

Driver shortage stunts industry's ability to grow

Is it getting tougher to find motorcoach drivers these days?

Operators across the country say the much-discussed driver shortage seems to be turning from bad to worse as they struggle to find enough men and women to keep their coaches on the road.

The problem is amplified now, some of them say, because the industry is on the upswing and the shortage of drivers is making it dif-

ficult for them to keep up with the increase in business.

"It has become a very critical problem and certainly is one of the industry's top priorities," said Wallace Jones of Blue Grass Tours in Lexington, Ky., who occasionally is forced to put mechanics and office workers behind the wheel of his buses.

Others have had to turn away business, delay expansion plans

and even downsize their operations.

Frank Capri of Community Transit and Capri's Charters in West Palm Beach, Fla., said the growing shortage of drivers in his section of the country not only has kept him from expanding, but led to a financial decision to sell 9 of his 30 buses.

"We figured it would be better to downsize because the equip-

ment costs you money whether it is sitting or rolling," he said.

Don Dinger of Gotta Go Express Trailways in Forth Worth, Texas, has turned away business from time-to-time because he can't find enough drivers to keep his 40 coaches on the road.

"This is a serious problem for us because it affects our revenues," he added. "I'm not sure it has gotten any worse the last couple of

years but it certainly hasn't been very good for some time now."

Callen Hotard of Calco Travel in Geismar, La., who grows his business based on the number of good drivers he has on his staff, said he probably could add a few more coaches to his fleet of 40 if he could find a few more drivers.

"I don't go out and say we have enough business to expand and

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Negotiators fail to agree on critical charter issues; FTA may rule the roost

WASHINGTON — The private motorcoach and public transit industries remain far apart on several major issues related to revamping federal charter service rules, setting up the strong possibility the Federal Transit Administration will settle the differences.

Negotiators for the two sides, who have been holding monthly two-day meetings since May, will give it one more try Dec. 6 and 7, and if they again fall short, the responsibility will shift to the FTA.

Rewriting of the charter rules was mandated by Congress in August 2005, as a way of easing the long-running feud between private and public carriers over the types of charter work transit agencies should be allowed to do — if any.

Private operators say they cannot compete for charter work with transit agencies that are subsidized with taxpayer money, allowing them to oftentimes charge below-market rates. Transit operators insist they are simply filling a public need and running charters that private carriers have no interest in doing.

The dispute has led to a steady

Get it out of the FTA

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stream of complaints filed with the FTA by private motorcoach operators across the country.

Negotiators at the latest meetings in October reached agreement on a series of minor issues, but remained split on several key concerns, including the crafting of a formal definition of "charter," and the possible use of administrative law judges to settle complaints of charter rules violations by transit agencies.

"We just won't have a definition of charter, and that's pretty clear," noted meeting facilitator Susan Podziba, as the group at one point passed on continuing to discuss the definition and asked to move on to other issues. "If there is an impasse, then there's an impasse. Negotiations don't always reach a decision."

Definition key

While negotiators from both sides are prohibited from com-

FMCSA chief to speak at Expo



John J. Hill, administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, will be an opening day speaker at Motorcoach Expo 2007 in January. See story on Page 15.

menting to the media on the state of their talks outside the meetings, it was clear during the October sessions that the motorcoach operators consider the definition of charter to be key to drafting rules that are fair and have the best change of minimizing challenges in the future.

The split between the two sides centers on retaining the word "exclusive" in the definition. Motorcoach operators want it left

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New coach sales increase 26 percent in third quarter, top percentage gain of year

Sales of new motorcoaches in the U.S. and Canada, during the three months ended Sept. 30, posted their sharpest increase of the year, climbing nearly 26 percent above sales in the third quarter of last year, *National Bus Trader* magazine reports.

Coach manufacturers sold a total of 538 new over-the-road buses during this year's third quarter, up from the 428 units sold during the same three months a year ago.

The jump marked the July-August-September 2006 sales period as a "very unusual" quarter.

No. 1, the third quarter typically is the industry's slowest new-coach sales season of the year. That wasn't true this year. The 538 buses sold during the period exceeded the 490 sold during the first quarter of the year.

No. 2, the 25.7 percent quarterly increase compares with an 11.3 percent gain in the second quarter and a 5.5 percent rise in the first quarter.

No. 3, the third period this

year marked the eighth-consecutive quarter that coach sales in the United States and Canada have posted a year-over-year gain.

National Bus Trader Editor Larry Plachno, who compiles the magazine's sales report, attributes this year's third-quarter sales jump to four factors:

Ongoing industry growth, he said, probably accounts for 35-36 percent of the year-over-year increase.

An increase in sales to Canadian operators accounts for roughly 18 percent of the gain.

Public-sector orders could account for 27 percent of the rise.

The last factor, says Plachno, probably represents operators who ordered coaches early to get deliveries before the reduced-emissions 2007 engines come on line. He attributes roughly 19 percent of the sales increase to that factor.

Plachno also thinks this last factor could impact orders in the first and second quarters of next year.

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U.S. drivers affected

Canadian hours rules changing

OTTAWA, Ontario — Significant hours-of-service rules changes go into effect in Canada on Jan. 1, and they will impact U.S. drivers going across the border, say Canadian bus experts. (See July 15 and Dec. 15, 2005 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

David Carroll, director of safety and maintenance for Motor Coach Canada, says U.S. operators need to be aware of and plan for the changes.

One of the most fundamental issues is this: U.S. log books will no longer be compliant with the new Canadian rules. A driver using a U.S. log in Canada will need to add a few entries, including various odometer readings.

Additionally, while U.S. rules require the previous 7 days' logs be in the vehicle, Canada will now require the previous 2 weeks' worth. In other words, a driver must be able to produce daily log sheets for the previous 14 days, says Carroll.

The new Canadian rules also require drivers to declare in their

log book the "work cycle" they are using. "Cycle One" is 70 hours in 7 days, and "Cycle Two" is 120 hours in 14 days. Carroll thinks most drivers will find Cycle One to be most advantageous to work under.

On any day a driver is driving in Canada, he or she must have had a period of 24 consecutive hours off duty in the preceding 14 days.

The driver's work shift is capped at 16-hours from the time the driver starts work after at least 8 hours off duty. For example, a driver who starts work at 6 a.m. in the U.S., and drives into Canada at 10 p.m., he or she can't drive any more regardless of the on-duty time or driving time during the work shift. Eight hours off duty resets the work-shift clock and opens up a fresh 16-hour work-shift window.

Log books kept by Canadian drivers under the new rules will comply with U.S. rules.

Motor Coach Canada has issued a series of publications that explain the new rules and will have

additional ones available this month. The newest publications are driver training materials, including a trainer guide and a bus driver handbook.

The Trainer Guide, including 10 Driver Handbooks, lesson plans, CD-ROM with slide presentation and other materials costs \$295 for Motor Coach Canada members and \$395 for nonmembers. Prices are in Canadian dollars and volume discounts are available. The Driver Handbook is a 40-page, 5½ by 8½-inch publication. In other words, it is log book size.

The Driver Handbook can be purchased separately. The price for MCC members is \$14.95 each for 10 or fewer copies; \$12.95 for 11-30 copies; \$10.95 for 31-50 copies, and \$9.95 each for more than 50 copies.

Nonmember prices are \$19.95 each for 10 or fewer; \$16.95 for 11-30 copies; \$14.95 each for 31-50 copies, and \$12.95 each for more than 50 copies. Again, prices are in Canadian dollars.

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'Chinatown' operator fined \$31,000 for rules violations

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has fined Fung Wah bus company more than \$31,000 for violating safety regulations after one of its coaches rolled over in September, injuring 48 passengers.

The FMCSA said Fung Wah, which is one of the largest cut-rate operators running between the Chinatowns of Boston and New York City, hired drivers who couldn't speak English and who regularly broke speed limits.

Both regulations were violated in the Sept. 5 bus wreck, as well as previous trips reviewed by officials, the agency said.

"Motorcoach operators must ensure that their operations are safe and their drivers are reliable," said FMCSA Administrator John H. Hill, in announcing the \$31,110 fine, which is substantially higher than most penalties meted out to rogue coach operators.

In May, the agency fined Fung Wah \$12,950 for speeding and failure to maintain proper driver records.

During the past three years, federal regulators reportedly have visited Fung Wah eight times, including the May review that resulted in the near-\$13,000 fine.

Regulators in Massachusetts and executives from Fung Wah met late last month to go over the development and implementation of a comprehensive safety plan for the long-troubled intercity operator.

In September, Fung Wah agreed to implement reforms and to submit to regular inspections to keep operations going in the wake of the rollover near Auburn, Mass.

Joe Mokrisky, a safety consultant hired by Fung Wah at the urging of regulators, told a Boston newspaper he is "quite confident" a comprehensive safety program will be in place soon.

