



It was a full house at the first United Motorcoach Association Safety/Security Workshop

Operators struggle daily to cope with shortage of drivers

Motorcoach operators across the country are looking for more than just new charter and tour business these days.

Many are working just as hard trying to find good drivers so they not only can take on new business but keep pace with work they already have.

"This year has been the worst year for finding drivers that we've had since probably 1999," says Billy Ray Rhyne, the long-time president of America Charters in Charlotte, N.C. "It really has been tough for us."

Greg Hanson, safety manager at Sundance Stage Lines in San Diego shares the observation. "We don't lose drivers very often, but when we do, trying to find good people to replace them is very difficult," he says.

Both men say they've had to turn away business because they were unable to field enough drivers to handle the work. "Just last week

we were so full we had to borrow buses and then we still had to give up about a half-dozen jobs because we did not have enough people to drive them," says Rhyne.

The reasons for the shortage run the gamut.

Rhyne cites as part of the problem the surge in the tour and charter business that began in mid-2003, following the dramatic slide stemming from the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. "It came back pretty strong and we just haven't been able to keep up," he says.

The expanding national economy, low wages, having to be away from home for long periods, and competition for drivers from the trucking industry have contributed, too, say other motorcoach operators.

"Whenever the economy is good, like it is now, we have trouble finding drivers and when the economy goes bad, it's harder to find them," explains Rhyne. "That's the

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Safety First

Feds probe Chinese operators, other key issues

ASHBURN, Va. — A federal-state taskforce probing the safety of Chinese bus companies operating in the northeastern United States is beginning to produce results, says the top bus safety official at the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

Phil Hanley, acting chief of the FMCSA commercial passenger carrier safety division, said the multi-agency task force has conducted compliance reviews on 13 of the more than two-dozen Chinese/American-owned companies operating in a half-dozen northeastern states. Nine investigations have been launched as a result of the compliance reviews.

Hanley said the Northeastern Corridor Taskforce is focusing on a number of safety-related issues but particularly on an apparent propensity by some Chinese operators to

let both their operating authority and insurance lapse.

The taskforce also is trying to unravel what Hanley said were "complex business relationships" involving the Chinese operators, a job made difficult by language barriers. An investigator who speaks two dialects of Chinese has been hired to aid in the probe.

Hanley was the lead-off speaker earlier this month at the first United Motorcoach Association Safety/Security Workshop conducted over two days at the National Transportation Safety Board Academy in Ashburn. The sold-out workshop attracted more than 100 coach industry safety executives and owners from across the U.S.

In his remarks, Hanley updated attendees on a wide range of coach industry-related issues the FMCSA

is addressing. Among them:

- Inspections have been completed for more than 45 percent of the new-entrant companies that are targets of a program that requires the FMCSA to inspect new bus and truck companies before they have been on the road for 18 months. Hanley said the agency has set a new goal of getting new bus companies inspected before they have been operating for six months.

- The FMCSA is considering a NTSB recommendation that all over-the-road buses be equipped with cell phones so they can be contacted in emergencies and so the buses can call 911.

- The FMCSA is now receiving copies of motorcoach-company audits conducted on behalf of the Department of Defense. A low

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11 ►



Reason to Smile. Ron Cornell, president and CEO of ABC Cos. (left), and Dane Cornell, ABC executive vice president, announce the sale of 31 Van Hool coaches to Orlando-based Mears Transportation. See story Page 10.



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Bieber begins luxury service

Washington-Philly runs daily, Sunday

KUTZTOWN, Pa. — The nation's newest luxury intercity coach service has been started between Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

Bieber Business Class, a division of Carl R. Bieber Tourways of Kutztown, Pa., began service late last month with three Prevost coaches and free trial runs.

The service operates two round trips Monday through Friday between Washington and Philadelphia/Lehigh Valley, and one trip on Sunday afternoon.

The Washington-bound trip from Philadelphia begins at the Quakertown Park-N-Ride north of Philadelphia, with early stops at Philadelphia Marriott Downtown and at Colonial Airport Parking, which is two miles south of Philadelphia International Airport. The end point is the Washington Marriott at Metro Center, which also is the start point for return trips to Philadelphia. A one-way trip takes roughly 4 and one-half hours.

The cost is \$69 one-way.

The standard Greyhound fare between Philadelphia and Washington's Union Station is \$25.

The Bieber service includes free Internet hookups and power outlets at each seat and complimentary refreshments and snacks. The travel time on Bieber is about 45 minutes less than Greyhound.

To launch its service, Bieber purchased the three



Prevost coaches that had been used two years ago to launch ExecConnect, the luxury service that operated for nine months between Pittsburgh and Cleveland.

Bieber has priced its one-way service \$10 below what ExecConnect charged between Pittsburgh and Cleveland, which had a travel time of roughly two hours and 40 minutes.

Bieber hired Amadas Coach of Suffolk Va., to make upgrades to the former ExecConnect coaches that were outfitted with 27 extra-wide leather seats, power ports for lap-top computers, Internet connections, galley and four-person meeting areas.

The coaches were rewired with CAT5 cabling (the kind that networked offices typically use), wireless Internet connections, three XM radios, and KVH TracVision satellite receivers. The REL-based system also has DVD and VCR players.

John Kowalski, general manager of Carl R. Bieber Tourways and the driving force behind the Bieber

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

ABA-UMA boards approve consolidation

ORLANDO, Fla. — The boards of directors of the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association have approved a proposal for unifying the two organizations.

Meeting here Dec. 7, the two boards voted separately to ask ABA and UMA members to approve consolidation. The unification plan is expected to be presented to the two memberships in January and February with the goal of wrapping up a unification plan by March 31.

The boards met in a joint session to be briefed on a broad "framework" for joining the associations, and then adjourned to separate meetings to consider the outline for unification that had been put together by a task force composed of officers of both associations.

Following the vote, the boards issued what are called "talking points" that briefly address key issues in the unification process. The talking points released after the meeting not only covered the vote of approval by the two boards but also touched on three other issues:

- **Inclusiveness.** Both sides say they are committed to assuring that all elements of the over-the-road bus industry — tour, charter, line haul, shuttle, commuter, small operators and large, manufacturers and suppliers, and others — remain involved.

- **Next steps.** The critical steps and issues that need to be identified and spelled out before the consolidation plan is presented to members of both organizations. Those issues are expected to be clarified during the next two to three weeks. Among the matters that reportedly must be dealt with before consolidation can occur are legal, structural, contractual, procedural and management issues.

- **Playing to strength.** The two groups are committed to retaining and expanding the strengths of both organizations.

One bus operator who attended the Orlando meeting called the session a "very positive meeting."

The 10-member ABA/UMA Unification Task Force will work with the chief executives of both organizations to work out the details that will be presented to the members.



