 hours before

check-in time is usually the deadline for canceling a reservation without charge at hotels that charge cancellation fees, some have extended the deadline to as much as two weeks before check-in.

That means if you have a reservation for two nights starting Nov. 15, you must cancel by Nov. 2. And the cancellation fee after Nov. 2 can be as high as the room rate for both nights.

"You have to really look out for that kind of stuff," said one hotel expert. "It is increasingly important to read the fine print on reservations."

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'With any market, if you're a small operator and don't have a niche, you're in trouble. Partnering is also critical.'

# THE DOCKET

## Bill would send owners to jail when driver convicted of DUI

WASHINGTON — A congresswoman from Texas has introduced a super scary bill that would send motorcoach owners to jail whenever one of their drivers was convicted of driving an employer-owned coach under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

The bill, H.R. 7204, would amend existing law and direct the U.S. Secretary of Transportation to establish sanctions and penalties for employers whenever their drivers are convicted of DUI.

Rep. Shirley Jackson-Lee, a Democrat from Houston, specifically singled out operators of over-

the-road buses as targets for her draconian legislation.

Under the bill, USDOT would be required to issue regulations mandating that the employer of a driver convicted of DUI while operating a coach would be sent to jail for a period not exceeding one year or fined or both.

Separately, Rep. Jackson-Lee introduced a bill that would require states to inspect all motor vehicles once annually to assure they meet state safety standards.

States not complying with the requirement would lose federal highway starting in 2010.

## Illinois court says 'no' to fuel tax credit for idling

CHICAGO — The Illinois Court of Appeals has ruled that the state does not have to refund the tax a motor carrier pays on fuel consumed when its commercial vehicles were idling.

A trucking company based in Oklahoma (for IFTA purposes) had paid the taxes to Illinois through its base state. It later applied directly to Illinois for refunds, which concerned half a million gallons of fuel used in 2001 and 2002.

Both sides apparently accepted that the carrier could accurately measure the fuel it consumed while idling.

The trucking outfit argued that since the fuel was burned while its vehicles idled off the public highway — while they were being fu-

eled, while cargo was loaded or unloaded, or at rest stops — it was not subject to motor fuel tax.

The appropriate Illinois statute provides for a refund for fuel used "for any purpose other than operating a motor vehicle upon public highways."

However, the Illinois Revenue Department pointed out that the law also said "no claim based upon idle time shall be allowed."

The trucking company argued that the latter statement should be applied only to claims which involved idling on roadways, as, for example, when a truck was stopped in traffic.

The court concluded, however, that the ban on idle time claims was meant to be broader, and disallowed the refund claim.

## U.S. appeals court upholds liability preemption

ATLANTA — A U.S. appeals court has upheld the federal preemption of state laws that imposed vicarious liability for traffic accidents on the companies that leased the vehicles to the users who had the accidents.

The federal law, adopted three years ago and known as the Graves Amendment, says that a lessor of a motor vehicle, if it is in the business of leasing motor vehicles, may not be held liable for the negligence of its lessee merely because it is the vehicle's owner, state laws to the contrary notwithstanding.

In a nutshell, the Graves Amendment preempted laws in 12 states for commercial vehicles and 13 states for autos that allowed an accident victim to sue not just the driver and renter of a vehicle, but also the renting or leasing company that owns the vehicle. (See Sept. 1, 2005, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The legislation was designed to protect the interests of leasing and rental companies that can lose their business when lawsuits arise as a result of bad accidents. The law was expected to decrease losses by leasing companies and reduce their

insurance costs, enabling them to expand their leasing ability and keep their rates under control. This was seen as being positive for the motorcoach industry.

In the appeals court case, the lessee's negligence allegedly caused the accident at issue but there was no claim the lessor had been negligent itself, either in renting the car to the lessee or for any other reasons.

The lessor sued for a declaratory judgment that the Graves Amendment overrode the Florida law that would otherwise have con-

ferred vicarious liability upon it.

The injured parties argued that the savings clause in the amendment that provided that it did not affect state financial responsibility requirements for motor vehicle lessors applied here, since the caps that Florida put on the vicarious liability of a lessor depended on a lessor's insurance coverage. The court ruled that this connection was irrelevant and that granting the argument would, moreover, allow any state to avoid the preemption.

The court opinion wound up with an explicit finding that the

amendment was constitutional under the commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution even where, as in this case, both the rental and the accident took place in a single state.

The entire area affected by the amendment, said the court, was largely interstate in nature, and within Congress' purview to regulate.

Five other cases have been filed challenging the Graves Amendment. In four of the cases the decision has been in the lessor's favor; the final case, in New York, is still pending.

## Ah, New Jersey

### Turnpike, parkway tolls to jump on Dec. 1

WOODBIDGE, N.J. — Tolls on the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway will rise sharply Dec. 1.

The increases are the result of a plan approved last month to more than double the highways' tolls over four years to fund a \$7 billion capital-improvement program and meet debt payments.

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority six-member board voted unanimously in favor of the plan, which contains smaller increases than an initial proposal made in September.

Gov. Jon Corzine, a first-term Democrat, said he will approve the revised increases after refusing to endorse the earlier proposal.

"We strongly believe this is a matter of safety and efficiency, but

equally as important is that it will lead to job creation," said state Transportation Commissioner Kris Kolluri. "The governor's mandate was clear, he said we had to be aware of the broader economic climate."

The plan will raise turnpike tolls for autos to \$1.70 on Dec. 1, from \$1.20, the current average, and to \$2.60 in 2012. Garden State Parkway tolls will rise to 50 cents and 75 cents in 2012 from the current average of 35 cents.

The earlier proposed increase would have raised auto tolls to \$3 by 2023 on the turnpike and 85 cents on the parkway.

For 45-foot motorcoaches, the cash toll for traveling the full length of the New Jersey Turnpike will go from \$12.75 to \$17.85. E-ZPass

tolls for big coaches go from \$11.65 to \$16.30 on Dec. 1.

In addition to funding a 10-year capital plan and meeting debt obligations, the money also will help pay the state's \$1.25 billion share of a new commuter-rail tunnel under the Hudson River.

The rail-tunnel proposal has set off a firestorm of criticism by many truckers. They resent that a large chunk of the toll increase will be used for purposes other than maintaining or upgrading the two toll roads.

The revised plan gives a 10 percent discount to commercial firms that spend over \$10,000 monthly on tolls.

It marks the first time tolls have gone up on the turnpike since 2000 and on the parkway since 1989.

## Kentucky suspends lots of CDLs

FRANKFORT, Ky. — Kentucky has suspended the commercial driver's licenses of an unknown number of individuals who failed to provide updated driving record information.

Earlier this year, the state sent letters to CDL holders who hadn't updated their record. If drivers didn't respond to the letter within 30 days the state cancelled the CDLs.

Many of the letters were sent to addresses that were no longer valid. When letters were returned to the state, the CDLs were cancelled after 30 days.

The action was taken unbe-

knownst to the drivers, catching many unawares.

A spokesman for the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet said the Kentucky General Assembly required that certain driving record information be added to CDL applications by 2005.

Questions about the matter should be directed to CDL section of the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet at (502) 564-0280.

One driver who had her CDL suspended and reinstated — without a fee — after providing the required information said she was told 5,000 to 8,000 Kentucky CDL holders

may be driving under suspended licenses.

### Mass. suspends licenses, too

BOSTON — Massachusetts can now suspend the driver's licenses of individuals who are delinquent on their state taxes.

Under a provision included in this year's state budget, Massachusetts is requiring the state registrar of vehicles to suspend the driver's licenses of those who fail to pay state personal income taxes.

Louisiana and Rhode Island, as well as the District of Columbia, have similar provisions.

