

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

FMCSA postpones lease and interchange rule until 2019

WASHINGTON — Lobbying efforts by the United Motorcoach Association and other industry groups against “regulatory overreach” have once again paid off.

The controversial lease and interchange rule that the motorcoach industry has been fighting for two years has been postponed for another year so regulators can retool it to exempt charter agreements.

The Federal Motor Carrier

Safety Administration has pushed the compliance date for the final rule to Jan. 1, 2019.

FMCSA said in a *Federal Register* notice that based on meetings with industry stakeholders and further analysis of opposition to the rule, the agency is extending the compliance date “to allow time to revise the regulations, while ensuring that carriers have ample time to adjust to the requirements of the

revisions.”

UMA officials cheered the announcement as continued progress in the association’s fight against unreasonable regulations, but said it would continue working to kill the rule.

“This is a textbook case of regulatory overreach, burdening passenger carrier businesses while providing absolutely no benefit to the traveling public,” said Dale

Krapf, chairman of UMA and Krapf’s Coaches.

“UMA will keep pushing back against this final rule with the goal of eliminating the unnecessary and burdensome components for good, not just postponing it.”

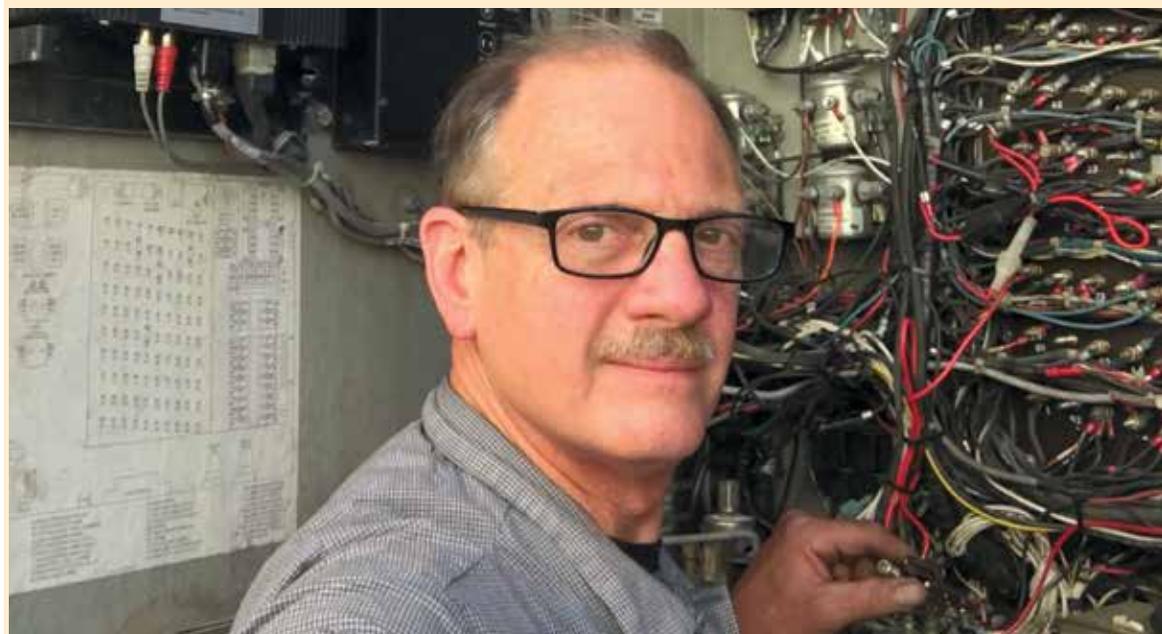
FMCSA published the final rule, officially titled “Lease and Interchange of Vehicles; Motor Carriers of Passengers,” on May 27, 2015, with a compliance date

of Jan. 1, 2017.

The rule would affect “charters, farm-outs, contracting or subcontracting” by requiring operators that contract with other carriers to provide buses on a temporary basis to execute formal leases. They also would be fully responsible for the subcontractor’s insurance and violations of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations, even though

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Maintenance Challenge winners take pride in their work



Tim Brown of Huskey Trailways in Festus, Mo., the 2017 Maintenance Challenge Grand Champion, said, “Once you work on buses, it gets in your blood.” The challenge is held annually during UMA Motorcoach Expo.

While many competitors cram book study and practice into the days before the annual United Motorcoach Association Maintenance Challenge, this year’s top finishers simply followed their personal Zen of motorcoach maintenance.