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THE DOCKET

CDL fraud big problem for USDOT

WASHINGTON — Despite progress, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration still is not doing enough to prevent commercial driver license fraud, says the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

In his annual report of the top 10 management challenges facing USDOT, Inspector General Kenneth Mead expressed concern that the FMCSA still has not issued a rule that would require CDL applicants to prove they're in the United States legally.

Mead's office first urged such a rule three years ago.

During the past five years, law enforcement agencies, with FMCSA backing, have conducted more than 75 CDL investigations and uncovered more than 8,000 CDLs wrongly issued to drivers who obtained them through corrupt testing, according to Mead's report.

Usually, the problem involved "third-party examiners," private companies certified by states to test CDL applicants. In too many instances, third-party examiners passed applicants without testing or supplied test answers in exchange for bribes, the report said.

Mead said the FMCSA should overhaul the system and include more retesting of suspect CDL holders and more covert testing of third-party examiners.

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 their services, or to bid on contract opportunities. UMA urges appropriate operators to take the time to respond to these notices:

Lafayette/West Lafayette, Ind. Deadline: 5 p.m. Dec. 15, 2004. Write to: Martin B. Sennett, CityBus, P.O. Box 588, Lafayette, Ind. 47902-0588.

Pottstown, Pa. Deadline: Dec. 31, 2004. Write to: Robert E. Ihlein, Borough of Pottstown, 100 E. High St., Pottstown, PA 19464.

Coach crashes to be focus of major study

WASHINGTON — Bus crashes are being put under the microscope by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration in a potentially far-reaching study the agency hopes will shed more light on what's behind most accidents.

The Bus Crash Causation Study will analyze a sample of motorcoach accidents that occur in New Jersey, plus other accident data gathered from federal agencies and private companies and organizations.

The study will help the federal safety agency develop an extensive report and database that will provide indicators and contributing factors for bus crashes and statistical evidence to support the allocation of resources, according to FMCSA spokesman David Longo.

The coding of crash data

results, development and dissemination of the study database and the drafting of study results will be completed in 2006, at which time the information will be made available to the public.

The study, which will be conducted by the FMCSA with assistance from the New Jersey State Police and local law enforcement agencies, was mandated by the Motor Carrier Safety Improvement Act of 1999.

Longo said New Jersey was selected as the study state because of its volume and variety of bus traffic and a high level of interest expressed by federal, state and local government officials who work in the area. Additionally, he noted that New Jersey has an excellent state police bus inspection unit and FMCSA field personnel in and

around the state have extensive motorcoach industry and crash investigation expertise.

"New Jersey state safety agencies will be important partners in this study at several levels: data collection form design, crash notification, crash investigation, bus post-crash inspections, and quality control review of cases," Longo said.

In addition to analyzing the accidents that occur in New Jersey, the study team will mine a number of databases for relevant information, including the Fatality Analysis Reporting System, Buses Involved in Fatal Accidents, General Estimates System, Motor Carrier Management Information System, Crash File, Crashworthiness Data System and National Transportation Safety Board.

FMCSA personnel also will

visit at least one insurance company to assess the quality, quantity and usefulness of bus crash causation data collected by the insurer.

Start up of the bus crash study comes as the FMCSA and the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration enter the final stages of a Large Truck Causation Study that was initiated six years ago. The goal of that study — the first of its kind — is to determine the reasons for and the factors contributing to serious large truck crashes. A team of experts analyzed almost 1,000 crashes that occurred over a one-year period in 24 states.

A number of high-profile collisions during the past three years have resulted in increased media attention and governmental scrutiny of the coach industry.

Feds want bullet-proof hours-of-service rules

PHOENIX — A top administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration thinks the agency will focus more on making its hours-of-service rules for truckers bullet proof than on completely overhauling the rules.

Rose McMurray, associate administrator for policy and program development at the FMCSA, also said the issue of electronic on-board recorders is on the table.

The FMCSA is under a court mandate to re-examine the hours-of-service rules for truckers it adopted last January.

Speaking at a trucking symposium here, Ms. McMurray said that any revision of the rules must be able to "withstand any assault that might come from an outside party."

She said the FMCSA is counting on a 10-person team of experts, who will be virtually sequestered for one year, to assure the agency considers all aspects of the rules,

including driver general health, 11 hours of driving, and the 34-hour restart, Ms. McMurray said.

"When we promulgated the rule last year, we believed we had sufficient evidence to issue the rule the way it was, including years of fatigue research," she said. "I think what we'll see is more evidence that substantiates the rule. I wouldn't expect to see wholesale changes."

As FMCSA examines the rule, it is looking at the feasibility of using electronic on-board recorders to monitor driver hours of service, Ms. McMurray said. The agency is mandated by Congress to consider the devices. Plus, "there is a tremendous push on the safety side of this industry to look at whether recorders are the answer," said Ms. McMurray. "We're, of course, concerned, as you are, with balancing the benefits of this technology with privacy," she added.

Black boxes coming, says FedEx

ST. PETE BEACH, Fla. — The CEO of FedEx Freight predicts electronic onboard recorders will be required when the next version of hours-of-service rules emerge from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

Those rules are currently being revised. A federal court struck them down last summer after a legal challenge. The court said the

FMCSA should consider using on-board electronic recorders to monitor drivers' hours.

FedEx Freight Chief Executive Douglas Duncan said at a meeting here that "it's a pretty safe bet we're going to get black boxes on trucks." "It's a way to improve highway safety. It's a way to make sure everyone is abiding by the same rules."

FMCSA proposes tightening hours-of-service enforcement

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has moved to improve compliance with federal hours-of-service rules.

In an analysis of a proposed rulemaking issued last month by the FMCSA, Lancer Insurance Co. says the changes are an initial step by the agency to create tighter enforcement.

The rulemaking "explains and reinforces its requirements for motor carriers to systematically control driver time, mandates the use of supporting documents for purposes of verification of driver hours, (and) further defines supporting documents as those which pass through the carrier's hands in the normal course of business and which could be used to verify the information record on a driver's logs," says Lancer.

Additionally, the proposed rulemaking:

- Makes improper the disposal of typical supporting documents.
- Reinforces federal requirements to maintain — in an organized manner — those supporting documents.
- Defines non-compliant hours-of-service records as those having 10 percent of the logs with falsifications.
- Further authorizes the use of electronic systems to replace paper systems.

An article in the Dec. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News* offered a different take on the proposed rulemaking.

Comments on the proposal may be submitted to the FMCSA until Jan. 3. Find the rule at: www.fmcsa.dot.gov/rulesregs/fmcsr/rules2004.htm#proposedrule.

Work begins on medical registry

WASHINGTON — Consultants for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration are developing a national registry of medical examiners certified to provide physical exams for interstate bus and truck drivers.

The project, which also calls for training and certifying medical examiners, is to be completed during the next three years.

The contract for the \$3.5 million program is being handled by

Axiom Resource Management of Falls Church, Va., while the subcontractor will be Manila Consulting Group of McLean, Va.