# Rule mandates school bus seatbelts; feds offer money

WASHINGTON — A new federal rule requiring higher seat backs, mandating lap and shoulder belts on small school buses and setting safety standards for seat belts on large school buses has been issued months before it was expected.

The rule is designed to make the nation's 474,000 school buses safer, said U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary E. Peters.

"Even though riding in school buses is the safest form of travel in America today, any accident is still a tragedy," said Peters. "Taken together, these steps are designed with a single purpose, making children safer."

Peters said the new rule requires all new school buses in America to be equipped with 24-inch-high seat backs, instead of the 20-inch-high seat backs required today.

Higher seat backs will help prevent taller and heavier children from being thrown over the seat in a crash, decreasing the chance of injury to them and the children in front of them.

All new school buses weighing less than five tons will be required to have three-point seat belts. She said lap-and-shoulder belts better protect children in small buses, adding that smaller school buses are more vulnerable because they don't absorb shock as well as larger buses.

The secretary also said the federal government would be setting new standards for seat belts on large school buses. The standards will improve seat belt safety and help lower the cost of installing the belts.

She cautioned, however, that

## Neb. operators pay tax online

LINCOLN, Neb. — Interstate operators based in Nebraska are now able to file fuel taxes through the state's official website.

The Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles, working with Nebraska.gov, has created a system allowing submission of International Fuel Tax Agreement payments online.

Nebraska-based operators can make electronic check, MasterCard and Visa payments online through the Nebraska.gov secure payment server.

The system brings the state closer to the online motor vehicle registration renewal program it intends to roll out later this year.

seatbelts on larger buses can limit capacity and force more students to walk or ride in cars to school, which is statistically more dangerous.

"The last thing we want to do is force parents to choose other, less safe ways of getting their children to school," she said. That is

why she said the federal government also would begin allowing school districts to use federal highway safety funds to pay for the cost of installing belts.

"No school district should have to choose between books and safety," said Deputy Transportation Secretary Thomas Barrett, who

outlined the new school bus rule during a visit to a Deatsville, Ala., elementary school with that state's governor, Bob Riley.

Admiral Barrett noted that a phone call from Gov. Riley to Secretary Peters following a November 2006 bus crash in Huntsville helped prompt the new rule. "The

fact that there are so few fatalities on buses every year is little solace for a grieving parent or a saddened governor," Barrett said.

The rule, according to some USDOT officials, was not expected to be issued until early next year (see Aug. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*).



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# I-65 becomes first U.S. 'biofuels corridor'

Interstate 65 is being touted as America's first "biofuels corridor," with B20 biodiesel-blend diesel and E85 ethanol-blend gasoline all along the highway.

In other words, biodiesel is available the length of the interstate from Gary, Ind., to Mobile, Ala.

The biofuels corridor is the result of a \$1.3 million federal project that involved Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and Alabama, the four states through which I-65 travels.

As recently as three years ago, there were no B20 biodiesel or E85 ethanol fueling stations along

I-65. With the completion of the project, there are 31 refueling stations accessible from the interstate, with more planned.

## Biodiesel in bailout

As part of the financial rescue bill passed by Congress in October, there are measures that extend the tax incentive for biodiesel and close the so-called "splash and dash" loophole.

According to the National Biodiesel Board, the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act specifically:

- Extends the biodiesel tax incentive through Dec. 31, 2009.
- Provides that all biodiesel,

regardless of feedstock used to produce the fuel, qualifies for the \$1 per gallon biodiesel incentive.

- Closes the so-called "splash-and-dash" loophole.

Splash-and-dash is where foreign finished fuel is sent to the U.S., splash-blended to claim the tax incentive, and then shipped to a third country for final use.

The legislation provides that effective May 15, 2008, fuel produced outside the U.S. for use outside the U.S. does not qualify for the biodiesel tax incentive.

## U.S. pushes biofuels

The U.S. Energy and Agricul-

ture departments have announced a plan to work together on development of biofuels.

The National Biofuels Action Plan is an interagency effort to accelerate development of a sustainable biofuels industry in the United States. The plan includes funding for sustainability, feedstock production, logistics, conversion science and technology, distribution infrastructure, blending, environment, health and safety.

Since 2006 the Energy Department has dedicated more than \$1 billion to cellulosic biofuel, and the Department of Agriculture has invested almost \$600 million.

# AVID announces passenger goods

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. — AVID Products has announced a new product designed to improve the travel experience of motorcoach passengers, plus give operators an additional revenue stream.

The product, called the Rest Easy Kit, can include a variety of items, including eyeshades, ear plugs, an inflatable neck pillow, a blanket, a headset or other "comfort products" an operator may want to include in a kit.

Other items that can be included in a customized kit include slipper socks; pillow and headrest covers, and disposable ear pads and buds, and pillows.

"These kits can have a great revenue turnaround for any motorcoach that introduces them to their customers," says AVID.

Freshorize also is new to the AVID Products' line. It is a combined hand wash soap, lotion and air freshener — all-in-one. "They are great for any short or long bus ride, and will definitely brighten up any bathroom with their amazing scent alone," says AVID.

For more information, go to [www.AVIDProducts.com](http://www.AVIDProducts.com).

# Pilot centers to offer 'diesel exhaust fluid'

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — One of the nation's largest operators of truck stops, Pilot Travel Centers, with more than 325 owned or licensed locations in 40 states, says it will have urea readily available "at the pump" late next year for 2010-model, reduced-emissions over-the-road trucks and buses.

Pilot's initial rollout plan calls for the urea, which is being euphemistically dubbed "diesel exhaust

fluid," to be available in bulk at more than 100 Pilot Travel Center locations nationwide beginning in mid-to-late 2009.

Pilot says its decision to offer diesel exhaust fluid at the pump will maximize affordability and convenience for truck and bus operators, and is one of the final infrastructure elements to be put in place for customers using selective catalytic reduction emissions con-

trol technology to meet 2010 diesel exhaust standards.

The company says its commitment ensures supplies of the fluid will be conveniently available during normal fuel fill-ups by drivers anywhere in the country, and will help lead the way for new 2010 SCR-equipped trucks and buses to run at near-zero emission levels.

In addition, all Pilot Travel Centers will carry pre-packaged,

"top-off" quantities of the fluid for SCR-equipped vehicles.

"By working with Detroit Diesel Corporation and Daimler Trucks North America, as well as other OEMs, we've begun to learn a lot more about SCR and the infrastructure needed to support this beneficial new technology," said Mark Hazelwood, executive vice president of Knoxville-based Pilot.

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# Make-up of Congress likely will impact coach industry

WASHINGTON — While most of the focus during this fall's political campaign has been on the presidential race, the battle over Congressional supremacy hasn't received the attention it properly deserves.

Virtually all political observers — from both parties — believe the Democrats will retain control of Congress. The only major open question is the margin by which the Dems will widen their control.

Currently, the Democrats hold a comfortable majority in the House that is expected to grow, but the more important issue is what happens in the U.S. Senate where the Dems currently have a razor slim majority.

Two or three months ago, it seemed likely the Republicans would lose a dozen to a dozen and a half seats in the House. Now, many political analysts say the Republicans are on track to lose at

least 20 or more House seats.

Still, few think the Democrats will pick up enough seats to reach 267, the number needed to override a presidential veto.

Retirements are the No. 1 reason there are many more competitive races in the House this year than in a normal campaign.

Twenty-nine Republican congressmen and women are retiring at the end of the year, plus seven Democrats.

Additionally, the Dems amassed a huge war chest for House races this year: \$56 million versus \$14 million for the Republicans.

In the Senate, the Republicans could lose at least a half-dozen, perhaps as many as eight or nine, seats.