“If you don’t prepare you are wide open for whatever they throw at you,” said the 2017 Maintenance Challenge Grand Champion, Tim Brown of Huskey Trailways in Festus, Mo.

“I guess I prepared by working on these things every day. People say, ‘Once you work on buses, it gets in your blood.’”

Eric Hale, shop foreman for Holland America-Princess at the McKinley Princess Lodge near Denali State Park in Alaska, was

the first runner-up in the 2017 competition, held during UMA Motorcoach Expo in St. Louis.

“I feel pride when I see pictures of my coaches on our trips,” Hale said. “That coach is the representation of me and my company and my guys. Our work is seen by people who are paying good money for their trip. That is a special side of it.”

This year’s second runner-up, Peter Haunold, is shop foreman at the Holland America-Princess shop in Anchorage, Alaska.

“You really have to be serious in this job. You are not hauling produce or freight, you are hauling guests,” Haunold said. “It is critical that our inspections are spot-on.”

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Krapf Bus acquires Birnie Bus Service of Rome, N.Y.

WEST CHESTER, Pa. — Krapf Bus Companies has acquired Birnie Bus Service Inc., a Rome, N.Y.-based school bus and transportation provider.

West Chester-based Krapf Bus is the largest provider of school bus transportation in Pennsylvania and Delaware. The company also operates charter buses, para-transit vehicles and public transit routes in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Birnie Bus, which becomes the largest division of Krapf Bus, has more than 1,300 employees and operates 1,000 vehicles including school buses, transit and para-transit vehicles, and commercial motorcoaches.

The combined enterprise will have more than 3,500 employees and will operate 2,500 school buses for 70 districts across Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware and

Virginia.

“Birnie Bus is a great bus company and a great fit for us,” said Blake Krapf, president and CEO of Krapf Bus Companies. “They are family owned and run like us. Their core values are much like ours. And they are widely recognized as being an excellent service provider. We are very proud to have them join the Krapf organization.”

Tim Birnie, president and CEO of Birnie Bus, said, “It is important to me that Birnie Bus is in good hands — including our customers, our employees and our reputation. While I will be joining the Krapf board of directors in a more strategic role, I am delighted that the Krapfs will not only be taking charge, but will be taking Birnie to whole new levels of performance in the years ahead.”

The acquisition became effective on June 14.

“We are very proud to have Birnie Bus become part of the Krapf Bus family,” said Dale Krapf, chairman of the Krapf board of directors. “Birnie has a very strong management and employee team, a great customer base and a fine reputation. We expect a very bright future working together.”

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Greyhound agrees to buy up to 360 Prevost motorcoaches

DALLAS — Greyhound Lines Inc. has awarded Prevost a contract for up to 360 motorcoaches, the largest order in Prevost's 93-year history.

The deal specifies the delivery of the first 60 coaches this year with the option to purchase the balance over three years.

"Our team is quite excited to be able to build Greyhound buses again," said Francois Tremblay, vice president and general manager at Prevost.

"We greatly value our long-standing relationship with GLI and are appreciative that they have chosen Prevost as their brand of choice," Tremblay said. "We believe product quality and exceptional service support made all the difference in their decision."

Greyhound President and CEO Dave Leach said the quality of buses Prevost produces "will help us to keep setting the highest standard for transporting customers across North America. Our customers desire to travel in the safest and most comfortable bus available; motorcoaches from Prevost allow us to fulfill that need for them."

The new coaches will seat 50 passengers, which has become Greyhound's seating standard during the past decade.

Volvo D13 engines coupled to Allison B500 transmissions will power the Prevosts. They also will be equipped with wheelchair lifts and inverters, enabling Greyhound and Bolt Bus to install 110-volt outlets and Wi-



Greyhound Lines has agreed to purchase up to 360 motorcoaches from Prevost over three years.

Fi, allowing Internet access by passengers.

Prevost has become the dominant supplier of new motorcoaches to Greyhound during the past decade, starting with an initial order of 50 announced at UMA Motorcoach Expo in January 2008. In a series of follow-up buys, Prevost has delivered a total of 465 X3-45 Prevosts for use in Greyhound, Bus Bolt and Greyhound Mexico fleets.

The Bolt Bus subsidiary of Greyhound operates in the northeastern and western regions of the U.S., plus British Columbia, and Prevost coaches dominate its 100-bus fleet, including a handful of second-hand H3-45 Prevosts Greyhound acquired.