A national registry of certified examiners is mandated by the six-year transportation and public transit funding bill that is bogged down in Congress.

Axiom and Manila Consulting are to create a program to train and certify medical examiners using established national standards.

NYC warning after bus hits overpass

NEW YORK CITY — The New York State Department of Transportation is asking coach operators to warn their drivers about a severe height restriction along FDR Drive.

The warning was issued after a motorcoach from Toronto filled with young Polish dancers and their families slammed into an overpass, injuring all 49 people on board.

In its advisory, the NYDOT said FDR Drive between East 53rd Street and East 63rd Street is under construction, and a temporary shield has been constructed to protect the public during demolition and reconstruction of the overpass.

"As a result, there is a reduced height clearance on both the northbound and southbound lanes of 9-feet, 6-inches. This height restriction is in effect until approximately September 2006. Please alert all relevant personnel to this situation," the NYDOT said in a statement.

Vehicles taller than 9-feet, 6-inches are prohibited from using the FDR Drive and must exit the southbound roadway at East 63rd Street, and the northbound roadway at East 42nd Street. Additionally, New York City law prohibits commercial vehicles from traveling on FDR Drive.

When the bus hit the overpass late last month, the impact peeled back part of the roof, crushed its front end and shattered windows. Panic ensued. Most of the injuries were bruises to heads and arms when passengers were thrown forward.

The incident happened when the coach, operated by Preference Coach Line, pulled off the Triboro Bridge and its driver, Yu Yuk-Ho, 56, of Ontario, ignored a sign prohibiting the bus from traveling on the FDR, police said. Yuk-Ho, who was not seriously injured, was issued five summonses.

About 35 blocks south of the Triboro, near 61st Street, the bus, which was 13-feet, 6-inches tall, slammed into the bottom of the temporary construction overpass just under the Queensborough Bridge. A bold sign there states the

height restrictions. There is a second sign post for motorists just off the Triboro.

At New York Hospital-Cornell, Yuk-Ho told a reporter in broken English that New York City needed to do a better job of warn-

ing drivers where they cannot drive.

For more information, contact the FDR Drive Reconstruction Project's Community Relations Liaison, Eric Deutsch, at (917) 369-9834.

Missouri DOT drops bus axle-weight limits

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Persistence by the United Motorcoach Association has resulted in the state of Missouri lifting axle-weight restrictions on motorcoaches.

Missouri has been at the forefront of a small group of states that aggressively enforce weight restrictions on motorcoaches even though Congress wants such restrictions eliminated. Missouri frequently imposes heavy fines on coach operators caught exceeding its weight limit.

Some out-of-state operators have become so outraged by Missouri weight enforcement policies that they have ceased sending coaches to the popular entertainment mecca of Branson, Mo. Coach traffic to Branson and other Missouri destinations reportedly is down significantly.

UMA and Greyhound have been after Missouri for years to lift the restriction. In late October, UMA Senior Vice President for Government and Industry Relations Norman Littler met with Missouri Department of Transportation Motor Carrier Services Director Jan Skouby at a Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance event

and pitched the issue again.

Skouby informed Littler by letter late last month that MoDOT will begin issuing "special permit(s)," allowing any single axle on a motorcoach to exceed Missouri's 20,000-pound limit. However, the permits will not allow operators to exceed gross weight limitations.

In her letter, Skouby said she was "pleased to announce" that her agency would provide the special permits free of charge to coach operators. Companies issued a permit may copy it and use it on multiple vehicles.

Skouby also noted in her letter that Congress is again poised to pass legislation that would prohibit states from imposing weight limits — such as those in Missouri. The prohibition is contained in the six-year highway and mass transportation bill that is stalled in Congress. Missouri will use its special permit until Congress finally acts on the highway bill.

To apply for the permit, or for additional information, contact the MoDOT Motor Carrier Services OD/OW Office at (573) 526-5338.

Search still on for tanker

PENNAUKEN, N.J. — The FBI has repeated its request for help from bus and truck operators in locating a 44-foot gasoline tanker stolen in April from a parking lot in Pennsauken.

The tanker, which can hold more than 9,000 gallons, was

empty when taken from a TK Transport Terminal. The vehicle's tank body was made in 1996 by Fruehauf and bore New Jersey licence plate T852SC.

The FBI asked anyone with information to call (215) 418-4000.



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INDUSTRY NEWS

Two special events brighten Motorcoach Expo 2005

Motorcoach Expo is traditionally a leading source of solutions for pressing business problems and of information on the newest products and services.

But it's also a great opportunity to network and socialize with industry peers. Two special events at Expo 2005 allow attendees to do

both — and have fun, too.

Vision Awards Banquet Thursday, Feb. 24

A major highlight of Motorcoach Expo 2004 was the first-ever Vision Awards Banquet. The overwhelmingly successful event will be repeated at Expo 2005 as a black-

tie optional affair.

Presentation of the United Motorcoach Association Vision Award will be a focal point of the banquet. UMA streamlined its Vision Awards program this year by singling out one company for the honor. That will be repeated at Expo 2005 as a UMA-member com-

pany is honored for embodying the future of the coach industry through its innovative business practices.

To create a ceremony befitting the Vision Award, attendees at the banquet will be taken back to the glamour of old Las Vegas, with all of the pageantry and pizzazz Vegas is famous for. There'll be cocktails,

dinner, cigars and entertainment.

UMA promises the banquet will be the ultimate networking opportunity and celebration.

Ray Dupuis Memorial Golf Tournament Saturday, Feb. 26

Capping off Motorcoach Expo 2005 will be a day of golf. The first Ray Dupuis Golf Tournament, honoring a founding member of UMA, will take place at Silverstone Golf Club.

Home of the Las Vegas Celebrity Players Tour, the Silverstone layout features mountain, valley and desert courses catering to players of varying ability.

Because there is limited room in the tournament, Expo attendees are urged to register early by filling out the form at www.motorcoachexpo.com/special. There will be no onsite registration for the event.

Each registration includes transportation to and from Silverstone Golf Club from the Las Vegas Hilton, continental breakfast, lunch, reduced-rate club rentals, a sleeve of golf balls and special prizes.

Trailways adds new members in three states

FAIRFAX, Va. — The Trailways Transportation System has signed up new members in Florida, Mississippi and Oklahoma. The three are:

- South Florida Trailways, formerly Endeavor Buslines of Miami.
- Starkville Trailways, which also is known as Starkville Buses of Starkville, Miss.
- Oklahoma Trailways, formerly Franklin Charters, of Tulsa.

Trailways President & CEO Gale Ellsworth said the addition of the companies is important to the organization's goal of expanding throughout North America.

South Florida Trailways is headed by company president Michael Amador. He said he expects to use his new Trailways identify to expand business in the military, cruise and airline markets.

Starkville Trailways is led by a husband and wife team, Randy Futral Jr., president, and Stephanie, vice president. Randy Futral's parents, who are retired, operated O.R. Tours & Charters of Holly Springs, Miss. The company is considering expanding into regularly scheduled casino shuttle service and adding retail tours.