The two biggest factors in whether Democrats reach the theo-

retical 60-seat, filibuster-proof Senate, at least on party-line votes, is whether you start off with an assumption of them having 50, that is, not counting Sen. Joe Lieberman, or 51, with the Connecticut independent in the count; and whether Alaskan Republican incumbent Ted Stevens is acquitted or convicted in his trial for not reporting personal gifts.

There's a general assumption that if convicted, Stevens is likely to lose his re-election bid, if acquitted, he more likely wins.

How significant will this election be from a Congressional perspective?

It's fairly normal for a party to suffer a train wreck election from time to time, but it's rare to have them in back-to-back elections. Indeed, only twice in the last 80 years

has a party suffered significant, double-digit congressional losses in back-to-back elections.

It happened to the Republicans in 1930 and 1932, and the Democrats in 1950 and 1952.

Having lost 30 House and six Senate seats in 2006, not counting the three special congressional election losses earlier this year, Republicans now look to be on track to lose 20 or more in the House and upwards of a half-dozen in the Senate.

Should the Democrats win the White House and capture 60 seats in the Senate, motorcoach companies can expect to see a slew of legislation and regulations that potentially will complicate their businesses significantly.

And that's probably an understatement.

## UMA urges operators to comply with ADA reporting requirement

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The United Motorcoach Association is urging its members, and other coach operators, to make sure they have complied this year with bus industry reporting requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Under federal rules, all U.S.-based over-the-road bus companies must submit three types of reports to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration every 12 months, documenting requests they have had for accessible bus service and how the requests were handled.

This year's reports were due Oct. 27, and cover the reporting period from Oct. 1, 2007, through Sept. 30, 2008.

The three reports operators must submit provide the feds with the following:

- Summaries of all accessible/equivalent service requests received during the previous year and the response/services provided by the operator.
- The number of passengers

who used a wheelchair lift to board an accessible coach.

- Summaries of motorcoach fleet composition, including the number of buses in the fleet and the number that are wheelchair accessible.

The splash page of UMA's website, [www.uma.org](http://www.uma.org), contains a link to the FMCSA's Overview of Reporting and Other ADA Requirements, and a reporting form.

"It is imperative that over-the-road bus companies comply with these reporting requirements," says UMA Vice President of Industry Relations Ken Presley.

"A company's failure to comply with the requirements may result in a USDOT referral to the U.S. Department of Justice for investigation and possible litigation."

Questions about the requirement can be directed to the FMCSA by e-mailing [mc-ecp@dot.gov](mailto:mc-ecp@dot.gov), or contacting Presley at [kpresley@uma.org](mailto:kpresley@uma.org), or calling him at (800) 424-8262.

## Federal estate tax a concern again

WASHINGTON — The federal estate tax, which is the most progressive of all the federal taxes (meaning its rate rises fastest with the amount to be taxed), is back on the radar screen of Washington politicians, according to a vice president of the American Trucking Associations.

Robert Pitcher, who tracks legal matters for the ATA, says it's widely assumed that a stronger Democratic Congress will not allow the estate tax to be repealed in 2010, which is what's supposed to happen under current law.

The estate tax has long been a problem for the owners of small and medium-sized businesses, especially those that have large amounts of capital tied up in expensive movable assets, like the owners of motorcoach companies.

There's a real danger that when the owner of such a business dies, part or all of the business will have to be sold to pay the taxes due on the owner's estate.

There are ways of avoiding this result but they are complicated and can be expensive.

During the 1990s and earlier, the ATA and others argued that the minimum size of estates subject to the

tax should be increased and the rate of the tax itself cut.

The so-called Bush Administration tax cuts enacted in 2001 addressed both issues.

Over the period through 2009, the tax has, in effect, been phased out for many because the amount of an estate exempt from the tax has been raised from \$675,000 in 2001 to \$3.5 million in 2009. At the same time, the rate of the tax for larger estates has been cut from 60 percent in '01, to 45 percent next year.

In 2010, under current law, the estate tax is repealed altogether. But only for 2010. After that, when the Bush tax cuts expire, the estate tax returns, with the exemption set at \$1 million and a rate of 60 percent.

Pitcher thinks the Democrats in Congress will reverse the 2010 repeal and impose the tax that year.

Still, Pitcher sees a couple of hopeful signs.

He notes that Republican candidate for president John McCain would raise the exemption to \$5 million and reduce the tax rate to 15 percent, while Democrat Barack Obama would keep the exemption at \$3.5 million and the rate at 45 percent.

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## Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

ISSUE NO. 134

A PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION

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25<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
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TESTIMONIALS



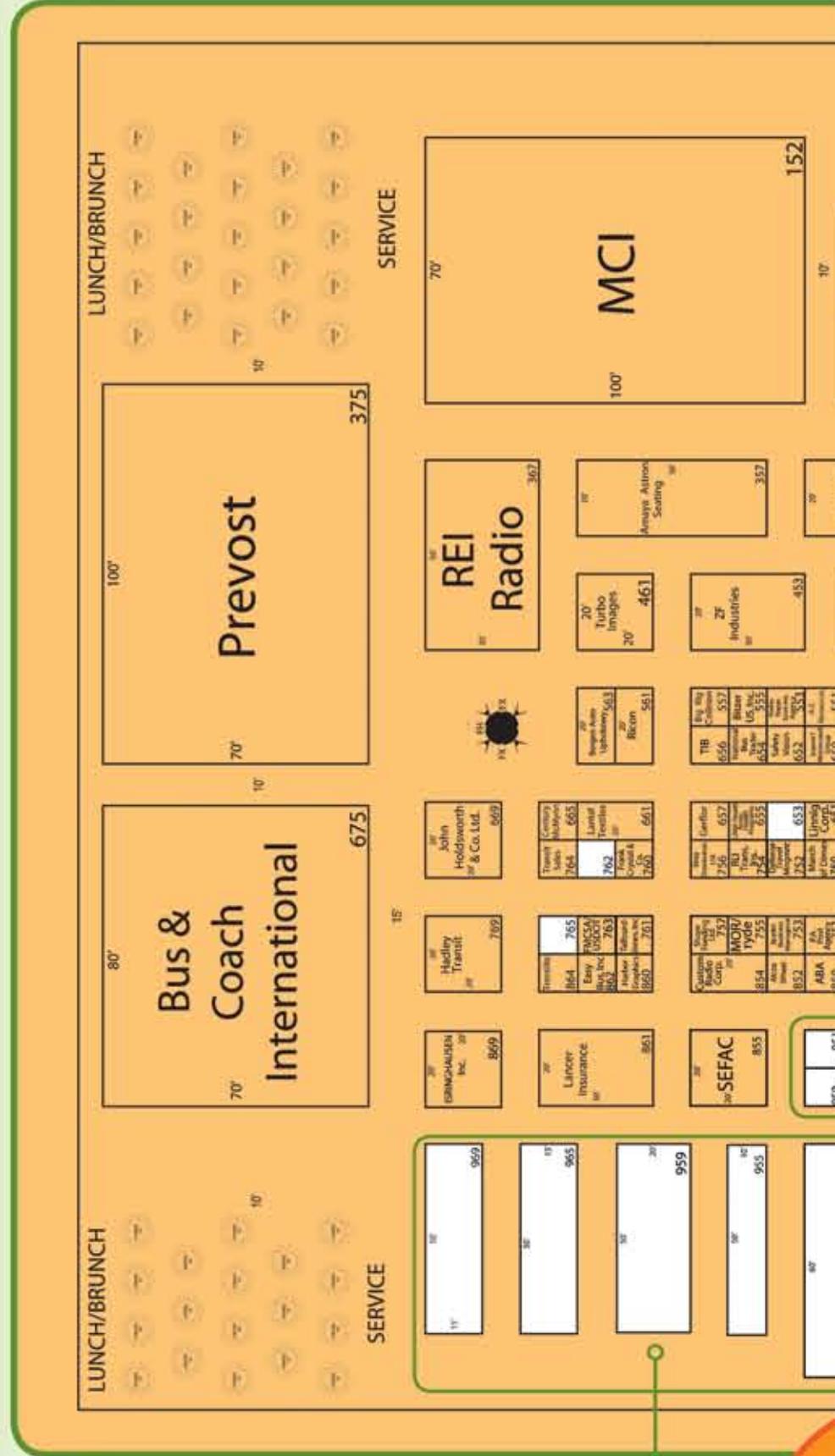
**Elaine Fickett, Attendee**  
**H&L CHARTER COMPANY**

"I come to UMA Motorcoach Expo because it always seems to feed new ideas that help in my business. The ideas come from the seminars but also just as frequently from networking with other members."