Should Greyhound end up buying all 360 coaches specified in the new order, that

will bring the number of Prevosts it has purchased to 830, representing just over half the Greyhound fleet.

The last major order for Prevost X3-45s by Greyhound was nearly four years ago, with delivery of those coaches occurring in April and May 2014. Since then, with Greyhound's parent company, FirstGroup, having to cope with a series of financial setbacks, Greyhound has added coaches on a more sporadic, smaller-scale basis.

In 2015 and continuing through most of last year, Greyhound passenger counts declined, forcing the carrier to reduce over-the-road mileage. During the 12 months ended March 31, 2017, Greyhound mileage decreased by 4.8 percent.

The drop in travelers and mileage allowed Greyhound to reduce the size of its fleet by 100 coaches during the 12 months ended March 31, cutting the fleet from 1,700 buses to 1,600 and reducing its workforce by 500 people.

Greyhound remains by far the largest provider of intercity bus transportation in North America, serving upwards of 3,800 destinations and operating throughout the continental U.S., 10 Canadian provinces and Mexico.

Prevost, which is part of the Volvo Group, is a leading supplier of touring, intercity and commuter motorcoaches. It also is the world's No. 1 producer of conversion coaches for high-end motorhome and specialty conversion.

Prevost has its main manufacturing facilities in Sainte-Claire, Quebec, and has 10 parts-and-service centers in the United States and Canada.

"It is always a pleasure to work with our long-term partners at Greyhound and FirstGroup," said Jack Forbes, vice president of North American sales for Prevost.

"A true team effort went into the bid process that brought us to securing this contract and our relationship with GLI will continue to be a team effort," Forbes said. "From sales to manufacturing to the best aftermarket support team in the industry, we are all committed to the success of this partnership."



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THE DOCKET

U.S. Supreme Court rejects effort to derail ELD mandate

WASHINGTON — It looks like the federal mandate that interstate trucks and buses convert to electronic logging devices will take effect as planned later this year.

The U.S. Supreme Court has rejected the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association's legal challenge to the ELD mandate, ending months of legal wrangling over the issue.

OOIDA, which said it was "extremely disappointed" by the Supreme Court ruling, has turned its attention to lobbying Congress and the Trump administration to reverse the mandate.

The trucking association sued federal regulators last year, asking the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit to overturn the ELD rule.

The association argued that requiring the use of ELDs violates drivers' Fourth Amendment right

to privacy and protections against illegal search and seizure because it effectively calls for their locations to be tracked in real time.

The association argued that employers could abuse the oversight and harass drivers.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, which issued the ELD rule, responded to the suit by saying, in essence, that the ends — highway safety — justify the means.

to privacy and protections against illegal search and seizure because it effectively calls for their locations to be tracked in real time.

A three-judge panel of the appeals court ruled against OOIDA late last year, saying the ELD rule addresses the harassment issue by expressly limiting the scope of information that ELDs should track.

The judges also agreed with FMCSA's contention that trucking is considered a dangerous and a "pervasively regulated industry" under which the right against un-

reasonable search and seizure under the Fourth Amendment doesn't fully apply.

OOIDA filed a petition earlier this year asking the full Seventh Circuit appeals court to rehear the case, but the court refused, leading the association to request that the Supreme Court review the case.

In its Supreme Court filing, OOIDA alleged that FMCSA failed to meet legal thresholds that

would allow it to sidestep search and seizure protections in the Fourth Amendment.

The association claimed that the Seventh Circuit ruling allows warrantless searches of millions of drivers without any restrictions on the ways the data collected by the ELDs can be used by any law enforcement agency.

The Supreme Court rejected the case without comment.

This was the second time OOIDA sued the federal government over an ELD mandate. The first time, in 2011, the association successfully challenged the mandate by arguing that it didn't take potential driver harassment into account.

FMCSA argued that it has addressed the harassment issue in the current ELD mandate.

FMCSA announced the ELD rule Dec. 10, 2015. It is scheduled to become effective on Dec. 18.

CDLs more accessible to military

Legislation that would make it easier for military personnel to obtain commercial driver's licenses is making its way through Congress.

Under the Active Duty Voluntary Acquisition of Necessary Credentials for Employment, or ADVANCE, Act, current military service members and reservists would have access to the train-

ing and testing standards for CDLs for veterans as outlined under the 2015 FAST Act.