The president and owner of Oklahoma Trailways is Frank Wood. His company traces its roots to the 19th century, when Oklahoma was a territory. He is looking at expanding military, university sports and leisure-tour clients.



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- Industry leaders will gather at the first ever *State Association Summit*
- New Solution Sessions covering *sales, pricing, cost management, contract work, and marketing lessons* from other industries and much, much more!
- The *1st Annual Ray Dupuis Golf Tournament* in honor of one of our industry's leaders and a UMA founder
- Many exciting new products to see on the exhibit floor

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- The always popular *UMA Maintenance Interchange*
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Travel Partner	\$325 / \$375	\$350 / \$400	
Non-Exhibiting Supplier	\$600 / \$700	\$650 / \$750	**Package Deals for UMA Membership and 2005 Expo! Includes UMA membership for one year PLUS two full registrations for 2005 Motorcoach Expo! *Only available for those who have NOT had an active UMA membership within the last 12 months.
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CANCELLATION POLICY: There is a \$50 processing fee for all cancellations. This fee is assessed on a per person basis. There is no refund for cancellations made after 12/31/04. All refund requests are up to the discretion of Expo Management.

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For further information, please visit our website www.motorcoachexpo.com

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Schedule of Events

Sunday – Tuesday, February 20-22, 2005
 IMG Maintenance & Safety Forum

Tuesday – February 22, 2005
 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM State Association Summit **NEW**
 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM Welcome Reception

Wednesday – February 23, 2005
 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM Maintenance Interchange
 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM Motorcoach Industry Panel (Building a Strong Foundation)
 10:00 AM - 10:45 AM Legislative and Regulatory Update
 11:00 AM - 4:15 PM Education Sessions (Concurrent Sessions) **NEW**

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM Marketing and Sales: Selling 101 - The Sales Process	Finance: Raising your Rates	Operations: Instilling a Safety Culture
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2:00 PM - 3:00 PM Marketing and Sales: How to get the phone ringing using cost effective marketing channels	Finance: Profit Power	Operations: Process of securing contract work
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3:15 PM - 4:15 PM Marketing and Sales: Making your website an integral part of your marketing and sales effort	Operations: Recruiting and training new drivers
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12:00 PM - 1:45 PM **Operator Luncheon** **NEW**
 Marketing Lessons from Other Industries
 Exhibit Hall Open - "Sneak Preview"

Thursday – February 24, 2005
 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM Networking Opportunity
 9:30 AM - 10:30 AM Education Sessions (Concurrent Sessions) **NEW**

Marketing and Sales: What operators want in vendor relationships	Finance: Margin versus markup misconceptions	Operations: Airport access issues and fees
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10:30 AM - 5:30 PM Exhibit Hall Open
 6:00 PM - 11:00 PM Vision Awards Banquet

Friday – February 25, 2005
 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM Exhibit Hall Open
Saturday – February 26, 2005
 8:00 AM - 3:00 PM Ray Dupuis Memorial Golf Tournament at Silverstone Golf Club **NEW**

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OPINION

Working with the FTA

Members of the Coalition of Private Transportation Associations met with the top leadership of the Federal Transit Administration late last month to (hopefully) gain input into documents the FTA will be issuing that explain its charter service and other regulations.

Two months ago, FTA Administrator Jenna Dorn told a congressional hearing her agency would circulate a "plain-English" document by Dec. 29 that describes the FTA rules and regulations as they relate to the private sector.

FTA staffers attending the November meeting said the document would focus on what the federal requirements are, how they are enforced, what the sanctions are for noncompliance and what recourse is available. The goal of the document is to spell out and clarify FTA private-sector rules and regulations in language that even public transit agencies can understand.

Becky Weber, who represents the National School Transportation Association, told the eight FTA staff members attending the meeting that members of the coalition had a number of suggestions — besides charter service rules — for inclusion in the proposed FTA document.

For example, Linda Darr of the American Bus Association raised the issues of access and partnering on intermodal facilities and the 511 system.

Hal Morgan of the Taxicab, Limousine and Paratransit Association, raised the issue of private operator participation in FTA planning and consideration of private operators in providing mass transportation and related support services.

Morgan said the nut of the issue for the private sector is knowing how to get in the front door of local transit agencies during their planning process instead of after a new or different service has already been finalized and is ready to launch.

Terry Thomas of the National School Transportation Association echoed Morgan's sentiments, recounting more than 10 years of frustrating experience in dealing with local transit authorities in northeastern Ohio.

Some of the tough words at the meeting came from Morgan, who said it is the private sector's view that transit operators are merely

'It is the private sector's view that transit operators are merely giving lip service to private-sector participation.'

giving lip service to private-sector participation and most of them do not give it real consideration.

Ms. Weber said the final FTA document should not only clarify what public transit agencies are not permitted to do, but should also be a "positive piece," explaining partnering opportunities with the private sector.

Norman Littler of the United Motorcoach Association brought up the issue of a report on the charter service issue the FTA was required to produce as part of the fiscal 2004 appropriations bill for the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Elizabeth Martineau, an FTA attorney, revealed that the report

had been submitted without fanfare to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees at the end of October. Ms. Dorn indicated that since the report had gone to Congress it could be made available to members of the coalition.

The report is a near 70-page history of the federal charter service law with a summary of the charter service complaints the FTA received between 2001 and early this year.

The report restates the FTA contention that the charter service issue is not really a big deal because few official complaints are filed with the agency and its regional offices. Of course, the report neither acknowledges nor reports on the scores of complaints that private operators file with transit agencies that get resolved at the local level.

On the positive side, the report does reinforce the FTA finding from the late 1990s that there are few if any unmet charter service needs that public agencies need to fill. There remain transit systems across the U.S. that argue there are unmet charter service needs by government, civic, charitable and community-based organizations. The FTA report threw more cold water on that contention.

It also is clear from the report that during the past two years the Toldeo (Ohio) Area Regional Transit Authority has been the worst offender when it comes to violating federal charter service rules, and has been extremely recalcitrant in cleaning up its act. The Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority in New York is a not too distant second.

Having a profitable year? Then buy a new coach!

WASHINGTON — Time is quickly running out to take advantage of the accelerated bonus depreciation that expires Dec. 31.

Known as the Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2003, accelerated depreciation allows operators to write off 50 percent of the cost of new equipment for the year it is placed in service. Of the remaining undepreciated half, the pre-2003 rules apply and entitle operators to deduct an additional 20 percent.

Operators may be able to reduce their tax liability, while boosting near-term cash flow.

The bonus depreciation applies to equipment purchased

after May 5, 2003, and put into service before Jan. 1, 2005. If an operator elects to participate in the additional 50 percent tax depreciation, it must be applied to all equipment that is purchased within the same class and cannot be applied selectively to equipment. It also does not include used equipment purchases.

