

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Quick solution seems unlikely for CSA issue

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — There was little but disappointment last month for motorcoach operators, industry advocates and trucking industry representatives hoping for a relatively quick resolution of one of the thornier issues related to administration of the federal Compliance, Safety, Accountability program.

Accident reconstruction experts told an advisory committee of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration that police accident reports are not a reliable source of information for assigning fault in over-the-road bus and truck crashes.

“The report itself is not, in my opinion, stand-alone enough to determine causation,” said Jeffrey Kidd, a former Georgia state trooper and president of Atlanta-based Collision Specialists Inc.

Going into the committee meeting, it was hoped Kidd’s presentation, and that of another accident reconstruction specialist, would help the advisory panel come up with recommendations that would assist FMCSA Administrator Anne Ferro in developing a workable crash-accountability process for the CSA program.

Instead, the experts essentially stymied the committee.

The CSA crash-accountability/preventability process has become a hot button issue because fatal bus and truck crashes currently are listed on a carrier’s CSA record, but the CSA profile does not contain information regarding whether the carrier was at fault in the crash.

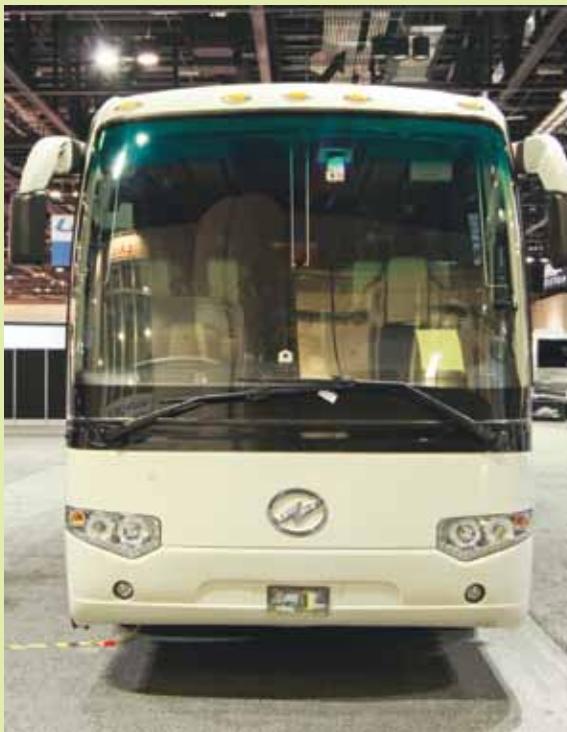
The American Trucking Associations has been particularly outspoken in its criticism of the seeming arbitrariness of the process, saying the FMCSA should

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ▶

UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION New at MOTORCOACH EXPO 2013



A remarkable assortment of buses and coaches were displayed. Turn to Page 15



FMCSA targets coach operators posing high risk

WASHINGTON — Citing a pair of deadly motorcoach crashes during the past three months, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has launched a nationwide crackdown on bus operators it suspects present a “high risk” to the public.

The agency says it is training many of its 400 inspectors, auditors and investigators to work with state police on the effort.

This month, they will begin a two-month blitz of investigations, targeting 150 to 200 operators that have had safety lapses similar to those involved in recent crashes.

“We’re doing this very quick and thorough strike in the next two months. We have all hands on deck,” said FMCSA Administrator Anne S. Ferro.

The agency now will have two investigators, rather than one, conducting Compliance Reviews, Ferro said.

Drivers and employees will be interviewed, as well a company’s owner. The reviews are to include thorough equipment and bus inspections, lasting 45 minutes to an hour, often in partnership with state police, she said.

FMCSA inspectors already conduct standard compliance and safety-management reviews that are cross-checked with destination inspections. Those inspections are to be more extensive.

All operators, whether they are on the FMCSA target list or not, should expect to see more Compliance Reviews and they will be asked questions they have never before been asked.

That sort of thing already has started. One operator reported last

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 ▶

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| 61759 | 2002 | J4500 | DD/ALL | | \$120,000 |

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| | | | | | |
|-------|------|-------|--------|---|-----------|
| 57733 | 2007 | D4505 | DD/ALL | ✓ | \$179,000 |
| 61775 | 2002 | J4500 | DD/ALL | | \$120,000 |
| 61763 | 2002 | J4500 | DD/ALL | | \$120,000 |

WESTERN REGION

| | | | | | |
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California emissions rule stirs consternation, questions

LOS ALAMITOS, Calif. — One-quarter of the charter buses at the Rose Bowl football game on New Year's Day were in serious jeopardy of violating California's stringent regulations designed to curb air pollution from buses and trucks, an official of the state Air Resources Board told attendees at a California Bus Association maintenance seminar here last month.

Les Simonson, manager of the agency's statewide truck and bus enforcement section, reported that 173 buses were inspected as part of a sweep during the Rose Bowl,

the agency's first large-scale bus enforcement action.

Nearly 20 percent of the buses inspected were from outside the state.

However, California's rules cover all diesel-powered vehicles traveling in the state, regardless of whether they are registered in California or elsewhere.

As of Jan. 1, California's Statewide Truck and Bus Rule essentially required motorcoaches and trucks operating in the state with 2000-04 model-year engines to have been retrofitted with PM fil-

ters. (See March 1, 2011, and Jan. 1, 2013, issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Similar requirements took effect for 1996-99 model-year engines in January of last year, and will apply to 2005 or newer model-year engines in January 2014.

The rule is so sweeping and onerous that a leading California motorcoach operator declared at UMA Motorcoach Expo in January that California has completely yanked its welcome mat for motorcoaches.

Simonson said all the potential

Rose Bowl citations were based on the truck and bus rule's "Basic Compliance Schedule," one of two ways fleet owners can comply with the rule.

The first is the model-year option, which requires that buses meet an engine model-year schedule. For example, a coach with a pre-1994 engine can travel in the state until 2015, and one with a 1994 or '95 engine can operate until 2016.

However, a coach with a 1996 to '99 model-year engine is required to have been retrofitted with

a particulate matter (PM) filter by 2012, and then can operate until 2020; one with a 2000 to 2004 engine equipped with a PM filter can operate until 2021, and so on.

For a complete schedule, see "Compliance Requirements Summary" at www.arb.ca.gov/msprog/onrdiesel/documents.php.

The second method of compliance is the phase-in option, which calls for a percentage of a company's fleet to meet the reduced diesel emissions standards by certain dates.

It allows fleet operators to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ▶

National antique bus show will be held in early April

BLYTHEVILLE, Ark. — One of the largest exhibitions in years of vintage buses and motorhome conversions is expected to take place here in early April.

The "Ghosts of Highway 61/ Dixie Tour 2013" national antique bus show likely will bring a wide assortment of pre-1980 model motorcoaches, buses and conversions to Blytheville from April 4-6.

U.S. 61, known variously as the Great River Road (because much of it follows the Mississippi River)

and the Blues Highway (because it runs through Memphis and the Mississippi Delta, two important sources of blues music), stretches 1,400 miles from Minnesota to Louisiana. It runs through Blytheville.

The Blytheville show, which is being organized by bus and automobile restorer Tom McNally of Tom's Garage in Peoria, Ill., with support from Main Street Blytheville, will feature a variety of activities, including a day trip to

Memphis, Tenn., for barbecue and a tour of Elvis Presley's Graceland. Memphis is an hour's drive from Blytheville.

McNally owns a former Greyhound Scenicruiser he has restored to its mid-1950s passenger-carrying glory.

The focal point of the bus show will be the former Greyhound Terminal in downtown Blytheville.

Built in 1939 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the fully restored building fea-

tures arresting art deco architecture and a bright blue paint scheme.

No longer used as a terminal, it now functions as a community center and will be set up with displays and memorabilia for the bus show. During the event, catered meals will be served in the former depot.

The downtown streets of Blytheville (population 15,000 plus) will be closed during the show to allow display parking of the participating coaches.

The event website is at www.ghostsofthehighway.com. A registration form and schedule also can be found at: <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B72D8XC7bxuYdGFYjdTVGRtT0k/edit>.

An entertaining video invitation can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8_no8n79Vo.

Questions should be directed to McNally at (309) 253-2169, or via email to tbonemcnally@hotmail.com. The deadline for forms and payment is approaching.

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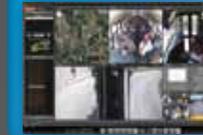
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THE DOCKET

Meeting clarifies border crossing issues

DETROIT — The Ontario Motor Coach Association reports that U.S.-Canadian border crossing issues have been clarified as a result of a meeting with U.S. Customs & Border Protection officials here last month.

The OMCA said its leaders meet for two hours with customs and border protection officials to discuss bus passenger processing at both the Ambassador Bridge and tunnel.

In recent weeks, some motorcoach operators using the Ambassador Bridge at Detroit have reported being told by U.S. border and customs officers they should not be crossing at the bridge, but rather all buses should cross at the tunnel.

OMCA said the issue was discussed during the meeting and it was made clear by customs and border protection officials that buses have the choice of using either the bridge or the tunnel.

The officials said customs and border protection management had advised crossing officers not to tell bus drivers they should use the tunnel.

However, bus passenger processing facilities at the bridge are

more limited than those at the tunnel, where there are four dedicated bus parking spaces and a large dedicated passenger processing facility.

For this reason, bus passengers typically can be processed more efficiently at the tunnel.

Don't scrape by

Before using the tunnel, though, operators having coaches equipped with roof-mounted GPS domes need to be sure there is adequate clearance. The height restriction posted for the tunnel is 13 feet 2 inches.

Also, drivers need to exercise caution when making a couple of turns near the Detroit end of the tunnel, the OMCA advised.

Another issue discussed during the meeting was the use of voluntary advanced passenger manifests.

OMCA said it was told that both the bridge and tunnel welcome the use of passenger manifests. But while manifests do not always guarantee faster processing, operators using them generally are finding they save time at the border.

Manifests can be faxed to the bridge at (313) 226-3140 and the

tunnel at (313) 226-2193. Manifests cannot be sent by e-mail. However, OMCA reported that Customs and Border Protection will investigate its suggestion to allow manifests to be sent by e-mail in the future.

Form I-94 processing

U.S. Customs and Border Protection would appreciate being advised in advance in cases where a bus tour includes a large number of foreign citizens that are being admitted into the United States in a nonimmigrant visa status and require I-94 form processing.