**John W. Bailey, Attendee**  
**BAILEY COACH**

"What we have learned here will help us back home to be proactive about going out and growing our business. The networking opportunities are also fantastic. New ideas and technology from UMA Motorcoach Expo help me to be proactive not reactive in my business. What's great about UMA Motorcoach Expo is that they tell us where the industry is going and that's important for my business."







25<sup>th</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY

## 2009 EXHIBITOR LIST

Company	Booth #	Company	Booth #	Company	Booth #	Company	Booth #
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ACC International, Inc.	535	Defense Travel Management Office	752	Michelin North America, Inc.	523	Setra-from Daimler Buses <b>Platinum Sponsor</b>	126
Advanced Biological Marketing	926	Driveware	619	Midland CVB	722	North America	
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Aesys Inc.	746	Easy Bus, Inc.	862	Mix Telematics	614	Shure-Step	811
Alcoa Wheel Products	852	eForward Solutions	827	MOR/ryde	755	South Carolina Tourism	708
Allison Transmission	423	Elreg Distributors Ltd.	756	Motor Coach Industries <b>Platinum Sponsor</b>	152	Spader Business Management	753
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American Bus Association	850	Fabric Services/Somtex	439	Motorcoach Movies	435	Stallion Bus Industries	937
American Seating	345	Five Star Specialty Programs (A Division of Crump Insurance Services, Inc.)	513	National Bus Trader	654	State Associations	613
Ametek Technical and Industrial Products	534	FMCSA/USDOT	763	National Coach Marketing	615	Steril Koni USA, Inc.	901
ArvinMeritor	313	Frank Crystal & Company	760	National Interstate Insurance Co. <b>Silver Sponsor</b>	739	Tallourd-Jones, Inc.	761
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Bergen Auto Upholstery	563	Groeneveld	510	National Tour Association	718	Thermo King Corp.	607
Berkeley County South Carolina	706	Hadley Transit	769	Olde English District	708	Tourism Cares	716
Big Rig Collision (Calgary)	557	Harbor Graphics	860	Orlando/Orange County CVB	715	Trans/Air Manufacturing Corp.	511
Bitzer US Inc.	555	HMS Host Restaurants in Travel Plazas	709	PAA Insurance Solutions	848	Transched Systems, Ltd.	512
Blaupunkt Div of Robert Bosch Corp.	501	IC Bus	907	P.A. Post Agency	751	Transit Sales International	764
Bode Corporation	417	INTAPOL Uniforms	441	Paradigm Technology Consulting, LLC	538	Transit Trx, LLC	710
Bridgestone/Firestone	301	Intec Video Systems	548	Pennsylvania Dutch CVB	711	Translite Enterprises — Bus Glass Distributors	864
Buckman-Mitchell	831	International Motor Coach Group	650	PennTex Industries	610	Transportation Insurance Brokers (TIB)	656
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Bus & Motorcoach NEWS	646	John Holdsworth & Co. Ltd.	669	Reach Local, Inc.	748	Turning Stone Casino Resort	723
Bus Exchange Magazines	826	Key Equipment Finance	606	REI-Radio Engineering	367	Turtle Top	146
Busline Magazine	833	Kidde Aerospace & Defense	409	Relational Bus Systems (RBS)	547	UMA Health-Assoc. Health Programs	655
BUS-WATCH® Surveillance by REI	307	Kingston Mobile Electronics	633	Research Underwriters	623	United Motorcoach Association	638
C. E. Niehoff & Co.	514	Kirk's Automotive Inc.	445	Ricon— A Division of Vapor Bus Intl.	561	Valley Forge Convention & Visitors Bureau	713
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Capacity Coverage Company	612	La France Industries (Former STI/Kings Plush Product)	447	Rodes-Roper Love, Div of Euclid Insurance Agencies	553	Wells Fargo Equipment Finance	429
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Carrocerias Ayas, S.A.	929	Lantel Textiles	661	Rosco Vision Systems	745	WiFi in Motion	617
Century McMynn Leasing	665	LINNIG Corporation	651	Safeguard, A Div. of IHMI	839	Willingham Inc.	433
Community Spec, Inc.	930	Lucas Oil Products	508	Safety Vision	652	ZF Industries, Inc.	453
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Custom Radio Corp.	854						

Exhibitor List as of 11.01.08

### TESTIMONIALS

## What People Are Saying About UMA Motorcoach Expo



SanDee Robinson,  
Exhibitor  
**CRACKER  
BARRELL**

"This is our second year and we think we needed to make a multi-year commitment to the show. We are excited about the new relationship with NTA and anxious to see what it is all about. We have seen the type of people we need to see this year: ten times more than last year. We think this is going to be a good venue for us."



Brenda Kissko, Exhibitor  
**MIDLAND  
CONVENTION &  
VISITORS BUREAU**

"If we stopped after today, only half-way through the show, I would be satisfied with the leads we have gotten and the positive feedback we have received. We are first time exhibitors and we decided to exhibit as a result of strong referrals from industry colleagues who exhibited last year at UMA Motorcoach Expo."

# James River buys MCI simulator

RICHMOND, Va. — James River Bus Lines has become the first coach operator to purchase the free-standing coach driving simulator marketed by Motor Coach Industries.

The \$200,000-plus simulator will be used to supplement the six-week driver training programs of James River Bus and its sister company, Carey Transportation.

“We see our simulator as lowering our risk,” said James River President Stephen Story. “If something does happen out on the road, our drivers will be under control.”

The simulator, which assesses driver performance and provides essential driver training in a safe environment, was developed by

GE Driver Development, which was purchased by MPRI of Alexandria, Va. MPRI adapted the trainer for MCI-model coaches and motorcoach drivers.

The MCI-MPRI simulator, called the TranSimVS IV, is designed to help operators reduce on-road training time, thereby lowering fuel costs and fleet wear while advancing drivers’ skill.

MCI installed one of the trainers on board a converted J4500-model shell. The shell serves as a mobile classroom and marketing platform that travels to tradeshow and is available for rent by operators of MCI coaches.

James River Bus Lines leased the mobile classroom before de-

termining to purchase a simulator of its own.

Afterward, it worked with MPRI to customize the unit for its specific needs, including installing additional software that simulates other James River vehicles.

The simulator purchased by the coach company is mounted on a trailer that can be moved to any of James River’s three locations.

James River operates a fleet of 88 vehicles that includes 40 motorcoaches.

Story plans to use the simulator to not only improve safety but also to reinforce fuel-efficient driving practices. A lesson on the simulator demonstrates how quick starts, abrupt stops and speeding



Computers, monitors and mechanical components simulate driving.

adversely impacts fuel economy. Smooth acceleration and deceleration practiced on the simulator can result in potential fuel cost savings

of 25 cents per gallon. More information about the simulator is available from MCI fleet support managers.