He said the Auburn accident, which followed previous accidents and mishaps by Fung Wah, was "unfortunate" but will lead to positive changes.

Fung Wah will have an opportunity to contest the latest penalties in an agency proceeding.

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THE DOCKET

Small Ohio transit promises it will do no sinning in 2007

ASHTABULA, Ohio — The Ashtabula county transit agency says it will not be providing incidental charter service next year after the United Motorcoach Association challenged the agency's annual charter service notice.

In its "Notice of Intent to Provide Incidental Charter Service" published in mid-August, Ashtabula County Transportation System said that unless willing and able private operators were available it would provide charter service to various senior organizations and other groups to attend local community events. And, in some cases, it would provide the service at "no charge to the hosting agency, group or passengers."

In addition, the transit agency included a requirement that any private operators responding to its charter service notice must provide "an inventory listing of the vehicles owned, including seating capacity, and the days and hours available for the service."

In a letter to the transit agency,

Slow progress marks program for certified medical examiners

WASHINGTON — Plans by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to establish a National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners continue to make slow progress, with the next big step a formal rulemaking.

The agency says it intends to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking "soon," but it has not announced a concrete timetable. Once the rulemaking process is unveiled, there will be an opportunity for public comment.

The goal of FMCSA is to establish a list of medical profes-

UMA Vice President of Industry Relations Ken Presley pointed out that federal rules do not require a private operator to provide fleet-related information when it responds to a charter service notice, and that federal transit regulations prohibit agencies from providing free charter service.

In a response to Presley's letter, Susan Stoneman, project manager for the Ashtabula transit system, known as ACTS, admitted her agency "incorrectly" requested the equipment list from private operators, but she denied the agency has ever provided "free" charter service.

"Due to the response we did receive from the legal notice... from various charter companies, whether it was correct or not, ACTS no longer intends to provide 'incidental' charter service for 2007, and will refer all requests that may be received to the Yellow Pages," Stoneman wrote in her letter. She refused to publish a corrected notice, which Presley had requested.

sionals who are certified to conduct CDL medical exams. The list, with location and contact information, will be posted on the National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners Web site.

The FMCSA has projected that the program will be in place for training and certification sometime late next year.

Meanwhile, interested persons can visit the National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners Web site, where information about the program is posted. It is at: <http://www.nrcme.fmcsa.dot.gov>.

Court rejects CARB 'reflash' rule

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The state Superior Court here has overturned a regulation that required all commercial vehicles operating in the state with 1993- to 1998-model diesel engines be reprogrammed to provide more stringent emission controls.

The court said the 2005 mandatory "reflash" regulation by the California Air Resources Board amounted to an "illegal involuntary

recall" that went beyond the terms of a 1998 consent decree that engine manufacturers negotiated with CARB and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

CARB's "chip reflash regulation unconstitutionally impairs the obligations" of previously negotiated settlement agreements, and "constitutes an illegal involuntary recall," Judge Judy Holzer Hersher said in her decision.

Transits seek charter firms

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

Merced County, Calif. Deadline: Nov. 24, 2006. Write to: Larry Shankland, Transportation Manager, Merced County Transit Charter Bus Service, 880 Thornton Rd., Merced, CA 95340. Phone: (209) 385-7600.

Monterey County, Calif. Deadline: Nov. 30, 2006. Write to: William Morris, Contract Transportation Manager, One Ryan Ranch Road, Monterey, CA 93940. Phone: (831) 899-2558.

N.J. considers flying objects, biofuel bills

TRENTON, N.J. — The New Jersey legislature is considering a bill that would require biodiesel fuel be used in buses that are leased or operated by New Jersey Transit contractors, and another bill to protect coach drivers and other motorists from objects thrown from highway overpasses.

Many private coach operators in New Jersey provide contract services to the statewide public transit agency and could be impacted by the biodiesel fuel bill.

The proposed legislation, which has caught the attention of the Greater New Jersey Motorcoach Association, was introduced by Assemblyman Neil M. Cohen, deputy speaker of the N.J. General Assembly. Cohen's bill was referred to the assembly's transportation and public works committee.

Under the proposal, all buses operated by New Jersey Transit and buses owned by New Jersey Transit but leased or operated by providers of bus service, would have to use biodiesel — "to the maximum extent practicable."

The "flying objects" legislation, assembly bill No. 1350 and senate bill No. 1439, have been referred to appropriate committees.

FMCSA makes operator safety data easier to find; see how you measure up

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has made it easier to find and monitor the analysis the agency uses to gauge the relative safety fitness of over-the-road bus and truck operators, and the data it looks at in deciding which operators pose the greatest safety risk.

All of this critical information is part of the Safety Status Measurement System, or SafeStat for short.

The automated analysis system evaluates individual bus and truck operators in four "safety evaluation areas:" accidents, drivers, vehicles and safety management. The system uses up to 30 months of safety-related data to develop measures and indicators for the four safety evaluation areas.

All of the information is combined into an overall safety-status assessment, called a SafeStat score, for each bus and truck operator that has a USDOT number.

Access to SafeStat results can be found on the FMCSA Web site, but until now the information has not always been easy to locate. FMCSA has streamlined the process by adding new links.

These links take you directly to the passenger carrier safety data. It is no longer necessary to take a circuitous route through several other pages to get there. To find the SafeStat page:

1. Go to the FMCSA home page at www.fmcsa.dot.gov.

2. In the second column of the page, under the header "Public Outreach & Education," go to the third bullet. Click on the text following the bullet, "Bus/Passenger Carrier Safety" (designated with a red "New"). This takes you to a page titled "Bus/Passenger Carrier Safety."

3. On this page, go to the "Helpful Guides" section, which is in the left center of the page. Place your cursor in the text following the first bullet, "Find Safe Interstate Bus/Motorcoach Com-

panies in Your Area." Clicking on this text will take you to a page that says "Welcome to the Passenger Carrier Safety Website."

4. Click on the link that follows item No. 2: "Find interstate carriers in your area and evaluate their safety information." This takes you to a search page labeled "Passenger Carrier Safety."

On the left side of the page, there is a search-criterion column. You can search for a bus company using the zip code for operators in a specific area. Or, you can search for all the registered carriers in a state by using the drop-down box. Or, you can enter a specific carrier name in the text box if you know the name or part of the name of a company but are not sure where it is located.

For instance, if you type the name "Arrow" in the text box, the resulting list contains nine active companies in eight locations, including one in Canada.

When you find the company you are interested in, click on its name and the SafeStat data for the company appears. If you want additional details about a company, scroll to the bottom of the page where there is a box entitled "Licensing and Insurance Data." This box shows the amount of insurance a carrier has and provides a link to the FMCSA Motor Carrier Details page where you can check on the company's authority status and other information.

SafeStat also can be accessed by going to <http://ai.fmcsa.dot.gov>. Clicking on the "a&i" box in the middle of the page takes you to a second page titled "Welcome to A&I Online!"

Under the Main Menu list in the middle of the page is a large button labeled Passenger Carrier Safety. Clicking on this button takes you to the detailed SafeStat results for all interstate bus operators, along with their specific safety data (e.g. crashes, inspections, and the like).

Get it out of the FTA

Disagreements on critically important issues have become de rigueur at the ongoing negotiations to rewrite the federal charter bus regulations. (See Page One articles in this and the Oct. 1 issues).

Most of the attention (and disagreement) has rightly focused on the issue of coming up with a definition of charter service that public transit managers can both understand and adhere to.

A very important secondary issue is what happens when a rogue transit agency decides to ignore or flaunt the rules and a private operator is forced to file a complaint.

Currently, complaints are lodged with regional administrators of the Federal Transit Administration. There are 10 FTA regions, and this has produced an incredible lack of consistency in charter complaint decisions and rulings. And when an appeal of a regional decision is made, it goes to the FTA headquarters in Washington.

Even a blind man could see the flaws in this system, and they are many.

But the biggest problem, and the one the public transit negotiators like to ignore or give short shrift, is the blatant conflict of interest the entire FTA chain of command faces by being investigator, judge and jury in charter complaint cases and, at the same time, doling out millions of dollars to the transit agencies that have charter service complaints filed against them.

This conflict of interest is at

the root of the hardnosed stance some private-sector representatives have taken at the charter rules negotiations.

Having the dual, triple or quadruple role of investigator, judge, regulator and sugar daddy is fraught with potential problems, including the issues of fairness and objectivity.

It's also bad public policy. There's a natural or institutional hesitance on the part of an agency like the FTA to believe its own regulations, its own oversight, its own decision making, and its own stakeholders would be anything other than acceptable.

Using an independent third party to consider charter rules complaints is the logical choice and the one that would be smart policy. The FTA would totally avoid conflicts by having a third party assigned to conduct investigations and make decisions. The people who are sending out million-dollar checks will not be the people deciding charter rules cases.