Operators should consult their tax adviser to see if they qualify. Accelerated depreciation is provided by the Internal Revenue Service Code Section 168(k). For additional information about bonus depreciation, go to www.irs.gov or call (800) TAX-FORM.

Talk of per-mile taxes takes hold on West Coast

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Don't look now but there are state officials on the Left Coast who want to scrap fuel taxes and tax miles driven instead.

The latest official to surface the idea is the new director of the California Department of Motor Vehicles.

Last month, California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican, appointed Joan Borucki, a Democrat, as the top official in the California DMV. Ms. Borucki has 24 years experience in state transportation administration. Most recently, she served as a team leader for the California Performance Review, a Schwarzenegger initiative aimed at restructuring, reorganizing and reforming state government.

Included in the transportation recommendations made by Ms. Borucki was a proposal to tax miles

traveled, not fuel bought. California fuel-tax revenues are declining because motorists are driving more fuel-efficient vehicles, including vehicles using fuels that by California law cannot be taxed at all. These include autos powered by electricity and fuel cells.

The California Performance Review estimates that a one-tenth of a cent fee-per-mile traveled would generate about \$310 million annually. The per-mile tax would replace the current near 35-cents-per-gallon tax on gasoline and 28-cent tax on diesel fuel. The proposal is far from implementation or even endorsement by the governor.

Meanwhile, up Interstate 5 in Oregon, officials there are also considering taxing miles traveled rather than gallons of fuel bought, and studying how that transition could best be made.

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Detroit Diesel Corp. will build new engine for 2007

REDFORD, Mich. — Detroit Diesel Corporation has announced plans to build a new family of heavy-duty truck and bus engines.

The engine, which is being developed by Detroit Diesel and its parent company, DaimlerChrysler, will be launched in 2007, and will meet the stringent federal emis-

sions requirements that take effect that year.

During a period of transition the new engine will be sold in tandem with the Detroit Diesel Series 60, which has been the most popular engine in the motorcoach industry for more than 15 years.

Detroit Diesel also announced

it plans to begin North American assembly of the MBE 900 medium-duty diesel engine at its plant in Redford. That engine platform, too, will be online by 2007.

The MBE 900, available since 1998, is offered in four and six-cylinder versions and has become known in the bus industry as an

option on cutaways built on Freightliner chassis. For example, it is an option on the ABC M1000 midsize buses.

"The planned addition of the new heavy-duty engine platform and MBE 900 engine assembly speaks to the strength of our manufacturing operations and workforce,

and demonstrates the importance of Detroit Diesel to DaimlerChrysler's North American commercial vehicle strategy," said Carsten Reinhardt, president and CEO at Detroit Diesel.

The Redford plant employees 1,300 people now have a new labor contract extending into 2010.

Calendar

JANUARY 2005

9-13 Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C. Info: (202) 334-2934 or go to www.trb.org.

13-16 North Carolina Motorcoach Association, Adam's Mark Hotel, Winston-Salem, N.C. Info: (336) 495-4970, or go to www.ncmotorcoach.org.

FEBRUARY 2005

3-4 American Bus Association Board of Directors, Chicago. Info: (800) 283-2877 or go to www.buses.org.

4-5 Bus Industry Safety Council, Chicago. Info: (800) 283-2877 or go to www.buses.org.

4-9 American Bus Association Marketplace 2005, Chicago. Info: (800) 283-2877 or go to www.buses.org.

20-22 International Motorcoach Group Maintenance and Safety Forum, Las Vegas. Info: (913) 906-0111 or go to www.imgcoach.com.

22-24 Clean Heavy-Duty Vehicles Conference, La Quinta, Calif. Info: (626) 744-5686 or e-mail: sromeo@calstart.org.

22-26 2005 Motorcoach Expo, Las Vegas Hilton, Las Vegas. Info: United Motorcoach Association, (800) 424-8262, or go to www.uma.org.

People

Walter Hubbard, owner and president of Kingsmen Coach Lines in Conley, Ga., has become president of the Georgia Motorcoach Operators Association. Hubbard, who had been association vice president, succeeds John Klapmeyer who moved to North Carolina to work for America Charters.

Dan Hammang has been named chief financial officer of DriveCam Video Systems of San Diego.



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INDUSTRY NEWS

Mears Transportation orders 31 Cat-powered Van Hools

WINTER GARDEN, Fla. — ABC Companies has announced one of the largest new-coach sales of the year, with Mears Transportation of Orlando purchasing 31 Van Hool coaches.

Mears, one of the nation's largest private bus companies and a long-time operator of Van Hools, is getting its new C2000-model coaches equipped with Caterpillar C13 engines and ZF AS-Tronic transmissions.

While Mears will have the largest fleet of Cat-powered Van Hools, the distinction of having the first Van Hool with a Cat ACERT engine belongs to Gotta

Go Express of Fort Worth, Texas. Company President Don Dinger was eager to try the new Van Hool-Cat combination.

Both the Mears' and Gotta Go Express' purchases took place at ABC's regional sales and service center in Winter Garden, which is marking its 30th anniversary this year.

The milestone for ABC Florida was celebrated late in October with a three-day customer appreciation event. Hosting the weekend activities were ABC President and CEO Ron Cornell and his brother, Dane, executive vice president. Dane Cornell said ABC would be sponsoring more customer events in the

future.

In other news, ABC announced that:

- Tremblay's Bus Co. of New Bedford, Mass., has purchased two new T2145 Van Hool coaches.

- NA Charters of Kent, Wash., and Durango, Colo., has purchased five additional T2145 Van Hool coaches. The additions bring to 13 the number of Van Hools that NA Charters has added to its fleet this year.

- The addition of Caterpillar engines in the full range of Van Hool and ABC brand buses will mean improved power, performance and fuel economy.



ABC Companies' Fast Track Weekend was a well-attended event

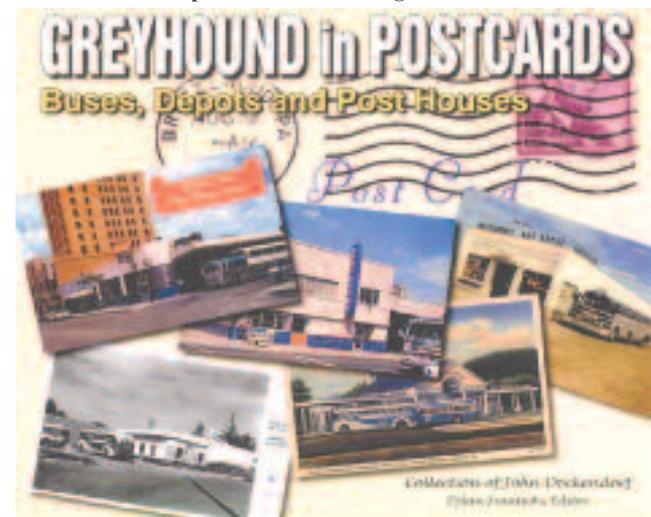
Greyhound in postcards is spotlight of new book

HARRISBURG, Pa. — The heyday of intercity bus travel is celebrated in a new book that features reproductions of hundreds of vintage postcards showing Greyhound buses, depots and post houses.