This will help officers assure adequate staff is available to process the travelers.

The customs and border protection officials also asked that OMCA remind operators that fresh fruits and vegetables grown outside of the U.S. or Canada are typically prohibited from crossing the border.

Even some Canadian- and U.S.-grown fruits and vegetables may not be brought into the United States by travelers. These include: Canadian origin tomatoes, peppers, green onions, leeks, chives, garlic with green tops, and

home-grown potatoes; and U.S.-grown oranges, lemons, limes and grapefruit.

Travelers should declare all fruits, vegetables, plants, meats, processed animal products (such as dried soup mixes), pets, or wood products, including firewood, to border crossing officers at ports of entry.

Failure to declare prohibited agriculture products or food items may result in the issuance of fines up to \$1,000.

Lewiston crossing

LEWISTON, N.Y. — Motorcoaches are now allowed to use the commercial truck lane — on weekends only — to cross the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge into the U.S. to access the "primary inspection" stop.

This new privilege is only available from 4 p.m. Fridays to 2 p.m. Sundays.

Use of the truck lane on the bridge will not change the manner in which U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers process buses at Lewiston.

Drivers are not to disembark passengers without the authorization of border officers.

N.J. seeks out license fraud with high tech

TRENTON, N.J. — Officials in New Jersey are crediting a high-tech tool with helping them uncover driver's license fraud.

A motorcoach driver was among the first caught by the system.

The yearlong effort to uncover New Jersey drivers who use fake identities to get driver's licenses produced an initial wave of 38 criminal prosecutions.

The prosecutions include five sex offenders and 29 other drivers whose real licenses had been suspended.

In all, state officials said that more than 600 potential criminal cases have been referred to prosecutors in "Operation Facial Scrub."

The heart of the system is facial recognition technology that has scanned all 19 million photos in the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission system to see if different names could be associated with the same photos.

"What the computer is analyzing are the structural aspects of your face — the distance between your eyes and the features of your nose," said State Attorney General Jeffrey Chiesa.

The first drivers charged included 50-year-old Raymond Pompey, a Coach USA bus driver from Hackensack, N.J., who allegedly assumed the identity of a dead man to get a license.

"His license had been suspended six times for traffic violations, he also has a felony record for identity theft fraud and forgery," Chiesa said.

Also indicted was a 58-year-old truck driver, Rickie Storie, of Old Bridge, whose real and fake licenses have been suspended 64 times, including six times for drunken driving violations.

The investigation also led to charges against an alleged sex offender from Elizabeth, 57-year-old Hiram Maldonado, who had a fake license to drive a school bus.

"He had multiple suspensions related to three DUI convictions. He also is wanted on an active warrant out of Florida on a charge of committing lewd and lascivious acts with a minor," Chiesa said.



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Michigan governor proposes 18-cent diesel tax hike

LANSING, Mich. — Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder, a Republican, has proposed increasing the state diesel fuel tax by 18 cents a gallon, to a total of 33 cents a gallon, to fix roads and bridges.

The governor's proposed spending plan also includes increasing the gasoline tax by 14 cents, to the 33-cent level, with both taxes fluctuating after a few years, depending on fuel consumption.

Michigan's fuel tax has not been increased since 1984.

The proposal also calls for boosting vehicle registration fees by 25 to 60 percent, depending on the type of vehicle.

The tax increases are part of a plan to fund \$1.2 billion in repairs to the state's transportation system.

Toddler seats on airlines is hotly debated

OAKLAND, Calif. — A dispute between the National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Administration could have implications for the motorcoach industry.

The NTSB wants the FAA to create a rule requiring children under the age of two to fly in child safety seats, forcing parents to buy a ticket to accommodate the child seat.

One of the people behind the push for the rule is Jan Brown Lohr.

She was the lead flight attendant on United Flight 232 when it crashed in Sioux City, Iowa, in July 1989. She remembers trying to block a distraught mother from running back in the wreckage for her toddler son.

The boy was one of the 111 passengers killed in the crash.

"I still have the visual image of it," said Brown Lohr.

Now, Lohr is supporting the proposal that would require all children under the age of two to be strapped into a safety seat — essentially a car seat — while on an airplane.

Currently, children under the age of two can fly free if they sit on an adult's lap.

Nonscientific surveys suggest parents are conflicted over the issue. They generally support the proposed rule from a safety standpoint but at the same time are concerned about the cost.

Candace Kolander of the Air Safety Association of Flight Attendants observed that "the only thing that I'm not required to stow securely is a two-year-old on the lap of an adult. That's inconsistent."

And in Virginia

RICHMOND, Va. — The Virginia Senate passed a transportation funding bill that would raise the state's 17.5-cent tax on gasoline and diesel fuel by a nickel, to 22.5 cents a gallon.

The Senate effectively rejected Republican Gov. Bob McDonnell's proposal to do away with the gasoline tax entirely.

McDonnell said he welcomed the Senate vote because it allowed the bill to move to conference, where lawmakers can debate their

differences.

Earlier, the Virginia House approved McDonnell's plan, which would swap the gasoline tax for a 0.8-percentage point increase in the state's 5 percent sales tax. The proposal did not include removing the tax on diesel.

Besides increasing the fuel tax at the pump, the Senate bill would index it to inflation, levy a 1 percent wholesale tax on fuel and raise vehicle registration fees.

The bill passed 26-14, with six Republicans joining Democrats in voting for it.

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CARB rules

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

decide which vehicles to retrofit or replace, regardless of engine model year.

For example, an operator would need to have PM filters on 90 percent of the buses in its fleet by Jan. 1, 2014, and 100 percent by Jan. 1, 2016.

This option counts 2007-model year and newer engines originally equipped with PM filters toward compliance and would reduce the overall number of retrofit PM filters needed.

Any engine with a PM filter regardless of model year would be compliant until at least 2020.

However, the rule states that operators had to report information about all fleet vehicles by Jan. 31, 2012, to use the phase-in option.

There is no reporting requirement in the model-year option.

Given the complexity of the rule and schedule — which is only one part of the overall truck and bus regulation — it was no surprise that Simonson fielded a myriad of questions at the CBA engine maintenance seminar.

One participant asked what an out-of-state fleet operator, who chooses to use the phase-in option but did not meet the reporting

Particulate filter maker shuts down following fires, recalls

SAN LEANDRO, Calif. — Brush fires caused by sparks from its diesel particulate filters and expensive recalls have apparently caused Cleaire Inc., a California-based maker of exhaust filters, to suddenly shut down.

Without a public announcement, the company, based in San Leandro with a manufacturing operation in San Diego, ceased operations and pulled down its website.

Cleaire is owned by New-World Capital Group, a private equity firm that invests in companies engaged in environmental mitigation.

deadline, should do now that the deadline has passed.

“My answer to that is that the reporting deadline is done, but my advice is report it,” he said. “Because there is always some flux... People say, ‘I’m not reporting because if I report, you’ll know how to find me.’

“Here’s my guarantee to you: I will not use (the reporting system) to find people to look at.

“If you took the time to report, then I’m very happy with that. I want to encourage reporting.”

Another operator asked whether out-of-state coach companies

Owners of commercial vehicles equipped with Cleaire filters are left without warranty support, but will be given exemptions from enforcement by California’s Air Resources Board, which had mandated a DPF retrofitting program for older diesel-powered trucks and buses.

“CARB is committed to ensuring that these impacts are minimized and wishes to make it clear that affected owners and fleets with Cleaire filters, as noted in CARB records, will not be penalized for missing deadlines with applicable CARB regulations until

could report based on buses in a division of their operation designated for travel in California, rather than on the buses in their entire fleets.

Simonson opined that they could.

Simonson warned there are significant penalties for noncompliance.

Fines start at \$1,000 per violation per month and increase over time. He said the agency had taken some 3,440 enforcement actions in 2011.

“Sometimes, with people who don’t cooperate, we go to Superior Court,” he said. “There, we’ve re-

ceived judgments to place liens on property. (The California Highway Patrol) can place businesses out-of-service — we had that with a bus company not that long ago,” he said.

However, he added: “You guys are trying to learn about engines and trying to do the right thing. I appreciate that.

“One of the reasons I’m here is to catch the people out there who are not trying to comply. And (because they aren’t complying they) can underbid you, and can put your companies out of business. One of the things we pride ourselves in at

this situation is resolved,” the agency said in a statement.

Washington officials blamed the 3,500-acre Monastery Fire in 2011 on a Cleaire filter on board a truck.

A smaller fire in August 2012 had a similar cause.

Established to serve CARB-

mandated demand for exhaust after-treatment devices, Cleaire and other companies designed and made retrofittable DPFs to keep older vehicles in service.

To assist fleets affected by the company’s dissolution, CARB has posted a letter to Cleaire customers. According to CARB, the letter contains guidance for affected fleets regarding Cleaire retrofit devices that have been installed on vehicles and equipment operating in California.

The letter is available at www.arb.ca.gov/diesel/verdev/companies/cleaire/cleairepage.htm.

ARB is trying to provide a fair playing field.”

Several participants had questions related to a major PM filter manufacturer, Cleaire, that closed its doors in January. (See related article on this page.)

Shawn Daley, of the agency’s mobile source control division, said CARB officials are attempting to minimize the impact of the closure on operators and others.

She directed operators with questions about Cleaire PM filters to contact her colleague Kathleen Mead at (916) 324-9550 or kmead@arb.ca.gov.