The transit negotiators have rejected this idea, saying consistency of rulings and decisions would continue to be an issue, plus it could be time consuming and expensive.

Wrong. It wouldn't take a cadre of administrative law judges any time at all to get smart on the issues and begin rendering consistent, fair, honest, reliable and quick decisions. Besides, if the charter negotiations end up with clear new rules, the complaint process shouldn't get used much.

Bus broker responds to article

Note: The following was written in response to an article that appeared on the front page of the June 15 issue of Bus & Motorcoach News. It was submitted Nov. 1 for publication, and has been edited for space.

By Edward Telmany
President of Sales
US Coachways Inc.

Although our company, US Coachways, is a brokerage, the company grew from our family motorcoach company. For thirty-five years we operated a company that eventually owned 20 buses in the New York metropolitan area.

It is because of our personal knowledge of the challenges of operating a motorcoach business that we have been able to thrive as pioneers in the still young brokerage industry.

We believe that as brokers we are helping to greatly expand the industry by providing benefits to both the operators of motorcoach companies and to our customers. The greatest benefit we have provided operators is increased business.

Most of our affiliate operators receive work from us weekly. Many receive three jobs a week or more. Our largest affiliate operators have each received in excess of \$1 million annually in revenues generated by US Coachways.

Another great benefit we offer operators is billing. We collect the fee from the customer. We make sure all the signed contracts and papers needed from the customer are collected.

Advertising, we spend approximately \$900,000 annually in

advertising. Although this expense benefits both our company and our affiliates, it is entirely funded by US Coachways.

Finally, in the rare instance (about 0.5 percent) when a customer is unhappy with the service, it's US Coachways that handles the complaint and it is US Coachways that ultimately, if necessary, refunds the customer. Even if the customer complaint is the fault of the operator, it is the reputation of US Coachways that is affected.

Your story pointed out that the Better Business Bureau has received complaints about our company. Most of what our customers see and interact with are the operators we use. Most of the complaints made against our company are complaints about the quality of the equipment, complaints about drivers, and complaints about operator performance.

Very few complaints are about the way we run our office. These are complaints that in the past would have been lodged directly against the operator. This buffer zone between the customer and the operator is something that didn't exist prior to the advent of the brokerage industry.

I must also address some of the issues mentioned in your article. First, paying operators, we are the first to admit that in the past we had some problems with the speed and efficiency of our back-office operations. No one, including ourselves, could have predicted the phenomenal rate of growth our company has experienced.

Although we are extremely pleased and grateful, it was hard for us to keep up. To remedy this

problem we now pay all our affiliates in advance. Second, we do not have our employees calling operators that we never use for quotes.

Once we determine that the value offered by a particular operator is not for us, we don't waste our employees' time or our money having them make calls for nothing.

Finally, I want to address the perception that we are only concerned with price not quality. We pay in advance. We don't have the leverage of withholding payment to an operator who provides poor service or no service at all. Also, as was mentioned earlier, it is US Coachways' reputation that suffers when things don't go well.

For these reasons we are constantly striving to find the best combination of quality and price when it comes to our affiliates.

This is what some of our satisfied affiliates say about US Coachways:

Premier Coach (N.Y.): "They have sent us a high volume of work as promised, paid us on time, and have been fair in dealing with issues of operations and service."

Alvand Limousine Service (Calif.): "They have excellent customer service, reliable dispatching and a very quick pay system."

Aim Limousine Service (Texas): "I would definitely recommend them to any other business."

Alamo U.S.A. (Texas): "US Coachways is one of the most efficient and serious transportation partners we have in the United States."

Gold Coach (Calif.): "All of your employees are wonderful to deal with, there are never mistakes, and we are always paid on time."

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Ramblin' Express
Colorado Springs

Robert Hume
Travel Mates Trailways
Harrisonburg, Va.

Daryl G. Johnson
J & J Charters
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Dale Krapf
Krapf Coaches
West Chester, Pa.

Godfrey LeBron
Paradise Trailways
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Joan Libby
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Michael Neustadt
Coach Tours
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Jeff Polzien
Red Carpet Tours
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Tom Ready
Ready Bus Lines
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Brian Scott
Escot Bus Lines
Largo, Fla.

Michelle Silvestro
National Interstate Insurance Co.
Richfield, Ohio

T. Ralph Young
Young Transportation
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Cold weather fails to cool issue of 'hot diesel'

GRAIN VALLEY, Mo. — Even as the weather turns cold in many parts of the U.S., the issue of "hot" diesel fuel continues to stir interest.

Late last summer, a series of articles in the *Kansas City Star*, and reprinted in other newspapers, focused new attention on the old issue of how summer temperatures expand diesel so buyers receive less fuel when they fill up in hot weather than when it's cooler.

The *Star's* investigation noted that while the federal retail standard for fuel is 60 degrees, the law does not require retailers to adjust their pumps as fuel expands in the summertime.

When fuel temperatures are higher than 60 degrees and the fuel expands, buyers are receiving less fuel than they should because the pumps don't adjust, the newspaper reported, adding that Americans will pay \$2.3 billion more for fuel in 2006 than they would if pumps were adjusted to account for fuel expansion.

The Owner-Operator Indepen-

dent Drivers Association, a trucking group, and the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association Foundation Inc. have been outspoken advocates of requiring that fuel pumps adjust for fuel expansion.

John Siebert, a team leader with the foundation, says there are a number of myths related to the issue. Here's his take on the myths:

Myth No. 1: Fuel expands and contracts in a vehicle's fuel tanks, so what's the big deal?

Reality: The only time expansion and contraction has a direct effect on your wallet is at the retail pump. If the fuel is expanded at the pump, then you are getting fewer bangs for your buck.

Myth No. 2: In-ground tanks keep fuel at 60 degrees Fahrenheit, so there's no way the fuel can stay hot.

Reality: That was probably so 40 years ago, when fuel was stored in single-walled metal tanks and turnover was slow. Today's double-walled fiberglass tanks act like a thermos bottle. Fuel cools much more slowly now, over a much

longer time. Also, many large chains are selling fuel at a rate equal to an 8,000 gallon tanker per hour. The fuel is not in the tanks long enough to cool naturally.

Myth No. 3: Hot fuel is just a political ploy.

Reality: Unless there is a political party that has adopted a campaign plank stating, "Fuel retailers have the unalienable right to buy fuel at cool volumes and sell it at hot volumes even if this damages the U.S. consumer," this is a consumer issue, not a political one.

Myth No. 4: Cold fuel in the winter offsets the effects of warm summer fuel.

Reality: This may be true in Alaska, where the average fuel temperature is 47 degrees Fahrenheit. However, in 29 states, especially in the middle and southern

tiers, seasonal differences do not cancel each other out; summer is warmer than winter is colder.

From a list showing the economic effect of fuel temperature on each state, the bottom 10 states — where consumers are gaining because of cool fuel — are getting extra fuel that totals \$178 million in value. In the top 10 states, where consumers are being harmed buying hot fuel, the cost to them is an additional \$1.869 billion a year, and that's 10½ times the savings gained by those cool states. Summer and winter are not a wash in the United States.

Myth No. 5: The cost of fixing the problem far outweighs the benefits to American consumers.

Reality: Retrofitting retail fuel pumps in the United States would cost \$300 to \$1,000 a pump for adding the thermal probe and turn-

ing on the existing temperature-compensating function built into digital pumps. Using the \$1,000 per pump figure, that would be \$1.9 billion (or five days of profits for the five largest oil producers for the last quarter). It would not require replacement of all pumps at a cost of \$25 billion, as oil interests have said.

Temperature compensation at the pump would save American consumers \$2.3 billion a year, from now on. The fix is less than the amount consumers are being bilked in a single year, so how can they scare us by saying we'll have to pay more for fuel, when we already are and have been for decades?

All should be in favor of getting exactly what they pay for every time they fuel up their vehicles.

Report: Billions needed to fix bridges

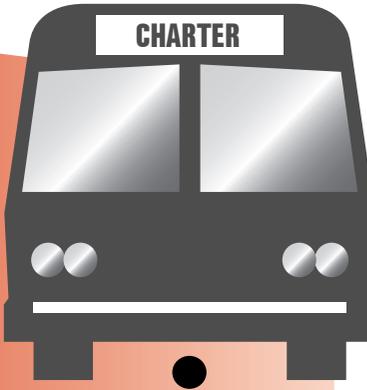
WASHINGTON — The Federal Highway Administration says aging bridges could cost up to \$63 billion to fix or replace.

One analysis showed that 26

percent of the nation's bridges need repair or are inadequate for current loads. Bridges in the Northeast are in the greatest need of repair.