# MCI wins top APTA marketing award for customer webinar sessions

SAN DIEGO — Motor Coach Industries has won a grand prize award in the 29th annual AdWheel Award competition sponsored by the American Public Transportation Association.

MCI received the award for its webinar series of educational sem-

inars that are conducted online.

The AdWheel Awards recognize excellence in public transportation marketing and communications. They were presented this year during APTA’s EXPO here last month.

MCI launched its webinars this

past spring. The initial online seminars have dealt with such topics as new-engine technology, ways to save fuel, and marketing ideas to drive customer demand.

“We’re using technology to bring the classroom directly to operators and maintenance staff,”

said Vicki Bowman, MCI marketing manager. “It’s a great way to gain knowledge, while saving time and money on travel and resources.”

MCI says some of the webinars have attracted hundreds of customers.

The interactive sessions are often led by MCI field support staff members, including Scott Crawford and Trevor Olynik.

For information about upcoming webinars, including one on Nov. 5, e-mail [Marketing@mci-coach.com](mailto:Marketing@mci-coach.com).

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## IC Bus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

thing of a splash when it announced plans to launch five commercial bus models. Four of the mid- and small-bus models announced in mid-2006 were brought to market but the fifth, a 38-foot, rear-engine, coach-style model failed to materialize. (See July 1, 2006 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The new model announced at APTA appears to be a full-blown, dual-axle, 53-passenger, mono-coque-constructed motorcoach. It will use Meritor axles, an Allison transmission and Navistar's new MaxxForce 13-liter engine.

Other details of the coach were not revealed, with company executives saying they would be announced later. However, that did

not stop spokesmen from outlining the competitive advantages they say the IC coach will have.

"Just as we were able to achieve a seven percent fuel economy advantage over other trucks with the aerodynamic design of Navistar's Class 8 International ProStar tractor, we can apply this experience to differentiate IC Bus from the motorcoach competition," said David Hillman, director of marketing for IC Bus.

"For example, extensive wind tunnel and aerodynamics experience can help design the bus to positively affect airflow around the total vehicle."

Another clear difference, compared to other 2010-model coaches, will be that the International MaxxForce 13 engine will not need to have urea added to the exhaust

stream to comply with the newest federal emissions regulations.

Every other motorcoach sold with 2010-compliant engines apparently will use urea-based selective catalytic reduction, or SCR, to meet the '10 emission standards and to improve fuel consumption.

International has maintained for months its MaxxForce engines won't need urea and will still be fuel efficient.

IC's coach announcement came barely one month after Navistar's Mexican-based subsidiary, Camiones y Motores International de Mexico, S.A. de C.V., and San Marino Ônibus e Implementos LTDA, the Brazilian bus body builder, signed a memorandum of understanding to form a joint venture to manufacture commercial bus bodies.

The vehicles produced under

the joint venture will be distributed as commercial integrated buses through the IC Bus dealer channel beginning next year.

"A (joint venture) with San Marino, one of the most respected Brazilian bus body manufacturers, gives Navistar the opportunity to more quickly provide global-integrated commercial buses through our IC Bus brand," said McKinney.

IC has had a relationship with San Marino, which is commonly known as Neobus, for some time. It has been Neobus that has supplied the body for the front-engine, 38-foot FC model commercial bus marketed by IC.

The Neobus line includes mid-size, shuttle, transit and articulated buses, plus intercity coaches. For information go to [www.neobus.com.br](http://www.neobus.com.br) and [www.icbus.com](http://www.icbus.com).

## Economy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

individuals are cutting back on travel," says one expert.

That could mean better deals at domestic travel destinations such as Las Vegas, Miami and New York.

Also, the cost of a Caribbean cruise is falling to levels not seen since 2001, according to one travel agent. Why the slide? She speculates there is overcapacity — too many berths, not enough cruisers. In any event, there are deals to be had.

And, finally, there's the decline in fuel costs.

Global oil demand is sinking like a stone. Some analysts are predicting crude oil prices could fall farther than the 50 percent decline from the record \$145 a barrel of four months ago.

"Falling oil prices are one of the good things in the marketplace," said one analyst. "That is a definite positive for coach operators."

Diesel fuel hit a record \$4.76 a gallon in July. The U.S. average is now around \$3.60 a gallon.

Silverado Stages also has terminals in Sacramento and Santa Barbara. It employs more than 150 people and operates a fleet of more than 65 motorcoaches.

## megabus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

commitment to provide an affordable travel alternative, megabus.com has invested in 96 new touring double-decker buses in an effort to meet the expanding customer demand," said company President and Chief Operating Officer Dale Moser.

The double-decker Van Hool carries 81 passengers and are

equipped with WiFi, power outlets, reclining seats with safety belts, reading lamps, restroom and are ADA accessible.

megabus.com is fond of reminding the news media that its double-deckers have the potential to remove 81 automobiles from the highway and are among the most energy and fuel efficient ways to travel.

According to Moser, the Van

Hool double-decker is 10 times more efficient than a Boeing 737 jetliner and 25 times more efficient than most single-passenger autos per passenger per mile.

The double-decker's fuel consumption per passenger per mile is .002 gallon, while a 737 is .02 gallon and a typical single-passenger car is .05 gallon.

The first of the two double-deckers going to Silverado Stages

has been delivered, with the second scheduled to arrive before year end.

"We are constantly upgrading and improving our fleet to better serve our clients," said owner Sharon Galusha. "These new coaches will allow us to continue to expand our inbound international charter business, as well as our regular charter, packaged tour and airport express services."

In addition San Luis Obispo,

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# The fine art of 'patching' should be used sparingly

By Dave Millhouser

It was 1979 and as a freshly minted bus salesman I'd been tapped to do a nationwide tour with the prototype of our newest model.

It was pretty exciting stuff but for some reason the factory couldn't get the left brake light to work. All this new technology and yet we had to run a piece of wire across the inside of the engine door from the right light, make a splice, crimp a couple of connectors... and I was off.

One of the advantages our industry has over the airlines is that when one of our machines breaks we can usually coast to the side of the road and look for help. Coasting is problematic for a jetliner.

Anyone who has dealt in used motorcoaches, or done work on transient buses, can tell you that our industry may be a little too good at exploiting this advantage.

Computerized drive trains and multiplex electrical systems on newer coaches have reduced the temptation, however. Running spare wires on a modern bus could

cause your toilet to flush when you flip the RH directional (imagine what the hazard light switch might do!).

There seem to be two different approaches to this sort of thing.

One large transit authority's policy is that, whenever the brakes are touched, they replace everything on that axle — brakes, bearings, bellows and bushings. Amazing what you can do when you're spending other folks' money.

The far end of the spectrum was a now-defunct carrier in Colorado who rooted through our scrap bin for worn cylinder liners. He'd buff them up and use them to "re-build" engines. Trust me, if WE threw them away they were scrap.

We're looking for a reasonable and responsible middle ground. I once saw a beautifully maintained coach towed 400 miles because one highly visible wire had come loose. Just looking in the engine compartment could have saved a world of hurt.

Every company is different with regard to what their drivers are capable of doing, but it's impor-

tant YOU get them the highest level of skill possible. You're looking for triage here, an accurate picture of what's wrong and whether it can be fixed quickly.

You can't ask them to fix most problems but they can accurately observe what's happening. There's a difference between power steering fluid and diesel fuel. What's leaking does matter. Steaming coolant smells different than hot brakes and requires different actions.

We spend a lot of time teaching safety and it would be worthwhile to use some of it to show drivers what all that stuff in the back does. We may not ask them to do repairs but we do want them to know which dipstick they're looking at or what that broken belt USED to drive.