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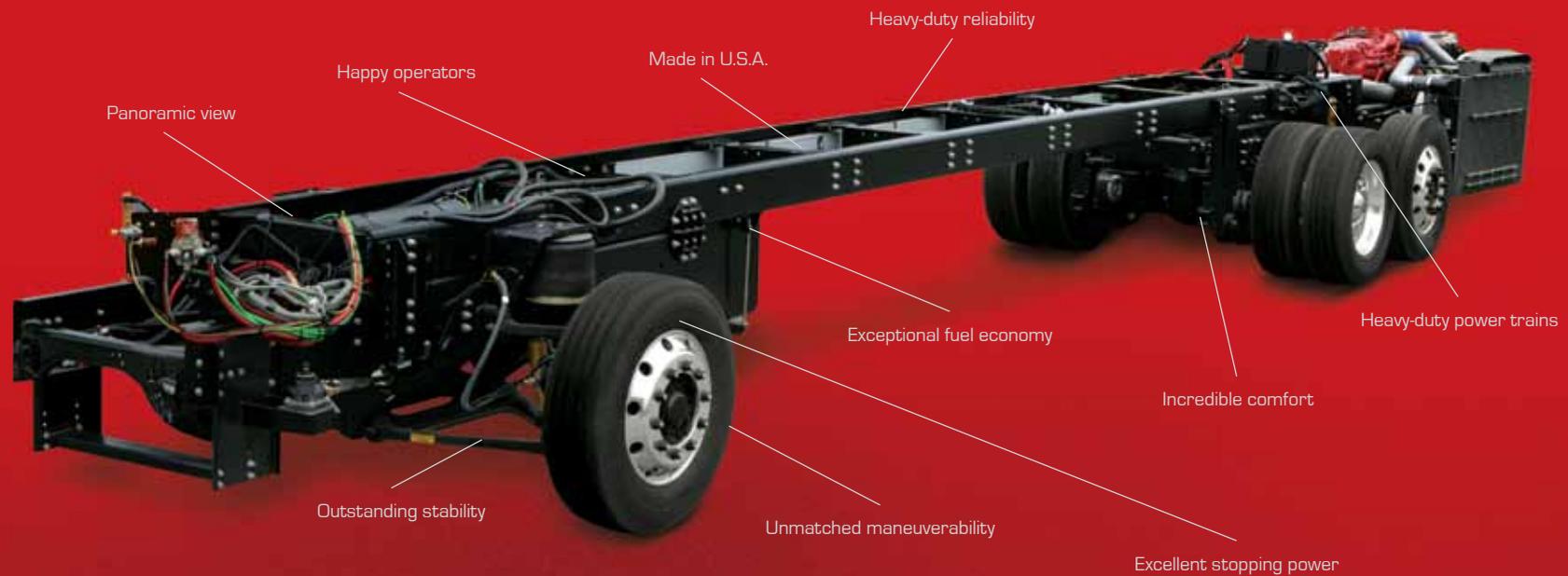
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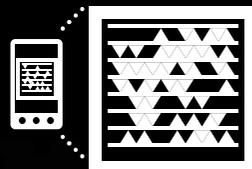




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Senators take aim at FMCSA after fatal California crash

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is under the gun again for its oversight of a bus operator whose coach was involved in a fatal crash last month in California.

U.S. Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., have written to U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, questioning the safety record of the operator involved in the crash in San Bernardino County.

Eight people died in the crash of a coach operated by Scapadas Magicas.

The accident was another of the particularly gruesome variety, with investigators saying several of the

fatally injured passengers were ejected as the coach rolled over.

In their letter to LaHood, Boxer and Feinstein questioned why the operator, in view of its safety record during the previous 15 months, was issued a satisfactory safety rating after a Compliance Review in January.

According to FMCSA records, the company had a history of federal safety infractions, including 58 safety violations and 10 out-of-service orders between October 2011 and January 2013.

The senators pointedly ask how the on-site Compliance Review by FMCSA in January could have resulted in a satisfactory rating.

'The FMCSA did what it often does, it ordered Scapadas Magicas to immediately cease operations.'

The letter also urged the FMCSA and (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) "to use all available authorities to prescribe the strongest possible rules to address the (National Transportation Safety Board's) outstanding motorcoach safety recommenda-

tions and any new recommendations arising from the investigation of Sunday's crash."

Following the crash, the FMCSA did what it often does, it ordered Scapadas Magicas LLC to immediately cease operations, and declared the carrier to be an imminent hazard to public safety.

A post-crash investigation by FMCSA inspectors of Scapadas Magicas' two other motorcoaches that had been operating in the U.S. found a string of mechanical safety violations, and those buses were immediately placed out-of-service.

FMCSA investigators also found that the company had failed to ensure that its vehicles were sys-

tematically inspected, repaired and maintained, and that its drivers were properly qualified and licensed.

On Feb. 3, a coach operated by Scapadas Magicas that was transporting passengers on a ski trip, crashed on a mountain road east of San Bernardino.

Besides the deaths of seven passengers, dozens more were injured, and a driver in a separate vehicle was killed.

The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the incident. A copy of the imminent hazard out-of-service order can be found at www.fmcsa.dot.gov/documents/about/news/2013/Scapadas-Magicas-IH-Order.PDF.

FMCSA crackdown

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

month that the FMCSA "special agent" that showed up at his company asked a series of questions about where the company purchases its fuel and how it pays for it. The operator was mystified by the questions, wondering what they had to do with the safe operation of his fleet.

It is not yet clear whether it would be advisable for operators to consider having an attorney present during a Compliance Review.

Those operators on the targeted list, and they should know who they are or they will find out shortly, need to either clean up their act right away, hire a safety consult to assist them, have their attorney on standby, or park their buses until they can get right.

Bad actors are catalyst

The new FMCSA crackdown comes after two deadly bus crashes in the past three months, one early last month in Southern California

(see story above) and one in eastern Oregon in December. Both involved bus operators known to the agency for safety violations.

Scapadas Magicas, which owned the bus in the California crash that killed eight people last month and Mi Joo Travel & Tour, involved in the crash near Pendleton, Ore., that killed nine in December, were on the FMCSA radar.

Before the crash, the agency had Scapadas on alert status because of vehicle-maintenance violations the previous two years, according to agency records. Before the Mi Joo crash, the operator had been cited for failure to meet driver-related drug and alcohol testing requirements, the agency said.

Although no cause has been determined in either crash, "we're saying: What are we missing here? We're stretching our resources — and authority — as much as we can and still we see these tragedies," said Ferro.

Seen it before

The FMCSA began turning up

the heat on the motorcoach industry two years after a series of crashes on the East Coast, increasing inspections and Compliance Reviews, and conducting enforcement blitzes. The agency says it closed 28 operators last year that it deemed an imminent hazard to the public. In 2005, it shut down one carrier.

The agency oversees safety and compliance for 525,000 motor carriers, 4,000 of which are motorcoach companies. The FMCSA, which has a staff of 1,100, will work with state law-enforcement agencies on its newest crackdown.

Separately, it will ask state and local police not directly involved in the effort to step up enforcement of traffic-law violations by interstate bus drivers, including speeding, tailgating, texting, impaired driving and unsafe lane changing.

Meanwhile, at home...

Meanwhile, the FMCSA also is conducting a "top-to-bottom" analysis of its own authority, structure and resources to determine, among other things, "the right

level of authority, structure and level and allocation of resources" for the organization, Ferro said.

The FMCSA also announced that the SaferBus mobile app will be available for the first time on Google Play. FMCSA released the SaferBus App last year for iPhone and iPad users to provide a way to view a bus company's safety record. Go to www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safety-security/saferbus/saferbus.asp.

Additionally, FMCSA "urges" consumers and whistleblowers to report any unsafe bus company, vehicle or driver to the agency through a toll free hotline (888) DOT-SAFT (368-7238), or FMCSA's consumer complaint Web site: <http://nccdb.fmcsa.dot.gov/HomePage.asp>.

"Motorcoach safety is at the center of this agency's radar," said FMCSA Administrator Anne S. Ferro. "While motorcoach travel is among the safest forms of roadway transportation today, it can and must be safer. The traveling public deserves no less."

Webinar to address CSA

SEATTLE — Former Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Administrator Annette Sandberg will present a free webinar — "Prepare for CSA and Regulatory Changes" — on Feb. 26.

During the webinar, Sandberg will discuss CSA changes and pending federal safety regulations.

The webinar, which is sponsored by Zonar Systems, will be at 10 a.m. Pacific Standard Time Tuesday, Feb. 26.

Sandberg has more than 20 years of public safety and law enforcement experience at both federal and state levels of government. Currently, she is CEO of TransSafe Consulting.

Zonar is a provider of onboard telematics, vehicle inspection, and remote diagnostics systems.

To learn more, go to <http://zonarsystems.us6.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bde74a937d0fb7538c960d9ab&id=dd55945099&e=fjd36c150bb>.

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Know what you're doing BEFORE tackling new business

By Dave Millhouser

They Tore Out My Heart and Stomped That Sucker Flat is (in my skewed opinion) a literary masterpiece by the late, great writer and humorist Lewis Grizzard.

In it, among other things, he describes in hilarious and rather specific terms, the mechanics of his heart surgery.

At one point, prior to the procedure, he says to the surgeon something akin to...“You’re going to crack open my chest and do WHAT?”

When it became clear that he needed the cardiac version of a “valve job,” Mr. Grizzard sought out the best heart surgeon he could find. Despite the fact anyone with a medical license legally could do the operation, he wisely picked a doctor who specialized in that sort of thing.

It may be stretching the metaphor a bit, but buses can be like heart surgery.

If you have coaches, insurance and operating authority (YES, a medical pun) theoretically you can take any group...anywhere...anytime.

But, like having a podiatrist do

heart surgery, it MIGHT not be a good idea.

A top executive at Big Busline once told me he was in trouble. His boss believed there was only one way to do anything (the boss’s way), and how well you executed was less important than doing it his way.

My friend thought there were lots of ways to do most things, and how well you performed them was more important than which method you chose.

On occasion, during the current rough patch, operators struggling for work are searching for revenue in new venues. I’ve gotta be careful how I say this (in case anyone actually remembers anything from previous columns)... but being innovative carries a certain amount of risk.

In the past, I’ve suggested seeking new business.

On the other hand, just because you have the equipment, and need revenue, doesn’t mean you’re instantly qualified for all kinds of work. Taking on new types of business — without the requisite skills — can be a recipe for disaster.

A friend, shorthanded one day, asked me to drive a sightseeing

tour of Chicago. Sightseeing is great work, but not if the driver doesn’t know the turf. The passengers STILL marvel at my showing them the Empire State Building... on Lake Michigan.

They did get their money’s worth, however. It took three hours for the one-hour tour to find its way back to the terminal.

If your specialty is local charters, then taking on long-distance tours is going to require serious homework (and training for your staff). The opposite is true, too. One key to making money on local work is maximizing the use of equipment and drivers...a highly-specialized skill.

A struggling operator on Long Island, who did OK on local trips, thought it a fiscal godsend when he underbid a competitor for a lengthy Florida charter.