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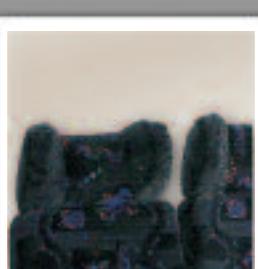
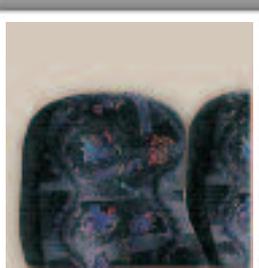
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LimoLiner expands Boston-New York City schedule

STOUGHTON, Mass. — On Nov. 1, LimoLiner officially expanded its schedule to five daily departures each way between Boston and New York City on Mondays and Fridays, and a minimum of four departures from each city the other weekdays.

On Saturdays and Sundays, LimoLiner typically operates three daily departures from each city.

LimoLiner is a luxury motorcoach service that marked its third anniversary in business last month. Its 28-seat coaches operate between midtown Manhattan and Boston's

historic Back Bay area.

"We're pleased to respond to our customers' requests for additional departures," said LimoLiner CEO Peter Pescatore. "LimoLiner's passenger base has grown rapidly since our launch as more people experience the service."

LimoLiner coaches make the 190-mile trip between the cities in an average of four-and-a-half hours, with one stop. The fare is \$79 one way, with discounts offered for same-day round trips.

While bad weather or traffic jams occasionally result in delays,

LimoLiner coaches arrive at their destinations on schedule 93 percent of the time, according to Pescatore.

Each coach offers constant cell phone reception and provide high-speed wireless Internet service, live satellite TV and satellite radio.

"Typically, if we have 15 or 18 people on board, three-quarters of them will be working at their laptops," Pescatore said. The coaches also have an onboard attendant who supplies beverages, snacks and light meals. The \$79 price includes the snack service.

Cell phone use on the coaches is confined to the rear three rows, which are separated from the rest of the seating by the vehicle's galley and restroom.

Pescatore said LimoLiner customers tend to be from small and mid-market companies, especially creative design, financial services and legal firms.

Preliminary plans are being made to add two or three more coaches in the next year or two. "We want to get to a place where we're leaving comfortably every two hours from early morning through early evening," he said.

Silver Slipper Casino opens in Mississippi

LAKESHORE, Miss. — The Silver Slipper Casino, the first casino to be built completely on land along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, opened here Nov. 9.

The 100,000-square-foot casino has more than 30,000-square-feet of gambling, with more than 1,000 slot machines and 26 table games, including blackjack, craps, roulette, mini-baccarat, flop poker and three-card poker.

The facility also has three restaurants and a show bar, featuring live entertainment year round. The Jubilee Buffet offers casual dining, the Blue Bayou Bar & Grill is a contemporary upscale bar and grill, and the Palm Court Café offers a 24-hour quick-service menu and take-out service.

The Casino Show Bar will feature local favorite Brooks "Daddy Man" Hubbard performing nightly through the end of the year.

The Silver Slipper Casino is south of U.S. 90/State Route 607 on the beach in Hancock County at 5000 South Beach Blvd. It is the closest casino to the Mississippi/Louisiana state line.

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Commercial insurance market softens, some rates dip

WASHINGTON — Now for a little good news.

A nationwide survey of insurance agents and brokers says the commercial property/casualty market is continuing to soften, with indications that some insurers are finding an appetite for business in which they previously were not interested.

Six out of 10 commercial insurance brokers and agents responding to the survey said their small accounts experienced decreases in renewal premiums during the third quarter.

And three quarters of the brokers who handle large and medium-sized accounts reported their customers had drops in premium rates. The majority of the decreases were in the 1-10 percent range for small, medium and large accounts, the brokers said.

An analysis of the survey results by Lehman Brothers showed that the average premium rates for all commercial accounts decreased 5.3 percent during the third quarter. The Lehman analysis showed the average small commercial account premium down 3.4 percent, the average medium account premium down 5.1 percent, and the average large account premium down 7.3 percent during the third quarter.

As premium prices fall and underwriters become hungry for

new business, the agents and brokers said that insurers are starting to be more aggressive in pricing and more liberal in policy terms.

At the same time, a survey by The Council of Insurance Agents

& Brokers found that U.S. coastal property and catastrophe-prone risks remain costly and hard to place. Wind, flood and property capacity remain tight, while deductibles and exclusions are on

the rise.

Some carriers are expanding their definition of coastal property to business within 60-70 miles of the seacoast.

For the full survey results, go to

www.ciab.com/marketsurveyQ306.

The council represents insurance brokers and agents who annually write more than 80 percent of the commercial property/casualty premiums in the United States.



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Minn. operators get Oct. shock: diesel shortage

ROCHESTER, Minn. — Motorcoach operators and truckers in Minnesota were hit with spot fuel shortages late last month, with supplies of diesel fuel either out or nearly so in Winona, Mankato and Rochester. Terminals also were reported closed in Minneapolis.

Press reports from around the state indicated there was fuel but it wasn't evenly distributed.

Distributors and others said the shortage was brought on by increased demand by farm equipment during the fall harvest, the ongoing transition to ultra-low-sulfur diesel fuel, and a changing mix of products coming out of refineries.

One coach operator said another factor was an increase in diesel fuel prices on the wholesale level that retailers couldn't immediately pass along because of competition. A "shortage" developed as a means of getting prices up.

Meanwhile, some operators in Minnesota are concerned about a potentially more lasting problem: finding enough cold-weather-tolerant diesel fuel for this winter.

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James JeBran of Trans-Bridge Lines dies

BETHLEHEM, Pa. — James J. JeBran, who seemed destined to become a grocer but instead became a successful and highly regarded motorcoach operator, died here Oct. 29, after battling cancer. He was 81.

Mr. JeBran was owner and chairman of Bethlehem-based Trans-Bridge Lines Inc., Trans-Bridge Tours Inc., and Delaware River Coach Lines Inc.

Born about 15 miles from Bethlehem in Phillipsburg, N.J., Mr. JeBran's parents emigrated from Syria and he was raised speaking Syrian. He learned English in school.

As a boy during the Depression, he worked for his uncle, a fruit peddler. After high school, he went to work for A&P, the grocery chain.

In 1943, Mr. JeBran joined the Navy and served in the Pacific on the USS Wasp, a highly decorated aircraft carrier. As a radioman, Mr. JeBran received a number of Navy citations and ribbons for his service.

After the war, he returned to the A&P, eventually becoming a manager. In 1951, he married Camille Ferraro. The couple celebrated their

55th wedding anniversary in June.

After his marriage, Mr. JeBran, his brother and other partners started a home fuel oil company in Phillipsburg. At the urging of his father-in-law, A.J. Ferraro, Mr. JeBran joined the Ferraro family bus business, Trans-Bridge Lines. Working in maintenance, he learned the bus business while continuing to operate the fuel oil company.

In 1959, Mr. JeBran and his brother-in-law, Joe Ferraro, took over operation of Tri-City Coach Lines, a small charter company in Bethlehem. Later, they began running school buses.

Experience gained operating tours in the mid-1960s eventually lead to the formation of Trans-Bridge Tours.

In 1981, Trans-Bridge Lines and Tri-City Coach Lines combined operations in Bethlehem in a new facility. The merged company was operated by John and Joe Ferraro, and Mr. JeBran and Camille. The business expanded to include daily runs to New York City from Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley.

After John and Joe Ferraro

retired, Mr. JeBran, Camille, and their sons took over the operation in 1990. Under Mr. JeBran's leadership, the company purchased West Hunterdon Transit of Frenchtown, N.J., and Jim Thorpe Tours of Walnutport, Pa.

One of Mr. JeBran's proudest industry moments came when he took delivery of the first two MCI Renaissance coaches (now the MCI E4500). Mr. JeBran had urged senior MCI executives to develop an upscale, European-style coach.

Mr. JeBran also was an advocate for and helped push development of bus terminals in eastern Pennsylvania communities.

Active in community organizations, Mr. JeBran was a past member of the Bethlehem Kiwanis Club and served as its president; the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce; the United Cerebral Palsy Association; the Lion's Club of Phillipsburg and the Notre Dame Church of Bethlehem.

Mr. JeBran also served on the boards of the Pennsylvania and American bus associations. He and Camille donated a 1987 MCI MC9B to the Museum of Bus



James JeBran

Transportation in Hershey, Pa.

Mr. JeBran was a devoted fan of the Philadelphia Phillies and Eagles, but golf was his No. 1 passion. He was an avid and accomplished player, having won a number of tournaments. He shot a "hole-in-one" three years ago.

In addition to his widow, Mr. JeBran is survived by his sons, Thomas and James, who are executives at Trans-Bridge Lines; a daughter, Janet; his brother, Charles; his sister, Lena, and six grandchildren.