A visual treat for bus enthusiasts and postcard collectors, the book highlights cards from the bus memorabilia collection of John Dockendorf, who is chief of the urban division of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Bureau of Public Transportation.

company also built a network of restaurants and rest stops, called post houses.

The Dockendorf postcard collection featured in the book includes buses, depots and post houses from across the U.S. and Canada. Called *Greyhound in Postcards: Buses, Depots and Post Houses*, the book sells for \$19.95 and is available at book, hobby and specialty stores, or directly from the publisher (add \$4.95 for shipping and handling).



Dockendorf reportedly has one of the largest collections of bus memorabilia in the nation. The editors of Iconografix Inc., a specialty book publishing company based in Hudson, Wis., arranged hundreds of Dockendorf's Greyhound postcards in an 80-page, 10.5 inch-by-8.5 inch softbound book. The cards are reproduced in color and glorious black and white.

The postcards were mostly published after Greyhound began building the nation's largest intercity bus system in the 1930s. A key aspect of the company growth program was an aggressive campaign to build terminals, many with art-deco architectural features. The

Send orders to Iconografix Dept. PR, P.O. Box 446, Hudson, WI 54016.

In late October, Dockendorf signed copies of the book at the annual meeting of the Museum of Bus Transportation. Dockendorf is a director, and first vice president and secretary of the museum. Part of his postcard collection is displayed at the museum.

Dockendorf told *Bus & Motorcoach News* he has enough postcards featuring Trailways and other intercity depots to compile a second book. Whether Iconografix publishes a second book will depend on how well the Greyhound postcard book sells.

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Renee Deymonaz, left, and Cheryl Polyard of Taylor Tours in Phoenix were among those attending the UMA Safety/Security Workshop.

Safety

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

rating on a DOD audit will trigger an FMCSA safety inspection.

- Enforcement of licensing and insurance regulations has been accelerated, reducing the time the FMCSA takes to revoke an operator's operating authority from 57 days to 6 days when the operator loses its insurance.

- The FMCSA is working with other federal agencies to assure compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements and monitor ADA-related complaints. (See Nov. 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

- The FMCSA is attempting to educate consumers about its Passenger Carrier Safety Web site.

Later, during another workshop session, the FMCSA consumer-oriented Web site was criticized by two operators who said the site penalizes operators that have never had a FMCSA inspection.

Jane Bass, acting chief of the bus security branch of the federal Transportation Security Administration, announced the TSA plans to pilot test a bus passenger screening system early next year.

Ms. Bass said her agency is working with Greyhound Lines on the TSA Bus Explosive Screening Test. Plans currently call for introducing the BEST system in February at the Greyhound station in Washington, D.C.

Joe Osterman, director of the Office of Highway Safety at the National Transportation Safety Board reported the NTSB is investigating four different motorcoach crashes that could result in safety-related recommendations.

The first involves the Victor, N.Y. crash in which a Coach USA bus ran off the New York State Thruway and plunged down an embankment. The driver had slept 4 hours in the previous 52, choosing to spend most of his off hours gambling instead of resting. Among the issues being investigated in connection with the crash are occupant protection (a number of passengers were ejected) and whether passengers should have emergency contact information when they suspect problems with the driver.

The Tallulah, La., incident in

which a church-owned bus crashed. Issues include identifying nonprofit groups that should have commercial operating authority, drivers who take medications in connection with herbal remedies, and possible seat anchorage problems on Neoplan coaches.

The I-55 crash in northeastern Arkansas in October. Issues include safety inspections (the operator "may have slipped through the net"), the driver's activities on the day of the trip that began at 9 p.m., and how well the coach roof had been repaired in a prior incident. Sheet metal had been welded over the old roof which had become rusted and corroded. The roof collapsed when the coach flipped upside down.

The crash last month involving an Eyre Bus Service coach that hit an overpass on the George Washington Memorial Parkway near Mount Vernon in Virginia. Issues involve whether the driver was distracted by using a cell phone, the adequacy of signs warning of the low overpass, and how motorcoach operators choose routes for their buses.

Alan Spachman, president of National Interstate Insurance Co., said that turmoil sweeping the insurance industry is impacting operators and their rates. He said operators have a major financial interest in what is going on in the industry because insurance typically represents 12 percent of revenues at a coach company, double the average profit margin for most operators.

Among trends he noted were soaring jury awards. Spachman said the average auto liability jury award has increased from \$175,000 in 1994 to \$323,000 in 2001, an 86 percent increase. That occurred while the Consumer Price Index was rising only 15 percent.

At the same time, the number of accidents caused by uninsured motorists was climbing to 14 percent, meaning those with insurance — like motorcoach companies — end up paying more.

He urged operators to support tort reform and efforts to halt the sharp rise of medical costs.

Too many operators are indifferent to managing risk financing, said Spachman. They should "actively manage the risk-financing process."

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NEW DELIVERIES

MCI offers incentive to mark Holland America purchase

SEATTLE — Holland America Tours has taken delivery of nine MCI E4500 coaches, including its 50th E model, further expanding its luxury fleet.

To mark the milestone, MCI is awarding a free Holland America cruise to operators that purchase and take delivery of an MCI J4500 stock coach by Dec. 31.

"The travel incentive provides an opportunity for operators to take advantage of bonus depreciation and benefit from MCI's long relationship with Holland America," said Patricia Ziska, MCI vice president of major accounts and marketing.

Holland America's new E coaches will be used for its Alaska cruise tours and land vacations, as

well as Pacific Northwest tours and charters.

The E4500s feature Caterpillar C13 engines, ZF AS-Tronic transmissions and seats by National Seating. They also have Carrier A/Cs; REI A/V systems with six monitors and CD, VCR and DVD capabilities; R.C.A. flooring, and National driver seats. Three of the coaches have Ricon wheelchair lifts.

To accommodate the highways and dirt roads of Alaska, Holland America modifies its coaches to include under-body rock guards, along with an interior air filtration system and auxiliary filters.

"The advantage, found on both the E4500 and J4500 coaches, is the way the tiered seating gives our



guests the effect of 12 front seats," said David Beagle, vice president of transportation for Holland America Line.

With a fleet of more than 320 motorcoaches, including 56 E4500s, Holland America is North America's ninth-largest private coach

operator, as well as the largest cruise line serving Alaska and Canada's Yukon.

The company's coach operations include Holland America Tours, Gray Line of Alaska, Evergreen Trails Inc., Gray Line of Seattle and Horizon Coach Lines

in Vancouver, B.C.

For more information go to www.hollandamerica.com.