In Orlando, his 20-year-old coach’s alternator pooped out, and what would have been irritating in New York became a catastrophe 1,100 miles from home. Setting up logistical help in advance might have saved him.

It’s a mistake to assume that because your competitor makes something look easy...it IS easy.

When charters fall off, some operators have jumped to scheduled service, tempted by the (perceived) higher and steadier revenue. Some do very well, but others fail, and I’d make the case that quality of execution is critical.

When a bus company maintenance system is geared for charter operations that put 50,000 miles a year on a coach...and that vehicle is now running 150,000 miles annually...changes are in order.

The residual value of a vehicle drops precipitously when it has high mileage, requiring some financial reckoning. Driver pay, scheduling and attitude need adjustment (darn few tips on a line run).

Innovation is great, but only if properly executed. Scattershooting the business map, trying everything in hopes of finding a magic bullet is not likely to produce long-term success. If your current business model is not working, see if you can do it better, more efficiently.

Conversely, if your specialty is making eight-track tapes, then you might need to seek new sources of revenue. When you do that, it’s important to do your homework. Assuming your equipment is adequate, decide what skills and



Dave Millhouser

resources your organization is going to need to do things right.

Just leaping in won’t work.

Potential competitors aren’t going to assist, but talk to folks in other parts of the country who are successful in the chosen type of operation. Doing a few things well is more likely to succeed than being mediocre in lots of services.

Under local anesthetic, during back surgery, my surgeon uttered the word you NEVER want to hear during surgery: “Oops.”

For a moment I regretted the decision to have him (a family friend) do the procedure, rather than a specialist.

Fortunately, he was both competent...and kidding.

Dave Millhouser is a bus industry marketing consultant and freelance writer. Contact him by email at: Davemillhouser@gmail.com.

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Georgia operator shut down by feds as 'imminent hazard'

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has shut down another small intercity company operating buses between Atlanta and New York City.

It is the fifth such operation to bite the dust at the hands of the FMCSA in the past nine months.

The latest to be ordered to immediately cease all passenger-carrying services is Top Class Bus Co. of Lithonia, Ga., which is a small community on the eastern outskirts of Atlanta.

The FMCSA said Top Class was "blatantly disregarding federal safety regulations and putting the company's own drivers, passengers and the motoring public at risk."

The "imminent hazard/operations-out-of-service order" issued by FMCSA prohibits the company from any type of commercial passenger service and blocks the unapproved use of its buses by another company or any driver.

According to the order, Top Class operated three coaches, and was primarily running them five to six times weekly between Atlanta and New York City.

During an unannounced, four-day investigation, a team of FMCSA investigators found Top Class failed to monitor and

ensure its drivers comply with drivers' hours-of-service requirements.

Investigators also found that Top Class failed to comply with records-of-duty status, driver qualification, controlled substances, and alcohol use and testing requirements.

And, if that weren't enough, it also was discovered the company was permitting drivers to falsify logbooks in an attempt to hide hours-of-service violations.

The company also was ignoring "critical vehicle equipment deficiencies" identified by drivers.

A woman, Colleen James, was listed by the FMCSA as the principal of Top Class.

At the end of December, the FMCSA shut down Aglemoarge Services, which was operating curbside services between Atlanta and Chinatown in New York City. (See Jan. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

On May 31 of last year, three inter-related curbside operators based in Chamblee, Ga., a suburb of Atlanta north of the city, were shut down along with 23 other curbside operations.

Tony Bus Line, Tony Bus Express Line and Hu Mei Express were ordered out of service because they were declared to be imminent hazards to public safety by the FMCSA.

USDOE hikes diesel price forecast

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Energy has boosted its price forecast for diesel fuel for this year, saying it will average \$3.92 a gallon in 2013 — below last year's average but a nickel higher than its previous projection.

The motorcoach industry's main fuel, which averaged \$3.97 in 2012, will slide to \$3.82 a gallon in 2014 on lower crude oil prices, the USDOE said in its latest short-term energy outlook. Next year's projected price is 4 cents a gallon higher than the agency's previous forecast.

Gasoline will average \$3.55 a gallon this year, up 11 cents from the previous forecast but below last year's \$3.63 average.

The USDOE says gasoline's average price will drop to \$3.39 in 2014.

Diesel fuel prices nationally spiked upward in February, with diesel rising roughly 20 cents a gallon and the U.S. average price

climbing above \$4.10 a gallon.

USDOE also boosted its price forecast for crude oil, the main component of refined fuels, saying it will average \$92.81 a barrel this year.

Crude oil averaged \$94.12 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange last year.

DEF price holds steady

The retail price of diesel exhaust fluid at U.S. truck stops held at \$2.79 a gallon in January from the previous month, Integer Research Ltd. reported.

Almost 900 U.S. truck stops now sell DEF at the pump.

DEF, or diesel exhaust fluid, is a mixture of urea and distilled water that is necessary for over-the-road buses and trucks using selective catalytic reduction, or SCR, engine exhaust technology.

Goal: 10% biodiesel for on-road market

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — The National Biodiesel Board has announced a goal for biodiesel to make up 10 percent of the on-road diesel fuel market by 2022.

The board, a commercial trade association that represents the biodiesel industry, said the goal is intended to be a "stretch but yet attainable," and takes into account future technological breakthroughs.

Eight years ago the board set a goal for biodiesel to be 5 percent of the diesel fuel

supply by 2015 and the association said the industry could hit that goal earlier than expected.

"It is not about replacing every drop of petroleum; it is about continuing to diversify transportation energy so we can meet our needs affordably and sustainably," said Joe Jobe, National Biodiesel Board CEO.

Biodiesel is diesel fuel blended with vegetable oils and waste oils from renewable sources.

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WEST CHESTER, Pa. — *Michael Ahern* has joined the staff of **Krapf Bus Companies** as chief financial officer.

Ahern is a CPA and a Villanova University alumnus, having majored in accounting.

Most recently, he worked for **Accutome**, a Pennsylvania-based supplier of ophthalmic products, including medications, surgical instruments and diagnostic equipment, for 14 years. Previously, he was employed by **Chemical Leaman Tank Lines**.

FAIRFAX, Va. — *Brian Crow*, a Canadian motorcoach industry veteran, has been appointed an adviser to the board of the **Trailways Transportation System**.

Crow has more than 30 years of industry experience and will assist Trailways in its efforts to ex-

pand its membership to Canadian motorcoach operators.

"Brian's in-depth North American industry experience, which includes leadership of national and provincial associations, will be an extraordinary asset to our organization," said *Gale Ellsworth*, Trailways president and CEO.

"He possesses a vast level of knowledge and is well-acquainted with industry leaders and government officials from both Canada and the U.S.A.; plus, Brian is recognized for his strategic vision and forward-moving approach.

"We are confident his counsel, acumen and leadership will help Trailways provide greater service and expanded value to our existing Canadian operators as well as to future affiliated bus carriers..." said Ellsworth.

Crow is the former president/CEO of both **Motor Coach Canada** and the **Ontario Motor Coach**

Association. He also served as executive director of the **Ontario Trucking Association**.

Additionally, he has been a leader in the Canadian tourism industry as founder of the **Travel Industry Council of Ontario**, and an active member of various groups, including the **Motor Carrier Passenger Council of Canada** and **Discover America Canada**.

Crow will assume his new position at the Trailways 77th Annual Stockholders Meeting & Conference, March 3-5, in San Diego.

INDIANAPOLIS — **Baldwin & Lyons Inc.** announced that *Dick Mahany* has joined the company as director of insurance technology.

In his new role, Mahany will be responsible for identifying and developing sources of information and systems for risk rating, underwriting and loss prevention. He will spearhead a usage-based insurance pilot program, developing

intellectual property plans, including product planning and development.

Mahany brings 30 years of experience in designing, developing and managing telematics systems, as well as predictive modeling and management support systems for commercial transportation safety and compliance systems. He has a degree in electrical engineering from **Iowa State University**.

Baldwin & Lyons has specialized in marketing and underwriting insurance for the transportation industry since 1930.

YORK, Pa. — **American Cooling Technology** has named *Jason Verdier* to a newly created position — parts sales and distribution manager.

Verdier has more than 20 years of experience in the North American bus air conditioning business, including years with **Carrier Transport A/C**.



Brian Crow

Jason Verdier

RIVERSIDE, Calif. — **Fleet Financing Resources**, a national lender for new and used commercial transportation equipment, has named *Jim Krug* as director of operations and account services.

In his new position, Krug will manage client services and overall operational success in meeting quality, productivity and financial goals.

Most recently, Krug was vice president and general manager for **Edson Financial**, the captive finance company for the former **Krystal Enterprises**.

Prior to his tenure at Edson, Krug held operation and management positions with other financing companies.

"Jim's experience and commitment to service makes him a valuable asset to our team," commented **Dave Reynolds**, president and CEO of **Fleet Financing Resources**.

Calendar

FEBRUARY 2013

25-26 Motorcoach Association of South Carolina Annual Coach Roadeo, Myrtle Beach, S.C. Info: info@scmotorcoach.org.

28 Alabama Motorcoach Association Annual Operators

Meeting, Thrasher Brothers Trailways, Birmingham, Ala. Info: info@alabamamotorcoach.org.

28 ADA Motorcoach Training at Alabama Motorcoach Association Annual Operators Meeting, Thrasher Brothers Trailways, Birmingham, Ala. Info: Email mmmlinda@embarqmail.com.

MARCH 2013

3-5 77th Annual Trailways Stockholders Meeting & Conference, Mission Bay, San Diego. Info: (703) 691-3052.

7 Greater New Jersey Motorcoach Association Winter Meeting, Atlantic Club Casino, Atlanta City. Info: www.gnjma.com.

11-12 North Carolina Motorcoach Association Operators Meeting and Annual Coach Roadeo, Great Wolf Lodge and Concord Mills, Concord, N.C. Info: info@ncmotorcoach.org.

20 Florida Motorcoach Association Quarterly Operator Meeting, Sheraton Tampa East, Tampa, Fla. Info: info@floridamotorcoach.org.

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Operator in Washington is fined for overloaded coach

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Northwestern Trailways has paid an \$800 fine for overloading a bus traveling between Leavenworth and Monroe, Wash., forcing eight passengers to stand in the aisle for the 85-mile trip.