Memorials have been established with the VNA Hospice of St. Luke's of Bethlehem, 2455 Black River Rd., Bethlehem, PA 18015, and the American Cancer Society, Lehigh Valley Unit, 3893 Adler Place, Suite 170, Bethlehem, PA 18017.

People

George Taylor has been appointed director of **Caterpillar Power Systems North America**, Cat's on-highway engines unit.

Formerly the marketing manager for the Caterpillar Asia Pacific marketing division in Singapore, Taylor replaces *Jim McReynolds*, who now will lead the Caterpillar global paving division.

In his new position, Taylor has primary responsibility for all aspects of the on-highway engine business, including line-haul, over-the-road and vocational buses, trucks and RVs.

Taylor joined the company in 1998 as manager of strategic planning for Caterpillar Business Development Services.

Friedrich Baumann has been appointed president of **Detroit Diesel Remanufacturing**. In the position, Baumann will be responsible for the overall vision, strategy and operations of Freightliner's remanufacturing business, including the company's five remanufacturing locations throughout North America.

Baumann succeeds *Jim Morrow*, who retired after nearly 40 years with Detroit Diesel.

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Driver shortage

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

then buy more buses without first having the right people in place," he said. "If I could find some more I might be able to expand a bit."

He said a steady stream of applicants usually comes to his door, but too few of them have the experience and the attitude that he likes to have in his driver pool.

"Although we're not at the point where we're struggling to cover things, we could use some extra drivers right now," he said. "It's just that the right quality individuals don't come around every day."

Jack Wigley of All Aboard America in Mesa, Ariz., said the driver shortage had worsened so much over the past few years that he had to develop new strategies to meet the challenge. Six months ago he increased driver pay by 23 percent, upped a daily bonus to \$15 from \$10, began paying the bonus monthly rather than quarterly and started working harder to bring company managers and drivers closer together.

"Things have pretty much calmed down since we made the

changes," he said.

Before taking the action, he had to use mechanics and office personnel as drivers to keep his fleet of 85 coaches on the road. "When that happens you just turn your organization upside down," he stressed. "Those people already have jobs and responsibilities and if you pull them out it just backs up the funnel no matter what."

The old squeeze

Randal Charlebois of Premier Coach Co. in Colchester, Vt., said that although he pays drivers above the industry average, attracting drivers remains extremely difficult, and the situation seems to be worsening.

"Across the board, the pay still is not what it should be," he said. "But unfortunately the customer is only willing to pay up to a certain threshold and that affects what a driver can make and therefore it is not as an attractive position if a perspective employee is looking at different options."

Still, he said, he has been able to find enough part-time drivers so he has not had to put his mechanics and office workers behind the steering wheels of his 18 buses.

"We have done everything we can to avoid it because as soon as your do you deplete your infrastructure and can't handle problems when they come up," he said.

Jones, general manager of Blue Grass Tours, said he's not too hot about using mechanics and office personnel as drivers either, but it is the only way he has been able to keep up with business. "We have two mechanics who drive and right now we're training a driver to work in the office, but he will be retaining his certification so he can drive, too," he said.

To keep his drivers happy so they are more inclined to stick around, he gives them a \$30 daily meal allowance even though many of them get free meals when they're on the road. "It gives them a chance to earn a little extra money," he said.

Joshua Bennett of Capital Trailways and Rohrer Tour and Charter in Harrisburg, Pa., said because drivers are so difficult to find these days, he concentrates heavily on retaining the ones the company hires. "There aren't that many to choose from out there so you don't want to lose any that you bring in," he noted. "If you can

keep them for six months, they probably will be with you for a long time."

Helping hands

To encourage them to stay, he has an extensive mentoring program in which veteran drivers take new recruits under their wings and bring them along slowly so they are comfortable once they begin making regular runs. "People feel more comfortable getting into a job if you hold their hand for a while," he added. "If they find it too complicated or too involved, then they generally leave you."

While the driver shortage is widespread, some carriers have yet to experience it.

"We've never really had a shortage and we don't have one now," boasts Dennis Prigge of Discovery Coach., which operates 10 coaches in Sheboygan, Wis.

Although he can't say for sure why he has been so fortunate, he thinks a key factor is that he also runs a school bus operation and many of those drivers are anxiously waiting in the wings to move over to the charter side where they can earn more money.

"Or, maybe we just have a real-

ly good company," he added.

Tom Miller of Antelope Express in Lancaster, Calif., said location — 60 miles from Los Angeles — has played a key role in his airport shuttle and charter company not facing any shortage of drivers for the dozen vehicles he operates.

"We have an advantage because most of our drivers want to work local and they take less pay to do that," he said. "If they want to work for another company they probably would have to go into Los Angeles and they don't want to do that."

No young people

Blame for the shortage varies widely, although most operators say a sharp drop off of young people coming into the industry is a major contributor.

"I never have anyone in their 20s come in and apply for a job," said Hotard. "Because of the minimum standards that are in place, when a person reaches the age of 25 they're usually into another career by then."

Most of his job applicants, he said, are in their 50s or early 60s.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13 ▶

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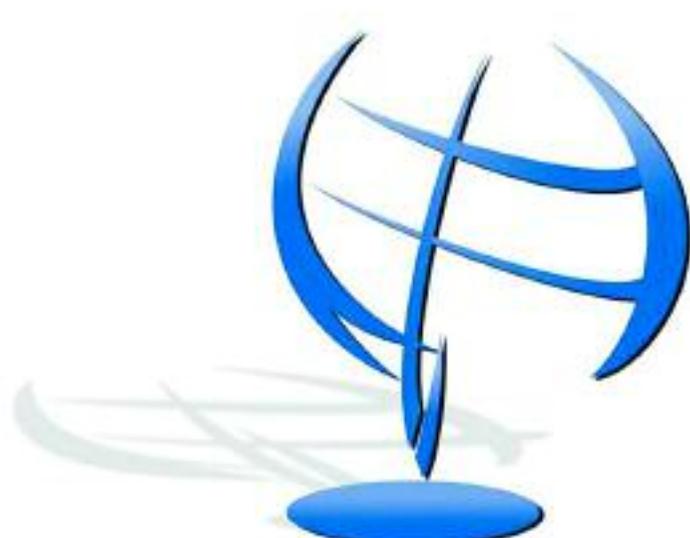
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Driver shortage

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

“Driving is a very demanding job and young people don’t want to do it for \$25,000 or \$30,000 a year when they can do something else and make more money,” emphasized Jones.

The rising age of drivers also has resulted in an increase in the number of part-time workers over those who work full time, which has put a pinch on scheduling, according to Charlebois. “The older

drivers usually want to work only part time and that means you are more subject to their availability,” he said.

Still, older drivers could be the best bet for solving the driver shortage.

“It is just easier to attract someone who can take advantage of an early retirement or has an opportunity to get out of a job they have been working in for the last 20 years and are not happy,” said Hotard. “That’s where our best opportunity to attract operators are.”

Truckers face driver shortage, too

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — A large survey by the American Transportation Research Institute, the trucking industry’s research arm, reveals that finding and keeping drivers are two of the three-most critical issues facing U.S. truckers.

The driver shortage, diesel fuel issues and retaining drivers topped the list in ATRI’s survey of more than 4,000 trucking industry executives.

Aside from the challenges of driver shortages and retention and diesel fuel, other Top 10 issues among truckers are:

- Hours of service
- Congestion
- Government regulations
- Highway infrastructure
- Tort reform
- Tolls/highway funding
- Environmental issues

A copy of the survey results is available at www.atri-online.org.



No. 2,000. The owners of Capitol Bus Lines in West Columbia, S.C., celebrate the delivery of the 2,000th Motor Coach Industries’ J4500 coach — with MCI executives — at the MCI plant in Winnipeg. Front row from left: Capitol Bus Lines’ President Charles ‘Buddy’ Young Jr., Mary Young, Heather Hook, Matthew Young, and Debbie

Sayer, MCI director of sales operations support. MCI executives in the back row, from left: Dayna Toth, sales; Shane Sutyla, superintendent the coach finishing facility; Gene Hall, vice president of sales; Rob Perry, vice president and general manager of operations; and Brent Danielson, manager of business development.



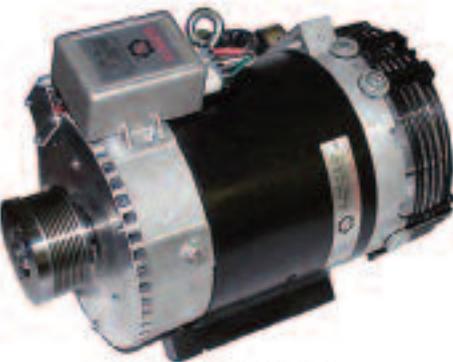
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Both models equipped for existing saddle mount brackets.