The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure approved the legislation, which sponsored by Rep. Pete Aguilar, D-Calif., and sent it to the full House.

"This is a common-sense mea-

sure that will help our brave men and women find work here," Aguilar said. "While we hear every day that Washington is broken and compromised by partisan gridlock, we can clearly see that there are issues that both parties can get behind.

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FMCSA advisory committee looking to cut regulations

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has begun the process of identifying burdensome regulations for possible elimination, as ordered by President Donald Trump earlier this year.

Trump issued an executive order requiring that for every new federal regulatory action at least

two prior rules must be identified for elimination.

FMCSA's Motor Carrier Safety Advisory Committee has been given the job of reviewing the agency's regulations and recommending candidates for elimination.

FMCSA spokesman Duane DeBruyne said the agency's staff

gave the committee a list of 12 possible regulatory relief candidates to consider. Some regulations on the list are outdated or no longer enforced.

The types of rules that might be cut include noise emission standards, motor carrier routing regulations, record preservation rules, road results for non-CDL drivers and cer-

tain agricultural requirements.

However, because the committee is "purely advisory," its members could accept or reject those suggestions and come up with a totally different list, DeBruyne said.

The advisory committee, whose members include representatives of the truck and bus indus-

tries, law enforcement, unions and safety advocacy groups, is charged with providing advice and recommendations to the FMCSA administrator on motor carrier safety programs and regulations.

The committee meets quarterly and is expected to present its recommendations later this summer.

CVSA has scheduled 2017 Brake Safety Day for September 7

GREENBELT, Md. — The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance has scheduled its 2017 Brake Safety Day for Sept. 7.

Brake Safety Day is an enforcement and compliance campaign during which law enforcement agencies across North America conduct inspections on large trucks and buses to identify out-of-adjustment brakes and brake-system and antilock braking system violations as part of CVSA's Operation Airbrake Program.

"The goal of Brake Safety Day is to reduce the number of crashes caused by poorly maintained braking systems on commercial motor vehicles by conducting roadside mechanical fitness inspections and identifying and removing ve-

hicles with critical brake violations from our roadways," CVSA said in a news release.

"In addition, outreach and educational efforts by CMV inspectors, motor carriers and others are integral to the success of the campaign. Brake Safety Day activities seek to educate drivers, mechanics, owner-operators and others on the importance of proper brake maintenance, operation and performance."

Properly functioning brake systems are crucial to safe CMV operation. CMV brakes are designed to hold up under tough conditions, but they must be routinely inspected and maintained carefully and consistently so they operate and perform properly throughout

the vehicle's life.

Improperly installed or poorly maintained brake systems can reduce braking efficiency and increase the stopping distance of trucks and buses, posing serious risks to all highway users and public safety.

Antilock braking systems help the vehicle, and thus the driver, maintain control in certain situations, which reduces the risk of some types of crashes.

Brake-related violations comprised the largest percentage — 45.7 percent — of all out-of-service violations cited during Operation Airbrake's companion International Roadcheck campaign in 2016, which focused on inspections of both commercial

motor vehicles and drivers.

On Brake Safety Day, inspectors will primarily conduct the North American Standard Level I Inspection, which is a 37-step procedure that includes an examination of both driver operating requirements and vehicle mechanical fitness.

They will inspect brake-system components to identify loose or missing parts, air or hydraulic fluid leaks, worn linings, pads, drums or rotors, and other faulty brake-system components. ABS malfunction indicator lamps are also checked.

Inspectors will measure push-rod stroke, where applicable. Vehicles with defective or out-of-adjustment brakes will be placed out

of service.