It's a lot easier and more effective to teach this stuff — in your facility — before an incident. On many modern coaches, an educated driver can even be coached to diagnose electrical problems, without leaving their seat.

A savvy driver can reduce the damage to your bus and make the

difference between parking the bus and coasting to a stop. It's a safety issue, if for no other reason than the breakdown lane is a dangerous place.

If your driver can diagnose the problem, then you have the option of calling in help, trying to fix it or limp it home.

There's a lot of redundancy built into modern coaches. Instead of one big electrical motor, there may be several, so losing one isn't catastrophic. What the heck, there are two alternators in lots of new coaches, and we got by on one for years. Dual-pane glass is great because when the outer is cracked, chip the rest away and the inner will do.

Limping in in any of these modes (or some even more imaginative ones) can be a painful necessity. Sadly, I've seen coaches DISPATCHED with these conditions. That's akin to leaping from an airplane, knowing your main parachute won't work and hoping the spare will open.

We've all patched, hopefully not quite so dramatically. The trick

is to do it rarely... and wisely. The other trick is to fix it right as soon as possible. If you don't, you'll forget the patch and

expose yourself to huge liability if there's an accident down the road.

Bus builders put all that stuff in there for a reason.

Boiled down, in addition to management exercising good judgment with regard to when patching is appropriate, the key is educating drivers. It's far easier teaching in your shop than yelling to make yourself understood on a cell phone over the roar of passing semis.

The prototype went 30,000 miles and then was sold. When it was delivered, that cobbled wire was still there and working. For all I know, it still is.

Dave Millhouser is a bus industry marketing consultant and freelance writer. Contact him at: [dave\\_millhouser@hotmail.com](mailto:dave_millhouser@hotmail.com).



Dave Millhouser

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# NTSB investigates use of illegal foreign-made buses

WASHINGTON — The National Transportation Safety Board investigation of a fatal Texas bus crash is zeroing in on foreign-made coaches that are operating in the U.S. even though they don't meet federal safety standards.

At a hearing here last month, witnesses testified that shortcomings in federal and state regulations and enforcement are allowing unscrupulous operators to use illegal buses to carry passengers on U.S. roads.

Debbie Hersman, an NTSB member, said the regulations are a patchwork of rules enforced by different agencies.

Hersman suggested that companies are purchasing buses that don't comply with U.S. standards because they're cheaper.

"We have no idea how many noncompliant buses are in the country," said Hersman, who presided over the hearing.

Forty-seven passengers were returning to Houston from Monterrey, Mexico, on Jan. 2 on board a 2005 Mexican-made Volvo coach. The driver veered off the road near Victoria, Texas, and overcorrected, causing the bus to flip on its side and strike a guardrail.

A male passenger was killed and his wife and daughter were injured along with dozens of others.

## Skirting the rules

Hersman described the circuitous route the coach owner took to exploit gaps in California vehicle

registration laws and ultimately get Texas license plates. The bus could not be registered in Texas because it did not meet U.S. safety standards.

With the help of Green River Buses of Dallas, the bus was registered in California using a Los Angeles address. Once registered in California it could be re-registered and operated in Texas.

Hersman said the owner "went to some pains" to register the bus in two states in an effort to "take advantage of loopholes in the registration process."

Capricorn Bus Lines of Houston owned the bus and leased it to International Charter Services Inc., which leased it back to Capricorn. Capricorn then supplied drivers, maintenance and insurance. Capricorn did not have authority from the U.S. Transportation Department to operate, and instead used International's USDOT number, said NTSB investigator Pete Kotowski.

The bus was cited in Oct. 2006 near Victoria, Texas, for not displaying Texas plates. It was registered in California in April 2007 under the International Registration Plan, or IRP, which allows motorcoaches registered in one state to operate in another under IRP member jurisdiction.

The bus was re-registered eight months later in Texas to operate as an intrastate carrier.

"The reason perhaps they went through all these hoops was they could not get titled in Texas and in order to get registered in Texas

they had to get titled," said Hersman. Bobby Johnson, a Texas Department of Transportation official, agreed, saying getting the title so it could operate in Texas was the objective.

## No night checks

The bus made regular runs from Monterrey to Houston. Enlarged photos around the hearing room showed the daily trip schedule stenciled on the rear of the bus. It lacked, however, a required label showing it met federal safety standards.

The bus arrived at the Laredo port of entry around 10:30 p.m. Jan. 2. Passengers had to get off and go through customs, and border officers checked the bus for contraband.

But because no Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration or Texas Department of Public Safety inspectors were on duty no safety inspection was conducted, Kotowski said. Vehicle safety inspectors are in place 16 hours daily at the port. The bus left about midnight for its 193-mile trip to Houston. It crashed at 4:35 a.m.

Texas officials concluded in their report the driver fell asleep before the crash.

## UMA joins probe

The United Motorcoach Association assisted the NTSB in its investigation. UMA was asked by the safety agency to be a "party" to its two-day hearing.

According to Greyhound, MCI was supposed to respond to that motion on Oct. 10, 2008, and the motion was to be decided by the court in November. However, according to Greyhound, MCI refused to move forward with discovery.

After MCI's refusal to comply with court orders, on Sept. 11, Greyhound said it asked the court that MCI be held in default and a judgment be granted in its favor.

"Literally minutes before (the) motion to default MCI was to be heard, MCI filed its bankruptcy petition" in federal court in Delaware, Greyhound asserted in a court document. The effect of MCI's bankruptcy filing was to halt Greyhound's case.

Greyhound was outraged. It claims MCI is not only discriminating against it by seeking to honor other warranty claims but not those of Greyhound but its bankruptcy plan is designed to single out Greyhound and assure it receives no compensation for its claims.

## BCI Falcons are recalled to correct leveling valves

JENNINGS, Kan. — Bus and Coach International is recalling 72 2007-08 model BCI Falcon 45 motorcoaches to correct a potentially significant leveling value problem.

According to the recall statement, there's a possibility the coaches could suffer an out-of-level condition, leading to transverse axle loading. Transverse loading can create increased axle load on one side, causing abnormal tire wear, which could result in a crash.

Under the recall, BCI will remove the left-front leveling valve assembly and re-plumb the front air bags to the right front leveling valve only.

UMA President and CEO Victor Parra, and Ken Presley, the association's vice president of industry relations, represented UMA and the motorcoach industry at the hearing and participated in the questioning of witnesses called by the NTSB.

Parties to a hearing are picked by the NTSB because they're expected to have special knowledge that will contribute to the development of pertinent evidence.

"The hearing revealed holes in the way buses are inspected and registered," said Presley. "The NTSB has every reason to be concerned because they have uncov-

The problem may have been uncovered as part of the investigation of a crash of a BCI Falcon on Interstate 15 near Las Vegas in August.

Witnesses said the coach suddenly veered to the left where a guardrail sheared off its wheels and axles. The coach body crashed into the center median where it came to rest upright. Twenty-nine passengers were injured.

Initially, it was thought the left-front tire had suffered tread separation; the damaged tire was completely shredded.

Owners of BCI Falcons should contact the company at (877) 452-9224.

ered dozens of buses registered and operating in violation of federal safety standards."

The hearing also revealed concerns about safety inspection frequency at the border.

"We learned that in 2007 there were over 265,000 bus crossings at the U.S.-Mexican border and just over 13,000 safety inspections. We have had occasional reports of Mexican carriers crossing the border and taking business away from U.S.-based carriers," noted Presley.

"We do not intend to stand by and watch unsafe competition hurt our members or harm the public."

or money supplied by the companies MCI lined up to refinance its debt, of such a huge amount (\$215 million) that it would be literally impossible get other financing if the unsecured creditors claims were held valid.