UMA offers charter opportunities to members

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The United Motorcoach Association plans to begin posting nationwide charter opportunities on the members-only section of its Web site.

Ken Presley, vice president of industry relations at UMA, said the service is designed to provide new business for UMA members.

“Postings will be made each day and UMA members will have the ability to log in and see any new charter opportunities that are available,” said Presley. “The postings will automatically be removed after a (few) days so we can keep all the information current.”

UMA is obtaining the charter information from a specialized service and sorting through it to find the best opportunities for members.

The Web postings will include dates of the charter, logistical information, number of coaches required, and other key information.

The service should be up and running by the time readers receive this issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

The address of the UMA Web site is www.uma.org.

There is a members' only link on the left side of the splash page. Click on that link.

Back-saver training for bus drivers

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — An injury prevention training program designed specifically for motorcoach drivers is now available for members of the United Motorcoach Association via the Internet.

The “Watch Your Back” training program is being offered to UMA members through Web portal www.MotorcoachSafety.com.

It can reduce the potential for injuries ... by up to 25 percent, says Pete Van Beek, president and CEO of Training Alternatives Group of Montgomery, Texas. TAG specializes in interactive online training for fleet drivers. Key topics in the program include:

- Common back injury causes
- Techniques for safe lifting
- Luggage/baggage concerns
- Alternative lifting methods

Van Beek says Internet-based training is easier than most people think. “It’s easy to operate, even for those with limited computer skills.

“It also provides maximum flexibility for employees to take the course anywhere, anytime and at their own pace,” said Van Beek.

The Web training program documents student progress, including attendance and test scores.

The MotorcoachSafety Web site provides a free demonstration.

For more information, go to the Web site, or e-mail pete@ddcusa.com, or call (281) 583-4900, ext. 1.

Speed limiters are requested

WASHINGTON — A second federal agency has been asked to require that all new over-the-road trucks be built with speed limiters that wouldn't allow the vehicles to travel faster than 68 miles per hour.

The petition was filed with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration by the American Trucking Associations

In September, a group of trucking companies joined with a public interest safety group to petition the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to require electronic speed governors on all over-the-road trucks and that they be set at no more than 68 miles per hour. (See Oct. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

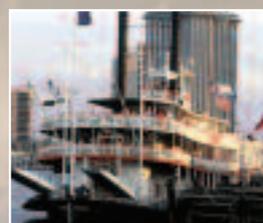
The trucking companies and the ATA say their speed-limiting initiatives are aimed at reducing the amount of crashes on the nation's highways.



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UMA United Motorcoach Association

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Visit www.motorcoachexpo.com to register today!

MOTORCOACH EXPO 2007

FMCSA chief Hill speaks at Expo

NEW ORLEANS — John Hill, administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, will speak at Motorcoach Expo 2007 here in January.

Hill, who took over the agency that regulates over-the-road bus and truck safety in August, will speak at 10 a.m. on the first full day of Expo, Jan. 18.

He should have lots to talk about.

Several new regulations have been drafted by Hill's agency and they are being reviewed by the White House Office of Management and Budget. The regulations include a proposal related to elec-

tronic on-board recorders for hours-of-service compliance, medical certification as part of the commercial driver license, new-entrant safety rules, and the supporting documents motor carriers must use to verify driver logs.

Hill also can be expected to talk about coach industry safety.

In recent speeches he has warned about a "plateauing" of fatalities related to commercial vehicle accidents. Given the anticipated growth in commercial transportation, along with greater congestion, experts think fatalities are likely to increase "unless we see a reinvigorating of safety initiatives,"

Hill told a recent audience.

One of the safety efforts Hill is pushing is the FMCSA's Comprehensive Safety Analysis 2010. Through the initiative, the FMCSA wants to achieve more effective oversight of commercial motor vehicle safety through contact with more companies and drivers; improved data to better identify high-risk carriers and drivers, and a wider range of interventions to correct high-risk behavior.

That could mean the FMCSA and states would look at 80,000 to 100,000 carriers a year rather than the 10,000 to 20,000 they currently review.

Maintenance Interchange has new twist

NEW ORLEANS — The Maintenance Interchange will be front and center at Motorcoach Expo in January, but the popular event will have a new twist for '07.

This valuable, no-holds-barred exchange allows motorcoach owners, managers and maintenance personnel to openly discuss the industry's toughest maintenance-related issues.

In advance of the program, participants propose the maintenance topics to be discussed at the Interchange. Once at the session, the participants provide suggestions for solving the maintenance problems that were provided ahead of time, as well as those that surface during the day-long session.

In the past, operators and maintenance personnel have found the Maintenance Interchange to be extremely helpful because of its focus on problem-solving.

To facilitate the discussion, the session is designed as an operator-to-operator, mechanic-to-mechanic exchange, with no vendors, manufacturers, suppliers or sales personnel invited.

Kevin Whitworth of Whitworth Bus in Miamisburg, Ohio, near Dayton, moderates the Interchange, keeps the program moving and hogs the rowdies.

The 9th annual Maintenance Interchange will be from 9 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 18, during the Solution Sessions phase of Expo.

On Friday, Jan. 19, there will be a first-time addendum to the Interchange, a maintenance competition. From 8:30-10:30 a.m., Interchange attendees will have an opportunity to compete for prizes on the Expo show floor.

The Interchange is free for Motorcoach Expo registrants; a fee is charged for those not registered for the show.

To register for the Maintenance Interchange and Expo, call the United Motorcoach Association at (800) 424-8262, or go to www.motorcoachexpo.com.

Those registering are strongly encouraged to suggest their toughest maintenance issues. Others attending the Interchange may

Special events at Expo mix business, pleasure

NEW ORLEANS — Motorcoach Expo is widely known for having the largest trade show space of any event in the industry and for attracting the industry's biggest and best crowds.

But it's also known for its hospitality events, activities that remind attendees that business and pleasure need not be mutually exclusive.

Starting with the show's Welcome Reception on Wednesday, Jan. 17, attendees can take advantage of open-bar cocktails and great food from 6 to 9 p.m. Whether individuals choose to relax after their travel to New Orleans with a drink, or mingle with industry movers and shakers from across the country, the Welcome Reception at the New Orleans Marriott on Canal Street will provide an early reminder of just how important the exposition can be.

After a long day of Solution Sessions that will help an operator's business go to new places, attendees will have an opportunity to be the first to have a look at the biggest show floor that Expo has seen in six years.

From 4:30 to 7:15 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 18, everyone will be able

to network with industry vendors, colleagues and other attendees while enjoying cocktails and snacks on the Expo floor.

Finally, on Friday evening, starting at 6:30, the fourth Annual United Motorcoach Association Vision Awards banquet will be at the Marriott. This one-of-a-kind event celebrates the industry's greatest innovators — big and small, and caps off the Expo — in style.

After the awards ceremony and a sumptuous meal, guests can continue to network with a cocktail, hand-rolled cigar or something from the dessert buffet, while enjoying a breathtaking view of New Orleans' French Quarter from the pool deck of the Marriott.

With New Orleans and its rich cultural tapestry and outstanding hospitality as a backdrop, Motorcoach Expo and its events will be an experience like no other.

At Expo 2007, attendees will discover first hand just how powerful a handshake and a smile can be to their success. Making friends, reuniting with old ones and forging dynamic business relationships is what Motorcoach Expo and these special events are all about.

have dealt with that or similar issues and can offer suggestions for solving the problem.

As one attendee said last year:

"The Maintenance Interchange is a great opportunity to speak frankly about the service problems that plague us all."

Expo Exhibitor News

Keller unveils drugs, booze testing service

NEENAH, Wis. — J.J. Keller & Associates, the motor carrier regulatory services and publishing company, says it is now a third-party administrator for drug and alcohol testing.

The company said the new service will simplify the process of establishing and managing a controlled-substances testing program.

The service is an addition to the long list of offerings under J.J. Keller's umbrella Drug & Alcohol Program Management service. Also offered are such DOT- and non-DOT-related services as:

- Company policy review/development
- Drug and alcohol file auditing and retention
- Drug pool management
- Random selections

- Statistical reporting
- Compliance monitoring
- Training and advisory services
- Post-accident testing

Keller will provide a free, no-obligation consultation to review a company's drug and alcohol testing program or guidance on establishing one.

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

Caterpillar adds C13 compressor

MOSSVILLE, Ill. — Caterpillar is introducing a new air compressor for its C13 engine, which is the model marketed to the motorcoach industry.

Cat says the new 270 air compressor is designed to provide cleaner air, plus greater reliability, significantly less vibration and quieter operation than current models.

The new air compressor will be available on all Cat C13 engines

next year.

The Cat 270 has two cylinders instead of one, resulting in better balance and producing one-fourth the vibration.

Noise is up to two decibels lower than competitive models, resulting in a much more comfortable and quiet ride, according to Mike Powers, product development manager for Caterpillar On-Highway Engines.