The bus traveled along mountainous U.S. 2 through the Cascade Range and Stevens Pass, climbing above 4,000 feet.

An investigation by the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission found the bus line violated safety regulations by forcing the passengers to stand for a distance of greater than 35 miles during a trip in early January.

A news release issued the middle of last month by the Utilities and Transportation Commission said its investigation resulted from

a passenger complaint.

The commission fined Northwestern Trailways \$100 per violation for a total of \$800. The company paid the penalty.

The investigation by the Utilities and Transportation Commission did not include a check of the bus' weight, or whether it may have violated tire-and-axle ratings. The commission investigators only

considered the issue of passenger overloading. The coach had a capacity of 56 passengers.

It would have been up to the Washington State Patrol to check for a possible overweight condition, and a commission spokeswoman did not know whether investigators referred the incident to the patrol.

Northwestern Trailways did not

respond to requests for comment.

Based in Spokane, Northwestern Trailways operates routes throughout Washington and Idaho, carrying 90,117 passengers in 2012.

Among the Washington cities it serves are Wenatchee, Everett, Tacoma, Pullman, Omak, Spokane and Ellensburg. Cities in Idaho include Boise, Coeur d'Alene, Lewiston and Sandpoint.

Volvo Group invests in DriveCam

SAN DIEGO — DriveCam Inc. announced that Volvo Group Venture Capital, a subsidiary to the Volvo Group, has made a strategic investment in DriveCam, the accident event recorder company.

Through the investment, Volvo Group becomes a minority shareholder of DriveCam.

"Volvo Group and DriveCam have a common vision — to reduce traffic accidents worldwide," said Johan Carlsson, president of Volvo Group Venture Capital.

"Complementary to our leading position in the global truck manufacturing market, Volvo Group is also focused on the human element in reducing acci-

dents, an area where DriveCam is a clear leader.

"This strategic investment enables the commercial vehicle industry to benefit from our collaborative development efforts, while it also supports the Volvo Group's vision to become the world leader in sustainable transport solutions," Carlsson added.

"Volvo Group and DriveCam both believe there is only one acceptable number of accidents in driving — zero," said DriveCam Chairman and CEO Brandon Nixon.

"And since the human element plays a role in nine out of 10 accidents, the driver risk management solutions that DriveCam has pio-

neered are essential to both companies reaching our common goal of zero accidents on the road."

DriveCam says its technology prevents collisions and reduces fuel costs by improving the way people drive. DriveCam addresses the causes of poor driving by combining data and video with real-time driver feedback and coaching.

Volvo Group Venture Capital says it invests in companies driving service orientation and product differentiation in the transport industry.

Announcement of the Volvo investment came one day after DriveCam announced it ended 2012 with orders in excess of \$100 million — a record for the company.

National Interstate announces affinity program with Trailways

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Insurance Co. announced it has entered into a "preferred partnership" with the Trailways Transportation System Inc.

National Interstate said the agreement is designed to deliver "a superior level of service to Trailways' members that purchase their insurance through National Interstate."

Program benefits include access to a variety of risk management tools and resources, including an exclusive online customer website and accident event recorder technology.

They will also have specialized claims management services, in-

cluding accelerated communication, subrogation assistance, and personalized file reviews.

"We are excited to strengthen our relationship with Trailways' members through our new affinity agreement," said Michelle Silvestro, assistant vice president and national commercial marketing manager for National Interstate.

Added Gale Ellsworth, president and CEO of Trailways: "We are so pleased...to be forming a preferred program partnership with the National Interstate team. They have a long, progressive history in providing a great line of auto liability coverage products."

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Crash accountability

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

immediately establish a system for removing crash records of accidents where it was evident the carrier was not to blame.

After Kidd's presentation, the ATA issued a statement based, at least in part, on his contention the FMCSA could not determine fault in many instances based solely on information from police reports.

"This may be the case with

some crashes, but not when a drunk driver rear-ends a gasoline tanker or the driver of a stolen car crosses a grassy median and strikes a truck head on," ATA President Bill Graves said in a statement. Graves was referring to recent

specific incidents.

"It is clearly inappropriate for FMCSA to use these types of crashes to prioritize trucking companies for future government intervention, especially when responsibility for the crash is so obvious,"

Graves said.

"Including these types of crashes in the calculation of carriers' CSA scores paints an inappropriate picture for shippers and others that these companies are somehow unsafe," Graves added.

Using police accident reports as a basis to assign fault in bus and truck crashes was FMCSA's favored process until last year. In March 2012, Ferro said the agency would delay — "until further notice" — its plans to use police reports as the basis for the FMCSA fault-determination process. (See April 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

At the time, Ferro said the agency had received feedback raising questions about the "reliability" of police reports.

The FMCSA has long held that regardless of who was at fault, past crashes are a meaningful indicator of future crash probability.

In his presentation to the advisory subcommittee last month, Kidd said the reliability of police reports depends on such factors as the extent of the investigating officer's training and experience, and whether evidence from an accident scene is too quickly disturbed to ease post-accident traffic congestion.

After his briefing, Kidd told a reporter that a police accident report is essentially a "reporting document," and not a "100 percent fool-proof report as far as causation."

Most officers who investigate crashes "do not have extensive accident training," he said.

General frustration with the CSA program was apparent throughout the two-day meeting of the advisory committee.

Representatives of motor carriers, law enforcement, trade associations, brokers and other stakeholders voiced concerns not only over the enforcement prioritization system's lack of crash fault/preventability, but also the use by some of CSA scores as de facto safety ratings.

Most, if not all, frustration, however, pointed back to the central underlying problem: The quality of the roadside data on which the entire system is based.

At the end of the day, after hearing from the experts, as well as others who spoke during public comment periods, it seemed apparent it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the subcommittee to come up with a meaningful recommendation for dealing with the crash-accountability issue.

The challenges inherent in determining fault and/or preventability are just too numerous and complex for easy resolution, or a simple recommendation.

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New at Motorcoach Expo 2013



Temsa. CH Bus Sales began delivering the Temsa TS 30, above, last year. Powered by a Cummins ISB engine and Allison B300, the TS 30 is North America's only integral-chassis 30-foot coach. A TS 35 also was on display at the Temsa/CH Bus Sales stand. Temsa will add a 45-model to its line-up this year.



Krystal. The Krystal cutaway bus line became a division of El Dorado National late last year when El Dorado purchased Krystal's bus assets out of bankruptcy and moved them to El Dorado's plant in Salina, Kan. El Dorado, which is the nation's

largest cutaway bus builder, is now producing such Krystal models as this IC Tour, a 38-foot coach built on an International chassis and powered by a Maxxforce engine hooked to an Allison. It seats 32-42 passengers.



Glaval Bus. Glaval brought this Legacy model to Expo, along with a Cable Car Classics' trolley replica. The Legacy is built on a Freightliner S2 chassis and powered by a

Cummins ISB engine and Allison. The Legacy is now available in a 102-inch width, and has seating for up to 45 passengers. It has an air ride suspension.



Turtle Top. Midsize bus manufacturer Turtle Top had the largest and smallest cutaway buses on the Expo floor. The Odyssey XLT, above right, seats 42-46 passengers. Built on a Freightliner chassis, the luxury XLT has plenty of bells and whistles. It has an MSRP of \$216,500. The VanTerra XLT, right, offers upscale travel for 12. It has an MSRP of \$82,500.



Alexander Dennis. The 36-foot, double-deck, open-top Enviro400 Tourist Bus provides travelers unbeatable viewing. The top deck seats 51; the lower deck adds

another 29 seats, or 22 seats plus 2 wheelchair positions. The Enviro400 is powered by a Cummins ISL and Voith automatic transmission. Sunshine is a preferred option.

ABC marks 8,000th Van Hool delivery in North America

ORLANDO, Fla. — ABC Companies celebrated the 25th anniversary of its partnership with Van Hool, one of Europe's leading bus and motorcoach manufacturers, at a special event at UMA Expo 2013.

At the same time, it commemorated the sale of the 8,000th Van Hool coach built for North America.

Vandalia Bus Lines of Caseyville, Ill., purchased the 8,000th unit — a 2013 Van Hool C2045.

ABC Account Manager Aaron Babcock said it was fitting that Vandalia ended up with the milestone coach. As ABC Companies President and CEO Dane Cornell noted:

“Vandalia purchased one of the first 45-foot Van Hools in the U.S. market and are now going to operate the 8,000th Van Hool unit to come to North America. We appreciate their loyalty and are proud to be part of their success.”

Vandalia Bus Lines, which has been in business since 1932, was purchased by Leon and Judy Streif in 1975. The company remains in the Streif family, managed by Judy and sons Dale and Dennis, and has grown to a fleet of 67 vehicles, of which 52 are motorcoaches.

A C2045 was one of the two Van Hool models on display at the ABC stand at Expo. The C2045 had a Detroit DD13 engine, Allison B500, and the following systems: Zonar electronic fleet management, Kidde fire suppression, Iteris lane departure warning, SmartWave tire pressure monitoring, electronic stability control, and REI Elite entertainment.

The other coach at the ABC stand was a luxury T2145 with the same systems, engine and transmission as the C2045. Both coach-

es also had Van Hool Body Line seats with three-point belts.

ABC also used Expo to kick off what it calls its “Mission 2013” initiative.

The initiative, says ABC, is essentially a commitment and business strategy that will guide company product and service offerings. The two key objectives driving the initiative are:

- Supporting operators' total coach lifecycle investments through programs that help reduce the cost of ownership.

- Increasing customer satisfaction by creating greater value and elevating the total customer experience.

ABC released research, conducted for it by Fleet Technologies Inc., that shows the average maintenance cost per mile for Van Hool coaches is 10 cents less than comparable models.

ABC said the research was prompted by operators who had tracked expenses for parts and labor on Van Hool coaches and

found they were less than other buses in their fleets. The research validated the operator findings.

Also unveiled at Expo were support programs built around the ABC Mission 2013. They include:

- Video call support: FaceTime and Skype support for operators during business hours.

- Scheduled 2013 education and training resources.

- Mobile resources for drivers: QR code window clings installed in all new vehicles, providing links to driver resources

- Detroit Virtual Technician: This feature is now standard in all 2013 Van Hool models equipped with Detroit engines. When a check engine light is displayed on the dash, the system sends alerts to designated operations personnel and the Detroit Customer Support Center for added on-the-road support.