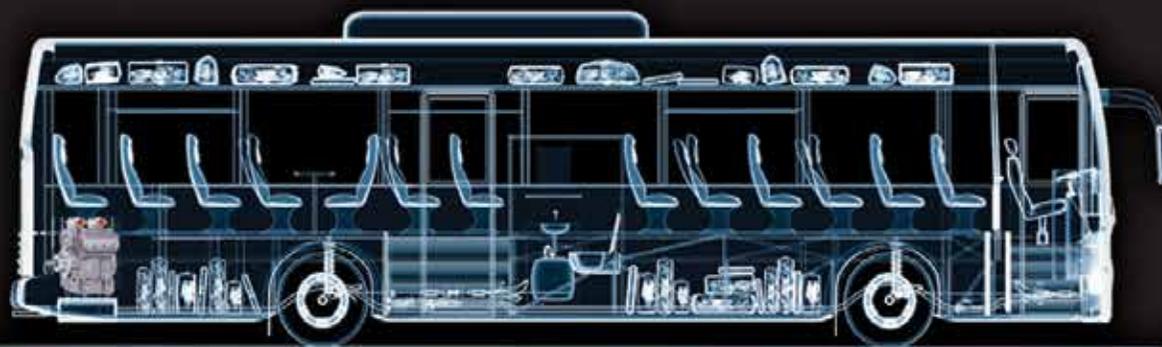
In the 10 jurisdictions using performance-based brake testing equipment, vehicle-braking efficiency will be measured. Such systems include a slow speed roller dynamometer that measures total vehicle weight and total brake force from which braking efficiency is determined.

The minimum braking efficiency for trucks is 43.5 percent, required by U.S. federal regulation and the CVSA out-of-service criteria.

This year's Brake Safety Day follows up on CVSA's May 3 unannounced Brake Safety Day and replaces the seven-day Brake Safety Week campaign from previous years.

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A coach is an important part of a 'guided vacation'

By Doug Gollan

TORONTO — They're back. They're hot. And they are not your grandfather's guided tours.

Escorted tours have changed — and travel agents who aren't selling what once were known as "motorcoach tours" are missing out on sales and profits, said top executives speaking at Travel Market Place in Toronto.

To convert lost opportunities into dollars, agents need to modernize their language and throw away their misperceptions.

"The coach is just the way you get from one place to another. If you cruise, when you go to Rome, you are 80 miles away (at the port). You get on a coach to actually go to Rome," said Jeff Element, Canada

president for The Travel Corporation. "It's a mode of transportation."

Cruise passengers spend a lot of time on a coach, just as tour passengers often spend a lot of time on other modes of transportation, said a panel of Canadian tour executives at a standing-room-only session.

And what travel agents need to emphasize is that "when you travel with us, you're not on the coach, you're in a destination. It's a guided vacation. The coach just gets you from one destination to another."

Words matter, said Collette Canada President Doug Patterson, and today's breed of tour operator requires a new vocabulary that avoids the word "bus."

"Do you call it a boat or a ship when you are selling a cruise?" Patterson asked. "So why does ev-

eryone say 'bus?' A bus is yellow and takes our children to school; a coach is high-tech. It has reclining seats, audio-visual equipment and Wi-Fi. We have charging stations for iPhones and tablets."

One agent in the room said he always describes the transportation involved as "Mercedes-Benz luxury coaches with extra legroom." Indeed, said Element, agents should talk up the fact that today's "bus" is instead "a business-class experience."

Indeed, clients can raise objections to every travel segment, said Stephanie Bishop, managing director for Globus Family of Brands in Canada. But a guided tour today "is the most effective way for (customers) to get the most value for their vacation in the limited time

they have to go."

When people are on vacation, they want everything to be organized for them, she said.

"You don't want to deal with all the back-end logistics. Customers say they want a champagne experience for the price of a beer — and what we provide is high value. We give travel agents the world to sell. We give you all the knowledge you need to sell."

When agents sell guided travel, their clients get the experience of the operators, the local connections, the access they can't get on their own, security and knowledge, the executives said.

And just because a customer usually books a cruise, don't assume that's all he or she wants to do. Bishop said even the regular

cruisers among Globus customers tend to cruise only every other year; in the in-between years they look for a land vacation.

One travel agent in the audience who has just started to sell guided vacations said his clients have been pleasantly surprised; they like the customization, the local experiences, and having the time to appreciate the destinations they visit in depth.

All three executives said their companies have 98 percent repeat rates.

"Sell your customer with any of us once, and you have an annuity," Patterson said.

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Dealing with employee requests for ADA accommodations

By Caroline J. Berdzik

During the course of their employment, individuals may present with physical or mental disabilities for which they are seeking a reasonable accommodation from their employer.

This interactive process between employer and employee is complex and can expose employers to liability if they do not handle the requests appropriately, meaningfully engage in discussions with the employee and obtain pertinent information from the employee's physician to determine whether the disability can be accommodated.

Many companies formalize the reasonable accommodation process in their employee handbooks so employees understand how the process works and how accommodation decisions will be made.