The new air compressor also should provide up to twice the reliability of current air compressors, says the company.

Reliability and durability also are enhanced by a cast-iron piston that is stronger than the aluminum piston used in many competitive models.

The 270 will offer better oil control than competitive air compressors, reducing "oil carryover" which degrades cleanliness of the air supply, the company noted. More information is available at www.cattruckengines.com.

Alcoa introduces 'brighter' wheels

CLEVELAND — Alcoa Wheel Products has introduced a version of its Dura-Bright wheels that use a new technology to make the wheels 53 percent more reflective, with 74 percent more image clarity.

Starting last month, Alcoa Wheel Products began transitioning from original Dura-Bright wheels to new Dura-Bright wheels with XBR technology.

Alcoa says the XBR system penetrates the wheel, allowing the shine to last years longer. Plus, brake dust, grime and oil residue wash off quickly and easily with a spray of soap and water, according to Alcoa.

The XBR technology also combats liquid road de-icers and chemicals.

For more information, call (800) 242-9898 or go to www.alcoawheels.com/durabrightxbr.

ASA picks LTM for West Coast

ELKHART, Ind. — ASA, a manufacturer and supplier of mobile electronics and observation systems to the motorcoach and bus industry, has named LTM Electronics of Huntington Beach, Calif., as the authorized Jensen and Voyager distributor, serving the states west of the Rocky Mountains.

Under the arrangement, LTM Electronics is responsible for the sale and promotion of Jensen heavy-duty audio-and-video equipment and Voyager observation/back-up camera systems to bus operators and fleets.

Voyager systems, which include split-screen, blind-zone, tri-view and multi-camera features, enable drivers to increase road visibility and safety.

For information, go to www.LTM1.com, or call (714) 841-0499.

Charter rules

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

out of any new definition, while the transit operators want it to remain as part of the official federal definition.

The private operators maintain that transit agencies routinely snag lucrative charter work — illegally, they contend — for major special events by extending regular routes to the event sites, adding a number of extra buses to the routes and then claiming to run them “open door,” while passing up people waiting at regular stops in favor of going directly to the events.

“Those actually are charters and should be done by private carriers, not public transit,” noted Ken Presley, vice president of the United Motorcoach Association, who attended the October meetings as an observer. “They do it all of the time and it’s not right.”

Transit operators, however, contend the buses they add to the extended routes are available to people not attending the event, which makes them “nonexclusive” runs and qualifies them as public transit operations.

‘Let’s go home’

Daniel Duff of the American Public Transportation Association made a surprise push at the outset of the meeting to bypass the critical issue by insisting that the federal mandate for negotiations did not include writing a new definition of charter and the exercise should not be part of the negotiations.

“Then let’s just all go home,” responded American Bus Association Senior Vice President Clyde Hart, who received acknowledging

nods from others on the private side as he pushed his chair away from the table.

FTA Chief Counsel David Horner quickly jumped in and reminded Duff that the group agreed at the outset to write a new definition of charter. “The process won’t work without it,” he said.

Horner is a key player in the talks because he will supervise the writing of the charter rules if the responsibility devolves to the FTA after next month’s meeting.

David Coburn, an attorney representing Coach USA, urged negotiators to continue to discuss possible definitions, saying it would be beneficial even if an agreement could not be reached. “If we can’t agree then the FTA will know the views of both sides,” he suggested.

The issue resurfaced the following day when Duff suggested that the private side actually was trying to expand the charter rules by pushing for a new definition of charter and eliminating the word “exclusive” from it.

Clarity wanted

“We’re not trying to expand them, we’re trying to clarify them,” responded UMA President and Chief Executive Victor Parra, adding that clarification of the charter rules, including the definition of charter, is not only what the private carriers want but what some transit officials say they need, too.

Parra said he had just returned from a meeting of rural transit operators in the Pacific Northwest where many of them complained that the existing rules are confusing and urged that they be reworked so they are easier to understand and follow.

tions. Carroll says the provincial regulations are expected to closely match the federal rules, with only minor deviations.

Since the new rules were officially published one year ago this month, they have not been modified, but the federal government has acknowledged that some of the rules are unreasonable and said they will be modified by amendments that will be passed some time after the implementation date of Jan 1.

All provinces have agreed no fines will be levied during the interim.

For example, the new federal rules say the driver must carry “supporting documents,” meaning road and bridge tolls, fuel receipts and the like for the previous 14 days.

Motor Coach Canada and trucking groups argued that this was an unrealistic requirement and would create hardship for drivers and carriers. The government

Transit negotiators later said they would be willing to discuss different meanings of the term “exclusive use,” but the words would have to remain part of any definition of charter.

“We’re not going to buy off on ‘exclusive use’ because every time there’s a question, we lose,” noted Hart.

The two sides also appear seriously split over how formal complaints of charter rule violations are adjudicated.

Currently, complaints are decided internally by the FTA, a process that transit operators want to retain. Private carriers, however, want the cases to go before administrative law judges, who they see as third parties, not affiliated with the FTA and public transit.

FTA preference

Horner noted that the FTA likely would prefer using administrative law judges because it would relieve the agency’s staff of the burden of investigating and hearing complaints. Appeals, he said, then could go to the FTA.

Other issues left unsettled were the possible need for the FTA to issue advisory opinions before a questioned charter job could be done by a transit agency, and the maximum number of hours that transit operators could use in a single year to transport government officials on trips that do not involve transit matters.

The negotiators did reach accord on a provision in the rules that would encourage, but not mandate, that the two sides try to settle their differences over suspected violations before a formal complaint is filed.

agreed to change it by limiting the requirement to the current trip.

Also, the federal rules will be amended to say that the eight-hour core rest period that must be served before beginning a new work shift cannot be taken in a bus (or truck) unless it has a sleeper.

However, a driver can still log waiting/resting time spent in the bus as “off-duty” during the work shift if the carrier has relieved the driver of responsibility for the bus and contents.

Another change regulators have agreed to make — as a result of concerns expressed by Motor Coach Canada — is that driver travel time/repositioning off-duty provision (when traveling as a passenger at the direction of the carrier), will not be restricted to just travel in a bus or truck, but rather any mode of travel. This makes Canadian law consistent with U.S. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulation Part 395.1(j).

Separately, the Canadian Coun-

The transit side called for reconciliation efforts to be mandated so a formal complaint could possibly be avoided, while the private operators said such a requirement would simply stretch out the time it would take to adjudicate a complaint.

Horner told the group that such “grass-roots” efforts to resolve a complaint have not worked well in the past, and making them mandatory would not help. “They don’t have a very good track record of working,” he said. “That’s why we’re here.”

No hiding

Agreement also was reached on a requirement that the names of private motorcoach carriers who file complaints against transit agencies be identified in the formal filings, even if the actual filing is done by one of the industry’s trade associations.

The carriers had expressed concern that a transit agency might retaliate against them by steering possible charter work to other companies if they knew the name of the complaining company.

Horner sided with the transit operators, saying that the name of the company alleging that a transit agency took charter work away from them is crucial to the case. “If they’re not willing to stand behind their complaint, then they shouldn’t bring it,” he said.

Under the negotiated rule-making process being used by the public and private bus sectors, issues that are agreed by both sides will be written into the rules, while those left unsettled will be determined by FTA lawyers and included in the rules.

cil of Motor Transport Administrators, the association of Canadian federal and provincial motor vehicle departments, is making available — via the Internet — what it calls an Application Guide on the new hours’ requirements to help commercial vehicle operators understand the changes.

Go to: <http://www.ccmta.ca/english/produstandservices/publications/reportcentre.cfm#hoursofservice>. There are no spaces between any of the letters or symbols.

Once you get to the Web address, the next step is not obvious. Click on the words printed in red: “CCMTA Application Guide.”

The guide, which is primarily in a question-and-answer format and provides answers to more than 150 questions, gives examples of logs that will be compliant with the new rules.

Carroll of Motor Coach Canada can be contacted at (416) 229-6622, ext. 230.

Coach sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Make and model preferences of new-coach buyers remained fairly static during the third quarter, compared to the second quarter, although a couple of coaches swapped places on the best-selling list.

The top three-selling coaches remained the MCI J4500, the MCI D4500 and the Van Hool C2045. Switching places at Nos. 4 and 5 were the MCI D4505 and the Prevost H3-45, while the Prevost X3-45 moved up to No. 6, topping the Setra S 417 at No. 7.

The last time Prevost had two models among the industry’s six best-selling coaches was in the first quarter of 2005.

The third quarter continued the trend of operators diversifying their selection of models. In the first quarter of 2005, the top-three models took 80 percent of the market. By the third quarter of this year, that percentage had dipped to 59 percent.