On hand for Expo and to mark the 25th anniversary of the partnership between ABC and Van Hool was Filip Van Hool, who had been appointed CEO of Van Hool



This Van Hool C2045 is equipped with 110-volt electrical outlets

just two weeks before Expo.

Filip Van Hool, 48, is the grandson of Bernard Van Hool, who was operating a small trucking company in Belgium when he decided to start building buses because he perceived there was going to be a need in post-war Europe for public transportation.

Filip Van Hool joined the com-

pany in 1989. He became a member of the executive team in 1999 and prior to being named CEO was in charge of the overall operations of the company's bus and car division.

For the past five years, Filip Van Hool has been a member of the board of directors of both Van Hool and ABC Companies.

Ameritrans unveils midsize passenger model

ORLANDO, Fla. — Ameritrans, a manufacturer and distributor of upscale midsize cutaways, debuted a new model at Motorcoach Expo — the 33-foot Ameritrans F330.

The stylized cutaway displayed enviable fit and finish.

It is aimed at tour-and-charter operations, church groups, schools and others interested in a cutaway with added panache. It has seating for 23 to 31 passengers.

The F330 is built on the solid Ford F550 chassis and offers a 102-inch-wide cabin, featuring a flat floor and maximum legroom. It's designed for a flexible ADA-access location.

Thermopane windows and a front cab touring window come standard. Many seating configurations are available, or Ameritrans will build to order to meet operator requirements.

Other features include:

- Welded, galvaneal steel cage construction
- Premium passenger amenities
- Rear luggage and paratransit options

“The new 33-foot, 31-passenger F330 was purpose-built to complement our existing E-series, with capacity for 25 passengers, and M2 series, with up to 47-passenger capacity,” said Barry Hines, Ameritrans general manager.

“We are eager to demonstrate our ability to deliver flexible solutions that adapt to a variety of applications and reflect the needs of our customer base.”

Ameritrans' ability to customize to customer requirements is a company hallmark. This year, it expects to increase the number of units it delivers by upwards of 20 percent, and it is increasing its dealer network by more than one-third.



The F330 has an REI system

Founded 15 years ago, Ameritrans manufactures and distributes a variety of cutaways at its plant in Elkhart, Ind. The company is owned by ABC Companies. For information, go to www.ameritransbus.com.

'Dark tourism' is big business; death seems to fascinate

ORLANDO, Fla. — Many tourists visit art museums, performance centers and great national parks to take in humankind's highest cultural achievements and most revered natural wonders.

But what draws travelers to Nazi concentration camps, the Killing Fields of Cambodia or the New Orleans neighborhoods wrecked by Hurricane Katrina?

That was one of the questions that arose during “Shining a Light on Dark Tourism,” a talk by Dr. Philip Stone, of the University of Central Lancashire, during the NTA Convention at Travel Exchange here last month.

“Dark tourism is about the commodification of death, the packaging of death. It's big busi-

ness, and it always has been,” said Stone, who's edited several books on dark tourism, including *The Darker Side of Travel* and *Making Absent Death Present*.

Stone said the economic impact of dark tourism is difficult to measure, but he cited a few statistics: About 1.4 million people visited the former Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz in Poland last year; 2.2 million people went to Ground Zero in New York City, and 30 million saw *Body Worlds*, an exhibition of actual human corpses.

“The Titanic cruises of 2012, which commemorated the 100th anniversary (of the sinking of the famous luxury liner), were sold out two years in advance. You could take a cruise of the very spot of the

sinking of the Titanic and dress in Edwardian clothes and were served the same dinner menu,” he said. “The only difference was of course you didn't sink.”

An interest in sites associated with death, tragedy and disaster is nothing new, he said. It shows up in works as diverse as *The Sex Pistols' “Holidays in the Sun,”* released in 1977, and Charles Dickens' “Uncommercial Traveller” articles, published more than a century earlier.

“(Dickens) said that whenever I am in Paris I am dragged by invisible forces to the morgue. I never want to go to there but I am always called there,” Stone said.

“Really, what he is trying to get at is why people are fascinated by

death itself.... But of course the invisible force which he referred to is marketing. We are marketed to our fears and to places of death.”

Stone took the handful of people in his audience through a virtual tour of dark-tourism hot spots, with photos showing tourists posing at battlefields, cemeteries, concentration camps and natural- and man-made disaster sites.

“Dark tourism can be spontaneous. It's accidental. This is in Sri Lanka in 2004, in the aftermath of the Boxing Day tsunami. Tourists just turn up, where rubbernecking becomes a kind of recreational activity,” he said.

“The questions you want to ask yourself is, why are they doing it? Do they want to capture the mo-

ment for prosperity? Are they validating with images? Are they saying that they have they been there?”

In keeping with his academic approach, Stone asked far more questions than he answered. That was his intention.

“These are critical issues for (the travel) industry to address, issues I probably wouldn't consider as a day-to-day manager.... So, really the aim of the session is about provoking ideas of critical thought. I want you to leave with more questions than answers.”



Dr. Philip Stone

MCI marks 80th anniversary during UMA Expo

ORLANDO, Fla. — Motor Coach Industries used Motorcoach Expo here to officially kick off activities marking its 80th birthday.

A champagne toast, accolades for customers, recognition of its top-selling J-model coach, and acknowledgement of the addition of the Setra brand were some of the elements that formed the MCI celebration.

“There’s plenty of reasons to celebrate,” said Patricia Ziska, MCI vice president of sales and marketing private sector.

“Even as we mark our 80th year, MCI continues to evolve with better looking, more reliable models, featuring advanced safety technologies and new interior designs and amenities that are attracting a new generation of riders.”

Added MCI President CEO Rick Heller: “We are working every day to make this company better. We have a well-trained workforce dedicated to meeting and surpassing the needs of



The Setra S 417TC has a Saucan TDS tracking system

our customers on a daily basis.”

For the first time, MCI, as the exclusive distributor of Setra coaches and parts in North America, offered a Setra coach at its Expo stand.

On display was a Setra S 417 Top Class owned by Compass Transportation of South San Francisco. The coach featured a stunning high-

end, custom-designed 27-passenger interior.

An MCI executive said the company picked the Compass coach to display on the show floor because it wanted to showcase the ability of Setra to provide custom interiors.

The Setra featured Ambassador 2+1 VIP leather seating, ISRI driver



“Fasten Seatbelt” is stitched into seatbacks on this Academy J4500

seat, leather and wood accents, rose-wood flooring, and a Mercedes Benz OM 471 engine hooked to an Allison B500.

Also at the MCI stand was an Academy Bus J4500 equipped with a Cummins ISX 425-horsepower engine, Allison B500, and Amaya Torino G Plus seats in Holdsworth fab-

ric with three-point seatbelts.

MCI traces its roots to Winnipeg, Manitoba, where, in 1933, repair shop owner Harry Zoltok introduced his first vehicle design — an 11-passenger body on a Packard chassis.

Zoltok’s Fort Garry Motor Body and Paint Works took the name Motor Coach Industries in 1941.

DesignLine introduces coaches to motorcoach industry

ORLANDO, Fla. — DesignLine Corp., a new exhibitor at Expo, had the only compressed natural gas-powered motorcoach on the show floor.

DesignLine is introducing its “ECOCoach” commuter model to the North American market. The 45-foot coach has a Cummins ISLG engine, ZF EcoLife transmission, Thermo King roof-mounted A/C, and Bendix/Knoor-Bremse disc brakes.

Eight CNG fuel tanks are mounted in the luggage bay. Over-the-road fuel cost reportedly is in the range of 30 cents a gallon.

The first major buyer of ECO-Coaches is New Jersey Transit, which has ordered 76.

“The CNG-powered coach for

NJ Transit offers the design elements of a coach bus, coupled with the cost savings associated with natural gas propulsion,” said Steve Justice, DesignLine sales and marketing director.

“The EcoCoach is an efficient, clean burning coach designed for over the road and intercity use.”

With the Altoona-tested coach, “DesignLine is poised to capture a significant share of the emerging sector for CNG coaches,” Justice added.

DesignLine also has an order from the Denver Regional Transportation District for 32 ECO-Saver shuttle buses for service along downtown Denver’s famous 16th Street Mall.

The buses feature Design-

Line’s fourth-generation “Range Extended Electric Vehicle” power train that uses a small onboard generator to recharge the batteries, and has the ability to operate as a pure electric vehicle for a large portion of daily service.

DesignLine was founded in New Zealand in 1985. Initially it was a manufacturer of tour coaches. In the 1990s it diversified into transit buses and then added hybrid city buses in the late 1990s.

It was acquired by American interests in 2006, and the company headquarters was relocated to Charlotte, N.C. It opened its U.S. plant five years ago.

DesignLine Corp. no is longer affiliated with the DesignLine operation in New Zealand, which



Performance of the ECOCoach is described as being ‘diesel like’

was placed in liquidation in 2011.

Joseph Smith became president and CEO of DesignLine last year following a company recapitalization and reorganization of its

board and management. Smith is a former president of the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority.

More information available at www.designlinecorporation.com.

It’s not your mother’s tour any more — it’s much more

ORLANDO, Fla. — It’s 2013 and many tour groups want more than a comfortable ride on a luxury motorcoach, cozy lodging accommodations and quick stops at popular destinations and attractions.

Now many of them are demanding — and getting — much more flexibility with their schedules and more time to be out on their own.

“We’re seeing much more of that in the industry now,” observed Brian Butterworth, sales manager for The Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge, Mass., during a panel discussion on bus and tour operators working together. The session was conducted at UMA Motorcoach Expo at Travel Exchange here last month.

Among the many groups that visit his popular tourist dining and overnight facility are some that are touring with itineraries that give

travelers more free time and multiple choices on places to visit.

“Tours don’t seem to be set in stone as much as they once were,” he said, adding that some tours even include taking part of a group to one attraction and others to a different location.

The changes, according to the panelists, emphasize the critical need for managers of the various ingredients of a tour — motorcoaches, hotels, restaurants and attractions among them — to work much more closely with each other.

Linda Jeffries, sales and marketing executive for the Newseum in Washington D.C., said she sees the same free time trend and has responded by adding two-day ticket specials for people in tour groups who want to return to the attraction during their free time the day after visiting with their group the day earlier.