Since part of the reasonable accommodation process involves a

determination as to whether the employee can perform the essential functions of his or her position with or without a reasonable accommodation, it is imperative that employers have up-to-date job descriptions that clearly spell out any physical requirements.

Job descriptions should also reflect what is typically done in the position and not be filled with boilerplate statements of seldom performed tasks. Job descriptions should be reviewed on a yearly basis, and updated as appropriate.

Additionally, it is very important that the employer have an understanding as to limitations the employee may have, the expected duration of those limitations and what accommodation(s) may be recommended from a medical professional.

It is advisable to provide employees with reasonable accommodation questionnaire forms, along

with a copy of their job description, to submit to their physicians.

Medical professionals can generally provide more objective information about the employee's limitations and provide some recommendations for possible accommodations (i.e. weight lifting restriction, leave of absence).

Human resources can then evaluate the information that has been provided to determine what possible accommodation(s) can be made to assist the employee in performing the essential functions of his or her position.

Sometimes employees refuse to participate in this process or do not provide the requested information. Any lack of cooperation should be documented because failing to participate in the interactive process in good faith can result in the employer rightfully denying an accommodation to an employee.

It should be kept in mind that

many positions in the bus and motorcoach industry are safety sensitive, particularly as they concern drivers.

Companies need to be familiar with the requirements of the federal commercial motor vehicle regulations and other state and local laws and how this may impact the reasonable accommodation analysis.

Employees should also be informed of the outcome of the interactive process and whether an accommodation can be offered.

However, if an accommodation is not to be offered to an employee after the interactive process is concluded, companies should make sure they have conducted a comprehensive and exhaustive analysis, which may include consulting resources such as the Job Accommodation Network (<https://askjan.org/>) and that they have documented every step of the process.

A reasonable accommodation

may not be offered to the employee if it is determined that such an accommodation would pose an undue hardship to the employer or alternatively if the employee poses a direct threat to the safety of themselves or others.

Unfortunately, disability discrimination and failure to accommodate claims are very prevalent and many times are brought in conjunction with workers' compensation and Family Medical Leave Act claims. Employers are well advised to proceed with caution in this area.

Caroline J. Berdzik is a partner with Goldberg Segalla LLP in Princeton, N.J. She devotes her practice to helping corporate clients navigate employment law issues from proactive counseling through dispute resolution and trial. Her clients include transportation companies. She can be reached at cberdzik@goldbergsegalla.com.

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Selling our services requires training our salespeople

By Dave Millhouser

I was living the dream. I was standing in the aisle of a north-bound Brill on Interstate 83 as it chugged up a long grade, and there was no traffic.

My boss sidestepped out of the driver's seat with his foot planted on the throttle. I slid in behind him and grabbed the steering wheel, replaced his foot on the gas pedal, and *I was a bus driver*.

Staying on the road was tricky until I figured out that when a sticker on the bottom of the windshield was aligned with the stripe on the road, we were centered in the lane.

Truth be told, there's a big difference between being a driver and a "wheel holder."

My sketchy ability to keep the coach centered on a wide highway was not the only skill involved in driving. Double clutching, braking and turning corners needed to be mastered. I'm still working on some of that stuff.

Sometimes, in our industry, we use a similar method to train salespeople. We stick them in a seat with a telephone and computer and

show them to how to price tickets, charters and tours. Then we turn them loose in the marketplace.

We call them salespeople, but sometimes they're the marketing version of a wheel holder — an order taker.

During the regulated era (when you sorta owned your market) some Northeastern operators answered the phone by saying, "bus company," based on the assumption that the customer knew who they'd called and had no other choices.

With deregulation came new entries, some of which turned out to be great at marketing but stumbled on the operating end. The pendulum seems to have settled more in the middle, and surviving companies have learned to walk and chew gum simultaneously.

We've taken some giant technological leaps forward. Coaches offer amenities that were inconceivable years ago and we are able to use buses more efficiently and safely than ever before.

That's a great thing, but it brings to mind a couple of caveats (not Latin for a dental thing).

First, why haven't we been bet-

ter at convincing the public of that? With too few exceptions, we are generally people's last choice when it comes to how they get somewhere.

Other than airlines' raw speed, what do trains, planes and automobiles offer that we don't? Wi-Fi? Entertainment systems? Power outlets? A comfortable ride?

Wait, we're heavily invested in that stuff.