For additional information about MCI's cruise incentive program, including special financing, call its special toll-free number, (800) 468-5827.

Michigan operator charts expansion

CLIO, Mich. — Blue Lakes Charters & Tours, a central Michigan-based operator that is expanding into southeastern Michigan and northern Ohio, has purchased six new Van Hool coaches to support its growth plans.

Blue Lakes' President Dave Cupp said the company has acquired property for its expansion in Luna Pier, Mich., which is along Interstate 75, south of Detroit near the Ohio state line. Construction of a 10,000-square-foot satellite facility will begin in the spring, with completion expected by late next summer.

Blue Lakes, which has a fleet of 60 coaches, is acquiring three Van Hool C2000s and three T2145 coaches from ABC Companies. With the new coaches, Van Hools will account for more than one-third of the Blue Lakes fleet.

The 57-passenger C models and 58-passenger T coaches will be equipped with Amaya seating, REI



A/V systems with six monitors, Goodyear tires, and Isringhausen driver seats.

Blue Lakes prides itself on being a full-service tour destination management company that can accommodate a wide range of groups for company, church and school outings, as well as sporting events. This fall, it provided shuttle transportation for upwards of 10,000 spectators each day during the 2004 Ryder Cup (golf) Matches at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

The 15-year-old company also offers sightseeing, convention planning, airport transport and other travel services.

"We take pride in our fleet, and consider the addition of these new Van Hools an investment toward the continued growth of our operation," said Cupp.

Southeastern Stages Atlanta

Southeastern Stages Inc., which operates a fleet of 30 motorcoaches, has added another Prevost H3-45 to its fleet.

Michael Dickson, company president, said he acquired the new Prevost because "many of our passengers specifically request a Prevost H3-45 for their charter tours. They appreciate its panoramic view and class-leading comfort. We are giving our customers what they want, resulting in significant business growth here at Southeastern."

Southeastern Stages, which has served travelers since 1933, provides regularly scheduled bus,



charter coach and group tour services. Its line-run service is between several cities in Georgia and the Carolinas.

The company's newest Prevost is equipped with a Detroit Diesel Series 60 engine, Allison B500 transmission, Jake Brake, REI A/V-DVD system with four monitors, National passenger and driver seating, Firestone tires mounted on Alcoa wheels, and Altro Flooring.

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University of Maryland College Park

The University of Maryland has expanded its fleet of four Setra S417 luxury coaches by adding a fifth S417. The coaches are used to transport athletic teams and student groups. The university transportation services department operates as an independent charter business that bids on transportation services needed by other campus departments and organizations.

The coaches also serve as traveling bill-

boards as they roam the U.S., and "have actually served us well as a recruiting tool," said David Allen, director of transportation services for the university.

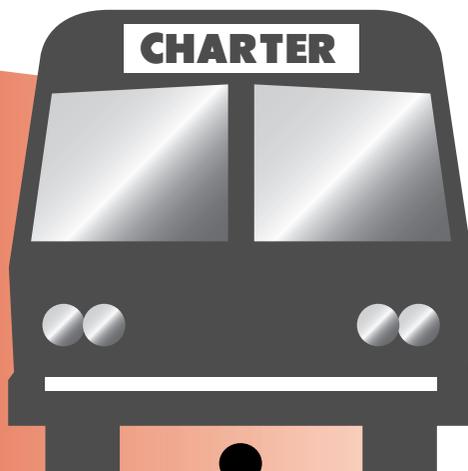
Each the S417s has a custom paint scheme using the school's logo, colors and turtle mascot — the terrapin. And, the custom designed interiors feature black, red and silver upholstery on the Setra seats with "Terps" embroidered in the headrests.

The newest S417 also is equipped with a Ricon wheelchair lift.

"The coach's independent front suspension gives it a great ride that you don't get from the other coaches," said Allen.

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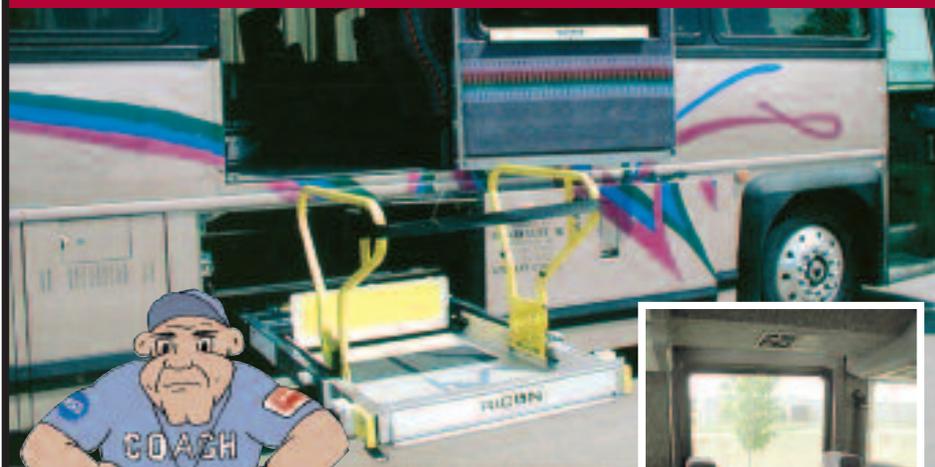
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Driver shortage

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

way I have always seen it in over 40 years in the industry.”

The national jobless rate has been running at just over 5 percent lately, but has been in the 3 percent range in some areas of the country.

The ‘pay problem’

Don Dunham, operations manager at A Yankee Line in Boston, says the pay scale for new drivers probably is holding back some people from applying for driver work as well. “It’s a problem industry wide; the pay scale is just not high enough,” he says. “I think our company has somewhat been on the high end of the scale but it’s probably still not enough.”

The starting hourly rate for motorcoach drivers varies widely across the country, ranging from \$9 in some areas of Southern California, to \$11 in Ohio, to \$16 in New Jersey.

Motorcoach operators aren’t the only ones hurting from the driver shortage. The situation also has hit the trucking industry where job openings are said to be in the thousands and some people are worrying that the situation could hurt the nation’s economy.

Truckers carry about one-third of the goods moved in the country, and shipping delays already are being reported. Truckers in Montana say they have been forced to delay shipments of cattle and other goods because of the shortage.

A number of trucking companies have tried to ease the burden by offering cash bonuses or large gifts, including vacations and boats to experienced drivers who switch to their companies from other firms.

While motorcoach operators aren’t going to such extremes just yet, some are finding new ways to fill the growing number of vacancies.



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Television ads help

Abbott Trailways in Roanoke, Va., turned to television commercials to fill dozens of part time positions after newspaper advertising failed to generate much of a response. “Only people looking for work read newspaper help wanted ads and we were pretty sure most of those would not be looking for part-time jobs, especially jobs that didn’t have regular hours,” says tour manager Briggs Hensley.