“If there are tour directors who want to work with us, we’ll certainly talk to them,” she said.

J. Chris Babb of The Group Tour Company in Washington D.C. said while free time is becoming more and more popular with tour groups, other changes support the need for businesses in the industry to work more closely together.

“We’re seeing a lot more family tours because a lot of schools are no longer doing them,” he said.

Babb said his company used to regularly book school tours that included as many as 50 children and two or three teachers. Now, because in many cases families are taking over the trips, the makeup of the groups has changed to about 25 children and 20 parents.

In addition, he said families are getting more involved in the trips

that schools still are sponsoring and, on many, families are following the buses in their cars and joining their children on the tours.

Those changes make it necessary for booking agents to broaden their planning by having to arrange for extra eating and lodging accommodations and ticket sales at attractions.

“We all have to become more diverse,” he said.

Meantime, the panelists all indicated that the devastating years of 2010 and 2011, when the sour economy sent the tour industry into a tailspin, were followed by a strong recovery last year.

“For us, 2010 was the worst, 2011 was better and in 2012 it was like nothing had ever happened,” said Brian Scott, president of Escot Bus Lines in Largo, Fla.

And as the tour business contin-

ues to pick up as anticipated, the panelists emphasized that every facet of the industry needs to work together so they all are ready for the next wave of travelers.

“We all need to think of niche markets and try to figure out who the next travelers are going to be,” emphasized Jeffries.

She also offered some advice to motorcoach operators whose new business might include trips to the country’s top tourist destination — Washington, D.C.

She said the area has changed dramatically over the past few years and operators should familiarize themselves with the region and its many new attractions before sending out a bus load of travelers.

“I think a lot of them are still relying on their experiences of several years ago, and it’s not the same.”

Prevost focus at Expo: 'Customer-focused introductions'

ORLANDO, Fla. — Prevost reported it had a “very successful” UMA Expo 2013, marked by several introductions and announcements.

Prevost’s main stand at Expo showcased a 2013 H3-45 motorcoach, featuring PRIME, the company’s innovative new energy management system, and a 2013 Volvo 9700, highlighted by interior upgrades.

The Prevost PRIME energy management system is designed to reduce fuel consumption by using engine “down time” — braking, deceleration and other negative torque situations — to charge the batteries and compress air.

PRIME focuses on eliminating parasitic loads on the engine by “intelligent management” of the alternators and air compressor duty cycle.

Instead of constantly charging, the alternator uses engine negative torque — braking, deceleration — to generate “free” electricity.

Depending on the air requirement, PRIME also will trigger the production of compressed air during negative torque.

The PRIME system utilizes readily available, maintenance-free, absorbed glass mat batteries and a Vanner 80 series battery equalizer.

Prevost says the system will produce an estimated fuel savings of 2 percent, which will vary by duty cycle and driver performance.



Ease of maintenance is highlighted for the Prevost H3-45

It says results have been validated in real-world driving conditions, with some test vehicles showing fuel savings higher than 2 percent.

The Volvo 9700 at the Prevost stand featured new interior fabrics for the passenger seats, side walls, roof liner and driver’s seat.

There also were new Bosch 15-inch monitors. Optional aluminum overhead parcel rack storage doors are available, giving the interior of the 9700 a sleeker look.

Several dashboard buttons have been relocated and reconfigured, giving drivers better access. There’s an integrated driver microphone built into the driver seat.

The I-Shift transmission control is now located on a shifter pad

on the left side of the driver area, “giving drivers a familiar transmission interface.”

The front end of the 9700 now has a chip protection system designed to keep stone and debris damage to a minimum. The protection is also located behind each wheel.

The Prevost H3-45 on display featured a Volvo D13 engine, Allison B500, Amaya Torino A210 seats with three-point seatbelts, 110-volt outlets, Prevost electronic stability program, and Prevost Liaison vehicle management information system.

Prevost also had a booth set up in the Maintenance Aisle, staffed by Prevost regional service managers and a service training manager.

The booth also introduced the



The Volvo 9700 interior gains new features for 2013

new Prevost Tools application.

Prevost Tools puts access to many Prevost service tools in one application. From any mobile device, the user can link to wiring diagrams, pneumatic diagrams, technical manuals, driver’s guides and service bulletins for any Prevost or Volvo motorcoach.

The app also provides links to Prevost online warranty services, the Prevost Liaison telematics system, and online parts ordering.

The Prevost Maintenance booth featured a new X3-45 coach, which served as the demonstration vehicle for various sessions on coach inspections and ADA compliance.

During the show, Prevost Vice President of New Coach Sales Robert Goodnight awarded the Prevost Sales Leader Awards to Ward Hicken and Serge Gonthier.

The awards are given each year to the leading regional sales managers from the Prevost team.



Stallion. The 900 series 35-foot coach uses a Freightliner chassis.



Vintage. The Museum of Bus Transportation borrowed this 1940 Yellow Coach for display at Expo and to promote the museum. The coach was restored by ABC Companies as a replica of ABC founder Clancy Cornell’s first bus. The next big event on the museum calendar is the annual Spring Fling, tentatively set for June 1, at the museum facilities in Hershey, Pa.

Caio/Alliance calls program ‘a hit’

ORLANDO, Fla. — The North American distributor of Caio motorcoaches unveiled a “customer-centric” ownership program at UMA Motorcoach Expo here.

The “Alliance Evolution Program,” as it’s called, is designed “to better support motorcoach operators’ businesses.”

And, according to Alliance Bus Group, which was formed last year to distribute Caio in North America, the program was “a big hit” at Expo.

The program resonated particularly well with independent and fleet operators looking for more support and business-friendly financial options from a motorcoach provider, said Mike Pouncey, Caio sales manager for the Alliance Bus Group.

“This proves Alliance Bus Group’s ability to fill a gap in the marketplace with the new Caio products,” said Pouncey.

The combination of an efficient manufacturing process through partnerships with Daimler/Freightliner and Caio, plus the support and economies of scale offered by Alliance Bus Group, allows operators a greater chance at higher profitability, he said.



Amaya seats, REI entertainment systems are standard on Caio

“The Alliance Evolution model protects customer business interests by guaranteeing the lowest cost of ownership throughout the vehicle’s entire life cycle,” Pouncey added.

Alliance Bus Group/Caio had “an extremely successful UMA show,” surpassing lead generation, scheduled demos and on-floor sales numbers by more than 150 percent, according to Pouncey.

“Operator responses were overwhelmingly positive and reaffirmed the proof of concept.”

For Expo, Caio had two coaches on display, plus a Freightliner chassis.

Besides a new 45-foot Caio G3600, there was a four-year-old,

37-foot Caio G3400 model. The G3400 reportedly was the first Caio sold in the U.S. and had 110,000 miles on the odometer. It was difficult to tell it from new.

Lettered on the side of the coach was a testimonial from David Haigler of Lancaster Tours/Lancaster Trailways of the Carolinas.

Caio is built by Caio Industrial of Sao Paulo, Brazil, which lays claim to being the largest full-line bus manufacturer in the Western Hemisphere, producing 9,000 units annually.

Alliance Bus Group is a network of bus sales dealerships with locations in Atlanta, Dallas, New Orleans, Orlando, Carlstadt, N.J., and Jackson, Miss.



New products clean up, cool down at Motorcoach Expo

ORLANDO, Fla. — Introducing...Barf Clean!

That's right, a drying and odor-neutralizing agent specially designed to assist in cleaning up that unfortunate by-product of motion sickness.

It was among the new products introduced at the UMA Motorcoach Expo 2013 here last month.

"The problem is that vomiting has a domino effect on a bus. The faster the driver can neutralize it, the quicker the odor gets eliminated," says Bill Fuller, at the Inca Gold booth.

That's especially important with today's tech-connected passengers, according to Fuller. "When the customer has a bad experience, they don't tell the bus driver or the coach operator. They tell a million people on Facebook," he says.

Barf Clean comes to the rescue in pre-measured, four-ounce foil packages.

According to the directions, powder granules are sprinkled over the vomit, and the odor stops. In 10 to 20 minutes, it can be swept up as a semi-dry powder. To learn more, go to www.incagoldonline.com.

Here's a sampling of other new products promoted by exhibitors:

A remarkable new product is BigRoad, an electronic logbook that drivers download as an application on Google Play and use on their mobile devices.

The e-log can help drivers improve accuracy and avoid common "form and manner" errors such as poor penmanship or not using a ruler, which account for a majority of logbook violations, according to Kelly Frey of the Waterloo, Ontario-based company.

The app also enables drivers to create vehicle inspection reports, send and receive instant messages, check real-time traffic and weather reports, and send documents and photos.

For example, a driver can email his "logbook" for several days as a PDT document to his or her supervisor, the safety director, the dispatcher or whoever.

Launched last year in the trucking industry, it has been downloaded by more than 36,000 users in its first six months.

The app's user-review scores show an average rating of 4.5 out of 5 stars, including an endorsement from user Domingo Tovar: "Great program! As a bus driver I'm very happy with BigRoad. Our company wants paper logs but using BigRoad has made logging much easier for our drivers here on the West Coast. Thanks, BigRoad."

In addition to the free app for drivers, BigRoad offers fleet-management software for operators with



Like other industry suppliers, Mohawk Manufacturing & Supply Co. brought its latest and greatest to Expo.

such features as: fleet tracking with real-time traffic; automated duty-status changes; driver log auditing and archiving; vehicle inspection reports, and archived text chat with sent/delivered/read receipts.

The web-based fleet management system costs \$15 per bus per month, and operators can try it out on a free, 30-day basis, according to the company website.

For information, go to www.bigroad.com.

Hadley, which is well known for truck horns and exterior mirrors, debuted new interior systems for the bus industry, the Swan AC and the Wave.

The Swan AC is an "air-conditioned-ready" luggage rack system, with air channels and fully adjustable air-flow nozzles built in. The streamlined Wave is a seamless luggage rack system designed for narrow-body vehicles and offers various optional material choices for the storage floor.

Both models are beefy and designed as "rattle-free" systems that are easy to clean, durable and easy to install, and can be upgraded with reading and night lights and other features, according to a Hadley designer.

In addition to display at the Hadley booth, the systems were showcased as part of the Turtle Top and AmeriTrans bus exhibits.