Another element of the strategy was to "deprive the Official Committee of (Unsecured Creditors) of funding," meaning there would no money available through the bankruptcy process to pay the unsecured creditors' attorneys. Dirty pool.

"In sum, the (debtor-in-possession) financing and lock-up motions employ almost all means possible to force the 'zero distribution plan' on all parties-in-interest and, at the same time, shackle the official committee, preventing it from protecting the interest of those harmed most by the plan — the debtors' unsecured claims," said unsecured creditors in their court filing.

MCI also had no comment on the creditors' allegations.

## MCI financing

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

million from a group of lenders led by General Electric Capital Corp. Shannon took the action over the hot objections of the creditors who say the loan will guarantee they aren't paid.

MCI sought bankruptcy court protection in September to stave off financial collapse (see Oct. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*).

Greyhound potentially stands to become the biggest non-investment loser, by far, if the bankruptcy court ultimately and completely adopts the bankruptcy plan filed by MCI.

That's because Greyhound has been pursuing tens of millions of dollars in warranty, breach of contract and other claims against MCI since November 2005, over what Greyhound calls "horrendous problems" related to G-model coaches Greyhound bought between 2001 and 2004, and for other MCI coaches Greyhound purchased.

"The G coach has proven riddled with defects in design and workmanship," Greyhound said in one court filing. The coaches "have been the subject of six official recalls registered with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Beyond the recalls, MCI implemented three separate 'campaigns' to fix numerous problems with the buses."

Greyhound also claims MCI warranted that the G models would cost less to operate and maintain on a per-mile basis than previous models purchased from MCI, and that if the coaches cost more to operate than D models, MCI would be required to repurchase the Gs or replace them. None of that has happened, according to Greyhound.

Greyhound's suit against MCI has been slowly progressing through circuit court in Cook County, Ill. In March, Greyhound filed for summary judgment as to whether or not MCI was required to repurchase or replace Greyhound's 2001 G models.

# California questions inspection program effectiveness

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California's bus and motorcoach inspection program, long considered one of the most effective in the U.S., is being re-examined in the wake of the state's worst intercity bus crash in at least 15 years.

Concerns have been raised about the state's ability to monitor the growing number of mom-and-pop coach companies that ferry thousands of gamblers daily to California casinos.

Triggering the concern was the fatal crash in early October of a casino-bound bus in Colusa County that killed eight people.

A coach operated by Cobb's Bus Service, carrying 43 people, tumbled into a watery ditch on a thin, straight stretch of rural road south of the Colusa Casino Resort. The bus was not registered with the state.

The incident has California Highway Patrol officials talking about reassessing their oversight practices.

"We would like to think people aren't lying to us and trying to hide stuff," said CHP spokesman Robert Kays. "We are looking for ways we can catch these rogue buses. We have the same concerns the public has; we want people to be safe on our highways."

Among the dead in the crash was Daniel Cobb, 68, the company's owner.

The CHP arrested the driver, 52-year-old Quintin J. Watts, on suspicion of driving under the influence. However, they later dropped the charges when blood-tests came back negative.

Officials also were looking into reports Watts fell asleep at the wheel. The rookie driver suffered significant injuries in the crash and was hospitalized.

## Inspection requirements

State rules require regulators to conduct on-site inspections of bus companies and their drivers every 13 months.

California Highway Patrol officials declined to disclose when regulators last inspected Cobb's company and what they found. CHP spokeswoman Fran Clader said the information was being withheld, for now, as part of the investigation into the crash.

At least one area newspaper has filed a formal Public Records Act request to obtain copies of any inspection documents.

California bus company inspections include maintenance reviews, and document checks on

driver hirings, training and drug testing, said CHP official Greg Bragg, manager of the agency's motor carrier safety program.

## More to check

The workload is getting heavier, and officials say part of it is because of the Indian gambling business.

Ten years ago, the CHP conducted 928 site inspections at bus yards statewide, Bragg said. Last year, the number had doubled to 1,818. But the number of CHP inspectors did not increase until this year, when it went from 205 to 243.

Inspectors "are running from truck to bus to truck to bus all day," Bragg said. Of 1,818 inspections

last year, Bragg said the CHP issued unsatisfactory ratings to 245 companies and recommended the state Public Utilities Commission suspend three bus companies.

However, Mike Waters of the California Bus Association and Coach America in San Francisco, told a Sacramento newspaper the CHP isn't being tough enough.

"There doesn't seem to be a hammer out there, to come and just shut a carrier down," he said.

Since 2000, the actions of private tour or charter bus drivers have contributed to nine other fatal wrecks in California, according to one analysis of data from the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration.

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Coaches are either 48 or 56 passenger configuration.

Prices include all spare stock of seats. Equipped with beverage galley, cordless and corded microphone, DVD, CD and VCR with four monitors, Enclosed parcel racks.

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## Calendar

### NOVEMBER 2008

**1-4 California Bus Association 35th Annual Convention & Trade Show**, Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa, Rancho Mirage, Calif. Info: [www.cbabus.com](http://www.cbabus.com).

**2-4 Eastern Bus Maintenance Management Conference**, Syracuse, N.Y. Info: Go to [www.ebmmc.org](http://www.ebmmc.org).

**15-19 National Tour Association Annual Convention**, Pittsburgh, Pa. Info: Go to [www.nta.travel](http://www.nta.travel).

### DECEMBER 2008

**3-4 UMA Safety Management Seminar**, NTSB Academy, Ashburn, Va. Info: Call (800) 424-8282 or to to: [www.uma.org](http://www.uma.org).

### JANUARY 2009

**8 ABA Marketplace**, Charlotte, N.C. Info: Go to [www.buses.org](http://www.buses.org).

**19-21 IMG Maintenance & Safety Forum**, Hilton Grand Vacations Club at SeaWorld International Center, Orlando, Fla. Info: Go to [www.imgcoach.com](http://www.imgcoach.com).

## Foreign tourists

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Says Parra: "I'm not sure how we can advise operators, except: Don't do that. I'm not going to say there aren't going to be abuses... But hopefully we recognize that there's an opportunity here for everyone to grow and nurture. If we nurture that foreign customer properly and they go back and tell their friends they had a great experience, and we recognize it's not a one-shot opportunity, they may come back again."

"We've had to overcome some major hurdles to get these people here. What's gotten them here, obviously, is the weak dollar, but ever since 9/11 international travel to the U.S. has not been very strong, and we're finally getting them back. We don't want to give them more reasons to stop coming again," Parra adds.

Hoelscher cautions about cultural sensitivities.

"With cultural differences, not everything will be perfect, but it will work itself out. In the Japanese market, they tended to be herded a little more, but they don't expect that now. It takes a little while," he says.

Or, the Chinese tourist may expect a smoking room for \$60 in Los Angeles. "That's going to have to be worked out," he adds.

Meanwhile, foreign tourism is forecast to drop next year but begin a rebound in 2010 — enough time for operators to get on board.

# Trailways adds operator members, picks new chairman

FAIRFAX, Va. — The Trailways Transportation System has added coach operators in Maine and Georgia as members.

Northeast Trailways, formerly Northeast Charter and Tour Co., of Lewiston, Maine, and Swept Away Trailways, formerly Swept Away Coaches and Tours of Savannah, Ga., are the newest Trailways members.

Scott Riccio, president and owner of Northeast Trailways has nearly two decades of experience in the tour and transportation industry. He founded the company more than 10 years ago with one motorcoach. Today, the company has a fleet of eight motorcoaches and transports passengers throughout the northeastern US and eastern Canada.

Charters for regional sports teams, like the Portland Sea Dogs (baseball) and the Lewiston Maniacs (hockey) are a part of the company's customer base.