Sales of European-made coaches — Van Hools and Setras — accounted for nearly 23 percent of the market in the third quarter, up from 20.6 percent a year ago.

Darn few 40/41-foot coaches, 18, were sold in the third quarter, or roughly 3.3 percent of the total market.

Canadian operators purchased 10 percent of the coaches sold in the third quarter, up from 7.5 percent in the third period of last year.

Sales of conversion shells remained relatively weak, however. A total of 64 were sold during the third quarter, or 11.9 percent of the market. That compares with 69 conversion shells sold in the third quarter of last year, or 16.1 percent of the market.

The percentage of coaches delivered with ZF-AS Tronic transmissions dipped to 31.4 percent of the market in the third quarter, from 35.8 percent in the second quarter. A year ago, ZF’s were installed in 29.4 percent of all coaches delivered in the third quarter.

The AS Tronic’s market share in the overall motorcoach sector continues to be restricted because the ZF automatic stick-shift transmission is not being spec’d for conversion shells or buses purchased by government agencies.

Questions about *National Bus Trader* quarterly and annual sales reports should be directed to Plachno at (815) 946-2341, or e-mail lplachno@busmag.com.

Oh, Canada

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

To order the publications, go to www.motorcoachcanada.com. Look for the publications link. Or, call the association’s Toronto office at (416) 229-9305, Calgary regional office at (403) 210-1054, or Fredericton regional office at (506) 451-6400.

Motor Coach Industries helped underwrite the cost of publishing the handbook and training guide.

While Jan. 1 is the implementation date for the new hours rules, the 10 Canadian provinces and 3 territories have yet to publish their provincial/territorial regulations that are expected to closely mirror the federal regulation.

Provincial/territorial regulations are required because the federal government has no enforcement mandate or enforcement resources, and provincial enforcement agencies do the enforcement and set fines under their regula-

State approves rate increase for Hawaiian coach operators

HONOLULU — State officials in Hawaii, that last bastion of complete bus industry regulatory oversight, have granted a rate increase to motorcoach companies operating in the islands.

The state Public Utilities Commission, which regulates Hawaii's ground transportation industry, approved a 10 percent increase in tour bus rates. The higher rates go into effect Jan. 1.

The increase was sought by Hawaiian coach tour companies to cover increases in fuel, wages, insurance premiums and other expenses.

Among operators impacted by the increase are such high-profile companies as Super Star Hawaii Transit Service, Polynesian Adventure, Polynesian Hospitality, Roberts Hawaii, Trans Quality Inc., Travel Plaza Transportation, and VIP Transportation.

The increase was approved in June but not announced until late last month by the Western Motor Tariff Bureau Inc., a nonprofit organiza-

tion that represents the operators.

Hawaii's tour bus companies typically get their customers through contracts with travel agents and by selling tours directly to passengers or groups.

"Travel agents on the mainland that sell tours for Hawaii would include in that some ground transportation in which they would hire the tour bus companies," said Bob Lewis, general manager of the Western Motor Tariff Bureau.

Stacey Djou, chief counsel for the Public Utilities Commission, said the rate increase was approved under a pilot program created three years ago that allows coach operators to file for up to a 10 percent increase within a 12-month period.

The program, which expedites the approval process and reduces the expense of a regular filing, has since been extended through December 2007.

Calendar

NOVEMBER 2006

22-25 17th National Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation Conference, Skamania Lodge, Stevenson, Wash. Info: (360) 705-7929 or www.trbruralconference.org.

29-30 3rd annual United Motorcoach

Association Safety Management Seminar, National Transportation Safety Board Academy, Ashburn, Va. Info: (800) 424-8262 or to www.uma.org.

DECEMBER 2006

5-7 Commercial Motor Vehicle Brake Safety Symposium, Hyatt Regency Indianapolis, Ind. Info: Go to www.cvs.org, or call (202) 775-1623.

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Haldex warns of imitation automatic brake adjusters

GRAIN VALLEY, Mo. — Haldex, a leading supplier of automatic brake adjusters to the motorcoach industry, has launched a campaign to warn bus owners and operators, fleets and dealers to beware of imitation automatic brake adjusters designed to look like Haldex automatic slack adjusters.

Haldex says the imitation adjusters are made with low-grade materials and manufactured using substandard processes and inferior quality control methods.

The company also said it has conducted thousands of hours of life-cycle and environmental tests on imitation slack adjusters. The

tests are identical to those Haldex conducts on its brake products. The test results indicate:

- Imitation ABAs have worm shafts and worm wheels that completed only 5 percent of the cycles before failing.
- Imitation ABAs have clevis-pin bushings that completed 10

percent of the cycles before failing.

- Imitation ABAs had a 100 percent failure rate in corrosion testing — completely failing every test conducted.

These failures can cause loss of braking or excessive brake chamber strokes, which lead to dangerous conditions, risky performance,

reduced durability and out-of-service violations, says Haldex.

“Imitation ABAs add up to inadequate braking performance, premature wear and expensive equipment repairs,” says Haldex, adding that the phonies aren’t worth the risk. Haldex ABAs can be identified by the Haldex name or logo on the side cover

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Photo is representative of coaches for sale.

Retiring your tires too early?

MUSCATINE, Iowa — A leading tire retread company says many bus and truck fleets have such stringent casing age limitations that they are leaving a lot of money on the out-of-service tire pile.

According to Bandag Inc., some fleets have tire casing age limits of as few as three or four years.

“While intended to increase reliability and uptime, those tighter age specifications have actually served to drastically reduce the number of casings available for retreading and increased tire costs for fleets,” says the Iowa-based tire retreading and management company.

While reliability is fundamental for anyone operating a bus or truck, there are ways to meet reliability goals without tossing casing assets before their full value has been realized, according to Bandag.

The retreading industry estimates that hundreds of millions of dollars in tire casings are being scrapped too early. The estimates are based on a long-held industry projection that when the original tread is worn off of a quality radial bus or truck tire, the tire owner has only realized about 30 percent of its tire investment.

“Multiple retreading is the only way to recover the remainder of that new tire investment,” says Bandag, adding that a number of new tire manufacturers have warranted their casings for seven years and two retreadings.

Noel Stineman, casing analysis engineer for Bandag, says the key to maximizing casing asset recovery is for tire owners to work with their local tire retreader and use the newest technology to inspect casings.

“Why not take advantage of the investment your tire dealer has already made in this inspection capability rather than throw away perfectly good tire casing assets,” says Stineman.

“Throwing away good retreadable tire casings, simply because they fall out of an arbitrarily established age limit, can be extremely costly for a fleet,” he adds.

Holland America goes upscale

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Holland America, the premier cruise and land-based tour company serving Alaska, is substantially upgrading more than 10 percent of its motorcoach fleet, including giving every passenger first-class seat space.

The company also is buying three MCI LX coaches, the super-luxury model MCI introduced about two years ago at Motorcoach Expo 2005 in Las Vegas, and refurbishing 36 coaches with upgrades that will closely match those of the LX models.

Holland America operates a fleet of more than 350 motorcoaches, making it one of the largest coach operators in North America.

The coach upgrade program will be introduced for the 2007 Alaska travel season.

"This fleet of 39 coaches in 2007 is an extension of our Signature of Excellence enhancements, creating a more premium environment for our guests," said Richard Meadows, senior vice president, marketing and sales at Holland America Tours. "We truly want to provide extraordinary comfort and an emotionally compelling on-board experience," Meadows added.

The three LX models will join three-dozen Holland America coaches that are being retrofitted with leather National Seats; REI 15.4-inch, drop-down LCD monitors, aisle carpeting and mini-galleys for cold snacks and beverages. The galleys also will have battery charging stations for passenger electronic gear.

The seats will have fabric inserts with the Holland America logo and the number of seats on each coach is being reduced to 45 from 54, providing 50 percent more legroom, or the equivalent of the legroom in the first-class section of a jetliner. Each seat will have a headset and eight-channel audio.

The exterior of the coaches also are being redone with livery depicting one of three Alaskan wildlife themes — whales, bears or moose.

When put into service, the coaches will offer Holland America's innovative narration program that includes handouts and visuals designed to both educate and inspire passengers, said Meadows.

The narration program, which reinforces and expands on the stories driver/guides and tour directors tell, utilizes 27 props, 29 topical handouts and 49 highway journals with color photos. Tour directors also use "show-and-tell" boards for discussions about indigenous

Alaskan wildlife, plants and local arts and crafts.

For its expanding tour program into Tombstone Territorial Park in Yukon Territory in northwest Canada, Holland America has added two "Tombstone Explorer" midsize buses that are something of a modern-day interpretation of the

famous 1930s-era White Jammers used for tours in Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks.

The 23-seat explorer coaches are built on an International 3200 low-floor chassis and feature a glass dome-like roof, large side windows, and vintage-look sloping rear ends.



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