Hadley also introduced its new "Quad Control" for exterior mirrors.

The new control is Hadley's first switch to allow full control of four panes of glass, plus heat function, in one controller.

Additionally, Hadley unveiled its "Dual Control" switch in a functional display at Expo.

Both Hadley control units are electronic, rather than electronic and mechanical. The controls eliminate joysticks and moving mechanical parts.

To learn more, visit the company's new website at www.hadleyadvantage.com.

Amsoil Synthetics presented its line of synthetic motor oils and other products, including oil, hydraulic, fuel and air conditioning filters, transmission fluid, synthetic gear lubes and heavy-duty greases.

Dan Watson, an independent Amsoil jobber and certified lubrication specialist, said the company's synthetic oil can provide better protection and extend the life of engines, particularly those in buses equipped with diesel particulate filters found in pollution control systems.

"These engines are not like anything there was five years ago," he says.

For information, visit Watson's website at www.thelubepage.com.

Kleenoil USA showed off its line of Power Up Lubricants and

its Bypass Filter System, an on-board oil recycling system for engines designed to extend routine maintenance intervals and the life of the engine.

Ron Mowrey, a Florida-based distributor, explained how the system works: A small portion of the total oil passes through a dense filter cartridge at a high speed, making it possible to remove nearly all water and particle contamination while retaining the oil additives needed for continued use.

To learn more, go to www.kleenoilusa.com.

Dia Solutions introduced Longhaul 485, a highly concentrated portable toilet deodorizer, marketed as environmentally friendly because it is NPE, phosphate, butyl and formaldehyde free.

Another "green" feature: The product is shipped in recyclable cardboard boxes rather than plastic containers.

For information, go to www.diasolutions.ca.

Monochem promoted DynaBact, a toilet treatment product that uses enzymes and non-pathogenic bacteria to liquefy waste and digest toilet tissue while keeping equipment and tanks clean.

The all-biological process eliminates the use of formaldehyde, ammonia salts and other harsh chemical agents that can cause problems

in bacterial populations in municipal wastewater treatment plants, according to the company.

"One of the main advantages is that there's not a dumpsite that won't accept this," a company spokesperson said.

To learn more, go to www.worldwidemonochem.com.

American Cooling Technology introduced a new family of skirt-mounted condensers.

The new CS-2, CS-32 and CS-3 models provide a universal mounting pattern which allows the A/C installer and service technician the flexibility to select the best bolt pattern for the specific vehicle.

The universal condenser further expands ACT's existing North American product line that includes a full range of split-system and roof-mounted air conditioning units for school and shuttle buses.

Based on market feedback from customers who participated in field trials, we've made the new condensers easier to install than competing skirt-mount condensers, said a company spokesman.

The condensers are available in both 12 volt and 24 volt and can be supplied in capacities from 60,000Btu/hr. to 82,000 Btu/hr.

To learn more go to www.actusa.us.com.

Finally, Holdsworth Fabrics presented its "totally reinvigorated" Vigor-Elements Collection of wool moquette seating fabrics.

The new line comprises 125 different design and color permutations, taking elements from wide-ranging design influences to create versatile interior schemes for modern vehicles. The fabric is made from 85 percent wool, 15 percent nylon with an inter-woven cotton backing.

With origins going back more than half a century, the original Vigor collection was Holdsworth's first moquette fabric woven using a face-to-face construction, producing two rolls of pile fabric simultaneously.

Since then the fabric has evolved in both design and color, to include traditional heritage patterns, classic center panel stripes and the celebrated all-over graffiti style.

The company's Elements Collection is a new generation of designs in five color themes — grays, blues, reds, greens and browns — with tonal shades and modern bright highlights. Inspiration is taken from current trend areas which encompass architectural details, mathematical and geometric patterns, as well as natural and organic influences.

To learn more, go to www.holdsworthfabrics.com.

UMA/NTA Travel Exchange by the numbers

ORLANDO, Fla. — The combined UMA Motorcoach Expo and annual NTA Convention at Travel Exchange brought together more than 3,600 tour-and-travel buyers and sellers, including a total of 1,176 buyers from 632 companies.

NTA (formerly the National Tour Association) has come up with a few other Travel Exchange

numbers:

- 380 NTA buyers attended from 230 companies.
- 796 UMA buyers attended from 402 companies.
- 34 countries were represented among the attendees.
- 26 members of the media attended, including trade magazines and bloggers.

• 42 motorcoaches transported attendees to the Welcome Reception/Icebreaker at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Center.

• The convention show floor took up 450,000 square feet.

• Show photographers snapped 27 gigabytes of photos.

• Bus operator registration was up 23 percent.

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National Interstate Corp. reports mixed results for 2012

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Corp. released preliminary financial results for 2012, showing gross premiums rose 9 percent for the year, while net after-tax earnings from operations declined around 14 percent.

The parent company of National Interstate Insurance, a major motorcoach industry insurer, said total premium income for the year amounted to \$573 million, up from

\$526 million in 2011.

Net after-tax earnings from operations, which National Interstate Corp. said is a useful tool for investors and analysts to use in analyzing ongoing operational trends for the company, were between \$1.51 and \$1.53 per share last year, compared to \$1.77 per share in 2011.

Net after-tax earnings from operations at National Interstate include both underwriting and net

investment income.

The company said its net income for the year was adversely impacted by higher claims costs in the fourth quarter.

“Specifically, losses incurred from Superstorm Sandy, and unfavorable development from prior year claims reduced 2012 fourth quarter net after-tax earnings from operations by approximately 10 cents per share,” National Interstate said.

“This is in sharp contrast to the unusually strong 2011 fourth quarter underwriting results, in which the company experienced low claims frequency and severity in its passenger transportation products, as well as favorable development from prior year claims.”

National Interstate has previously indicated that underwriting results can vary because of the timing of claims occurrences and it does not view the 2012 unfavorable development from prior-year claims to be “significant.”

While net income for the

fourth quarter was impacted by the higher claims costs, at the same time there were gains from investments that partially offset the increase in claims.

For 2012, net investment income and realized gains from investments are estimated to be higher than the 2011 gains by roughly 17 percent.

Bottom line, National Interstate estimates net income for 2012 will be 2 to 5 percent below 2011.

National Interstate is expected to release final 2012 numbers around Feb. 26.

A week after the release of the preliminary results, the National Interstate board increased the company quarterly dividend by a penny, setting the new rate at 11 cents per share.

The first quarterly dividend payable at the new rate will be March 22, to shareholders of record March 8.

During the fourth quarter of last year, the National Interstate board declared a special one-time

dividend of \$2 per share. The \$2 payout was added to the regular fourth-quarter dividend of 10 cents per share.

To pay for the special dividend, National Interstate sold investments during the fourth quarter. It used some of the money it raised from the sale of the investments to pay a portion of its outstanding debt.

Dave Michelson, National Interstate president and CEO, said the \$2 per share payout was an “opportunity to return a portion of our excess capital to our shareholders through a one-time special dividend.

“Since our last acquisition in 2010, National Interstate’s profitability has resulted in accumulated capital that exceeds our near-term needs. We continue to maintain adequate and increasing capital to fund our organic and acquisition growth strategies.”

National Interstate Corp. has a healthy A.M. Best credit rating of “bbb+” with a “positive” outlook.

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Growth continues at Greyhound

ABERDEEN, Scotland — FirstGroup plc, parent company of Greyhound Lines, reports that revenue at Greyhound grew by 1.6 percent during the final three months of last year.

In its “interim management statement” for the fourth quarter of last year, FirstGroup said the U.S. operations of Greyhound continued “to achieve a strong performance.”

“Against the backdrop of a sluggish economy, operating margin performance (at Greyhound) remains in line with our expectations as a result of the actions we have taken,” said FirstGroup.

“These actions have transformed the business and created a more flexible and agile operating model. We continue to expand our popular (Greyhound) Express product and build on the unique strength of our national network in providing support for sustainable flows on newly launched services as we roll out across more destinations,” FirstGroup added.

Greyhound Express is the company’s “premium direct service between major cities.”

During the fourth quarter of last year, Greyhound Express expanded to three new states, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Nevada, plus Ontario, Canada.

The expansion has continued into this year.

During the middle of February, Greyhound Express launched additional routes and expanded to six

more cities.

The new routes connect Chicago to Memphis, Atlanta to Cincinnati, and Orlando, Fla., to Mobile, Ala.

New Express markets along the routes include Knoxville, Tenn.; Lexington, Ky.; Effingham, Ill.; Tallahassee, Fla.; Panama City, Fla., and Pensacola, Fla.

Greyhound says the latest expansion of its Express operation make it “the largest network of express transportation in North America.”

“With this expanded Greyhound Express network, our customers can enjoy a comfortable, safe ride with premium amenities...,” said Greyhound President and CEO David Leach.

Greyhound Express coaches are equipped with Wi-Fi, power outlets, leather seats, reserved seating, extra legroom, and wheelchair lifts.

Customers can buy Express tickets online to take advantage of discount pricing, print tickets at home, or pick them up at a self-service ticketing kiosk. Seating is guaranteed.

Additionally, Express customers have “private waiting areas, protected from the elements in a secure environment, with a dedicated guest services specialist to provide an extra level of customer assistance.”

At FirstGroup’s other North American units, First Student was significantly impacted by Super-

storm Sandy that hit the East Coast during late October, and First Transit turned in a strong performance.

“A significant amount of (First Student) operations were disrupted by Hurricane Sandy in late October,” said FirstGroup.

The storm, which affected much of the eastern seaboard, as well as parts of the Midwest and eastern Canada, impacted 130 First Student locations and led to the closure of schools for up to nine days.

“This is expected to adversely impact operating profit by approximately

\$15 million” for fiscal 2013, said FirstGroup.

“Nevertheless, our current expectations for underlying margin performance for the full year remain broadly unchanged,” the company added.

The company’s transit division generated good operating results from its operations.

“A strong performance was achieved with good revenue growth particularly within our core operations,” said FirstGroup.

“We continue to see good contract retention rates and develop opportunities from a healthy pipeline of new contract bids.”

Meanwhile, First Transit is attempting to settle a series of legal claims, involving meal and rest break claims, in its fixed-route and paratransit businesses. Some of the claims date back 10 years.



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