Riccio expects the Trailways affiliation to help expand charger

business opportunities.

Owned and operated by Todd McElmurray and Henrietta Smith, Swept Away Trailways has a fleet of 15 motorcoaches, which it uses for tours and charters, meetings and convention shuttles, as well as military moves throughout the U.S.

McElmurray said that being part of Trailways will provide "impressive brand marketing exposure to the public and added value against competition."

## Chairman elected

The Trailways Transportation System board has elected Ron Moore its chairman.

Moore is president and owner of Burlington Trailways in West Burlington, Iowa. He succeeds William (Bill) C. Steele, who served three terms as chairman.

Broadening public awareness of Trailways' commitment to safe and secure transportation services will be one of Moore's priorities.

Moore has served several terms on the Trailways board, and also is a member of the American Bus Association board.

Moore grew up in New Jersey, and began cleaning buses for his

dad's Trailways' affiliated company when he was in high school. The family moved to Iowa in 1981 when they acquired a motorcoach company in the Cedar Rapids area. Burlington Trailways employs

more than 100 individuals and maintains a fleet of 25 motorcoaches.



Ron Moore

## Interchange on tap at Expo

ORLANDO, Fla. — Each year, the UMA Motorcoach Expo brings together dozens of maintenance professionals at the annual Maintenance Interchange to find solutions to common coach repair issues.

The maintenance Interchange is an open forum between motorcoach owners, operators and maintenance personnel to solve pesky maintenance problems that have been bugging technicians and their bosses all year.

To foster frank and open discussions, the Maintenance Interchange is for operators and their maintenance personnel only.

No vendors, manufacturers, suppliers and sales personnel can at-

tend the interchange.

The Expo '09 Maintenance Interchange will be Thursday, Jan. 22, at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando. The session is free to UMA Motorcoach Expo registrants.

The '09 Interchange will again feature the UMA Motorcoach Expo Maintenance Competition. The competition pits participants against the clock in a race to solve maintenance glitches.

The competition will be composed of a written exam on the 22nd, and a timed trouble-shooting exercise on the morning of Jan. 23.

To sign up for the Maintenance Interchange, call (800) 424-8262.

## ASA unveils side-vision camera

ELKHART, Ind. — ASA Electronics has introduced a compact, aerodynamic side-vision camera for commercial vehicles, including all sizes of buses.

The Voyager Super CMOS Side Vision Cameras are for installation on the side of motorcoaches, near the front end, or on the front fenders of cutaways.

The cameras eliminate blind spots that surround buses and other larger vehicles, enhancing driver visibility and safety.

ASA Electronics says CMOS (or, complementary-metal-oxide-semiconductor) technology has allowed it to increase the picture quality of the camera, enhance nighttime vision, and decrease camera size.

"The Voyager Super CMOS cameras offer drivers the ability to see beyond the normal scope of vi-

sion provided by conventional mirrors. When paired with a Voyager Heavy Duty LCD observation monitor, they deliver high-quality, 'real time' images that aid drivers in daily driving maneuvers such as backing up, changing lanes, merging and making wide right turns," said ASA.

The cameras also are "anti-blooming," meaning direct light from headlights or sunrises/sunsets will not wash out the screen. The CMOS technology condenses direct light so the halos and bright areas that can often appear around camera images are eliminated, making the cameras more effective in bright (daytime) and low light (nighttime) situations.

They are compact and can be surface mounted on any application, says ASA. For more information, go to [www.asaelectronics.com](http://www.asaelectronics.com).



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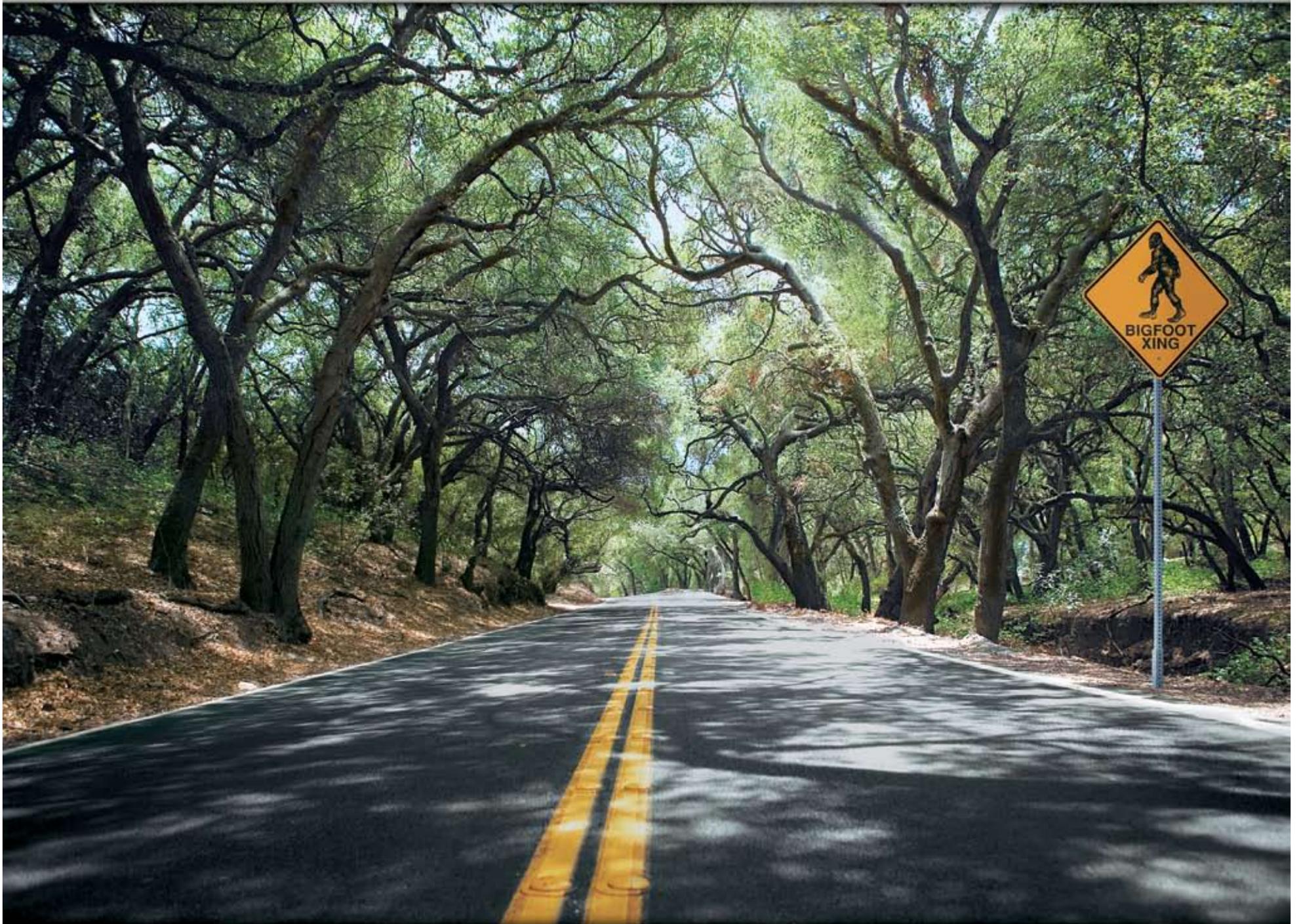
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either applying brakes to the appropriate wheels or overriding the throttle. Incredible indeed, protecting passengers, assets, and your company's reputation. This is after all a Prevost. More than a coach. It's an experience. Knowing that we're always there for you. Anticipating the unexpected. Challenging the detours. Outdoing what's been done. This is the Prevost way. To learn more please visit [prevostcar.com](http://prevostcar.com). **THE ULTIMATE CLASS**



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