“So, we decided to run TV commercials in hopes of attracting some retired people who really weren’t actively looking for a job but would look up when they saw the commercial and say, ‘Hey, I could do that.’”

The commercials “starred” three part-time Abbott drivers who told how they were retired from other types of jobs and how much they enjoy driving motorcoaches part time and taking groups to Atlantic City and kids to the zoo.”

The ads brought in dozens of applicants, about 50 of whom were hired and put through the company’s driver-training program. “We have another 20 or so on a waiting list and hope to have them enrolled in the school after the first of the year,” adds Hensley.

Abbott has about two-dozen full-time drivers and more than 140 part-time drivers for its fleet of 76 coaches.

In Cincinnati, Charter Bus Service concentrates its advertising in its own neighborhood rather than the entire metropolitan area. And, that strategy is working well, too, according to Louis Klug, president.

Klug believes few people are willing to spend 45 minutes to an hour driving across town — through heavy traffic — just for part-time work. So, he advertises only in a local community newspaper read by people who live near by. “We’re located on the West Side of the city and it’s sort of a community all by itself,” he explains. “As a result, we have been able to find drivers from right around here.”

Bieber

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Business Class service, said the interior appointments also were refined with — among other things — new headliners and marble entry tile with nonskid coverings.

Between Nov. 29 and Dec. 12, Bieber offered complimentary service with those customers using the Internet to make reservations charged \$1 on their credit card. However, when passengers boarded the coach, the \$1 was refunded in cash.

Proactive Greyhound

Greyhound Lines in Dallas, which employs about 4,100 drivers at 83 locations around the U.S., recently hired a special recruitment manager to work full-time looking for drivers in the Northeast, its busiest service area. In addition, it runs television and newspaper advertisements in communities where it is in need of drivers and works closely with neighborhood organizations to sell its story to potential job applicants.

“The proactive things we do seem to work, too,” says spokesperson Kim Plasskett, noting that the company receives about 15,000 inquiries a year from driver prospects.

Hanson says that while Sundance Stage Lines has its troubles filling vacancies, it tries to avoid the need to look for new drivers by working hard to keep those it already has. “We try to provide a good working environment with a family atmosphere that makes our employees want to stay here,” he says. “It works, too, because we have little turnover.”

Some motorcoach operators appear to just luck out. Leo Homeijer, operations manager at Lakeland Bus Lines in Dover, N.J., says he was having difficulty filling several driver vacancies when a motorcoach business not far from his firm closed down. “Their drivers came over here for applications and that may be the only reason why I’m doing OK for drivers right now,” he adds.

However, he worries that the good times might not last long. “If you call me back in March or April, I’ll probably tell you that I’m short of drivers,” he says.

Dunham at A Yankee Line maintains that the up and down nature of the motorcoach business contributes to finding and keeping drivers, and makes management of trip and work schedules a challenge.

“We can’t have drivers just sitting around waiting for a call,” he says. “But I guess if we’re having headaches because we don’t have enough drivers, then that just means we’re busy, and that’s good.”



Full fare was scheduled to go into effect Dec. 13.

Marketing plans include a direct mail program. The service is being positioned as “premiere service/executive treatment.”



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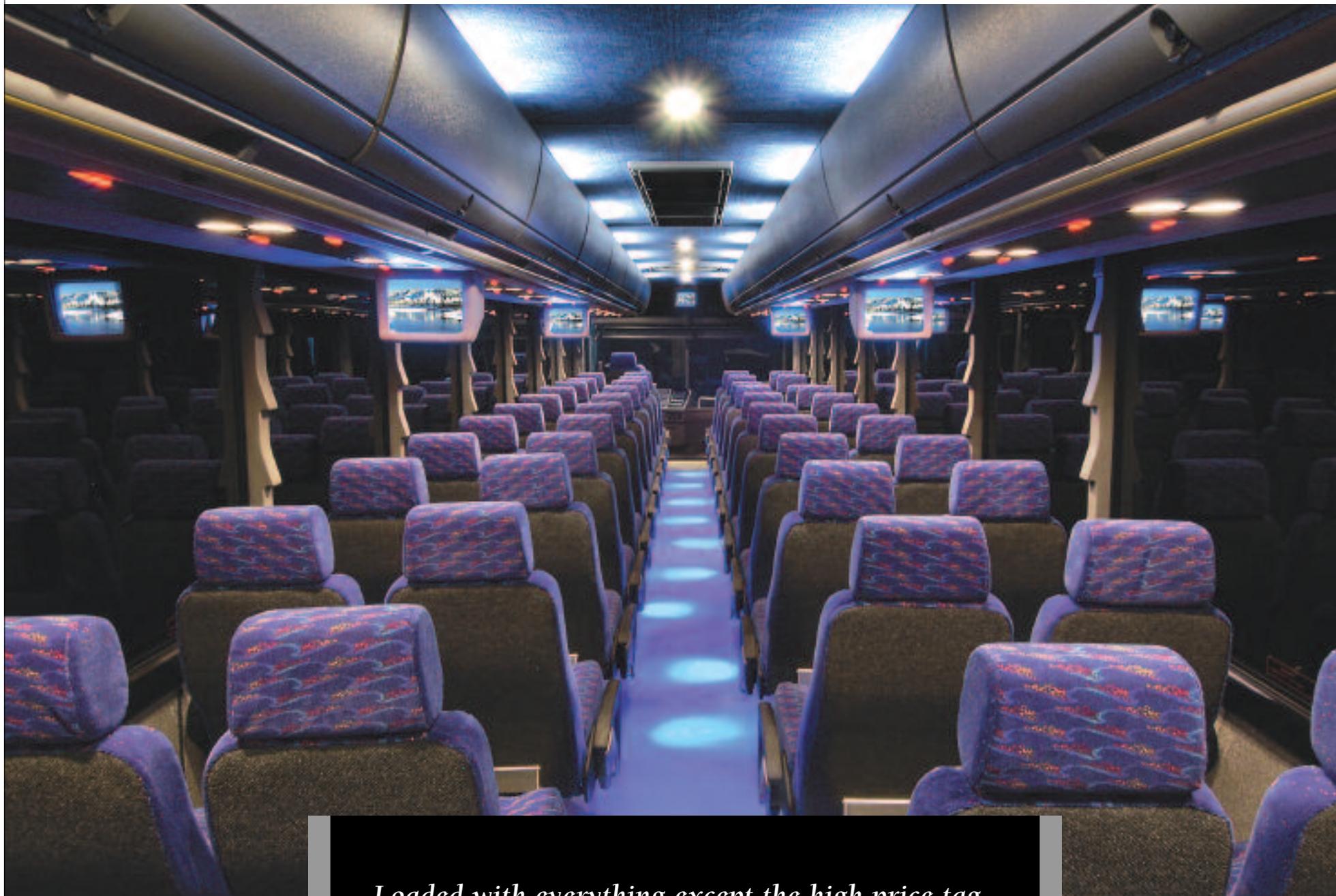
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