Second, would it make sense to be as diligent in teaching our staff sales skills as we've been at training employees in using new technology?

Part of the deal, in good companies, is for every worker who has even remote contact with the public to understand that they are salespeople. Heck, you knew that, but it never hurts to remind employees that without happy customers none of us have jobs. (Have I thanked you lately for reading my column?)

The other part might be some sort of sales training for your folks. If your forte is operations or maintenance, there are consultants (some who specialize in the motorcoach industry) you can

engage.

If you, or others on your management team, are good at selling, you can do it yourself. Recognize that sales, like every other important discipline, needs to be learned.

Some employees are naturals, engaging customers easily. For others, that may require effort.

In ye olden days, I returned from a week of trying to sell bus parts and my boss asked me how things had gone. I told him the customers seemed to like me. He pointed out that the goal was selling parts, not being liked.

Engaging customers is just the first step, and it offers the opportunity to identify what they want and need from the relationship. It's critical to know how to take the next steps, and that's where training helps.

"Do you want fries with that?" is a punch line, but it is also marketing genius. It's important to try and add flavor and value to your customer's experience, and that involves building a relationship in an effort to understand how you can help.

There also needs to be a sense of urgency. A quick response does

two things: it keeps competitors out of the equation and signals to your clients that their business is important. Trained salespeople don't have to stall while waiting for clarification from above.

Selling "value" requires training in what you do better than competitors. It also involves follow-up. The backs of school bus seats have twice as much padding as the fronts for safety. Good salespeople spend extra time after the sales making sure customers are happy.

If we work at training sales people, the perception of our industry as a whole will likely improve.

Now, if I could just master right turns, I'd be a driver instead of a wheel holder, but they keep making the darn buses longer.

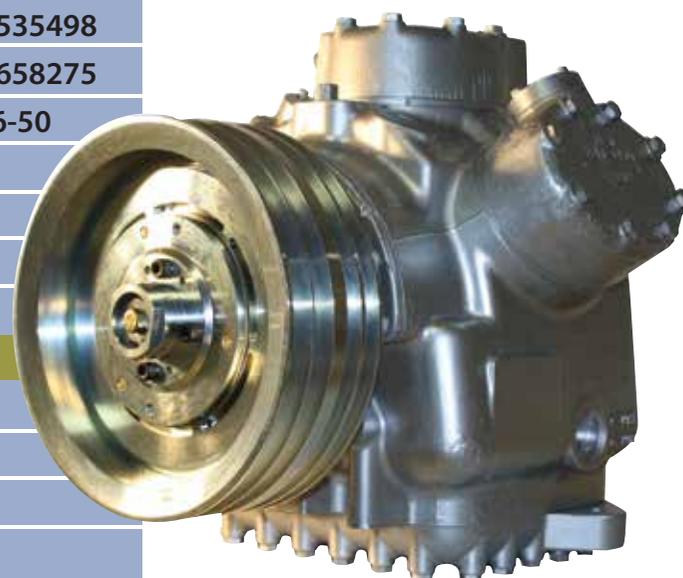
Dave Millhouser is a bus industry marketing consultant and freelance writer. Contact him by email at Davemillhouser@gmail.com.



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MCI adds legroom, seats to its 2018 J4500 coaches

DES PLAINES, Ill. — Motor Coach Industries has given its popular J4500 motorcoach an interior makeover that includes more legroom and a 60-seat capacity.

The new 2018 model J4500 will be unveiled during MCI Reliability Rallies in the U.S. and Canada starting this month.

The redesigned interior includes a reconfigured lavatory and air-intake system, resulting in 20 inches of new floor space in the 2018 model.

There also is an optional rear window, the first ever on an MCI coach.

New standard touches include indirect LED ceiling lights, puck-style spotlights and entryway illumination. The updates, along with the addition of rear-window views, make the cabin feel more spacious, MCI officials said.

“We’re very proud to unveil this coach to our current and future operators,” MCI President Ian Smart said. “It has been a collaborative effort at MCI, where we focused on operator needs and passenger wants.”

Brent Maitland, MCI vice president of marketing and product planning, said the project began in 2015 and was completed in two stages — the first focused on space maximization and the second on interior

redesign.

To capture the extra 20 inches of space, MCI engineers lowered the air intake system duct 4.5 feet to just above the beltline of the coach and reoriented the lavatory, achieving a more comfortable fit with 22 percent more in volume total.

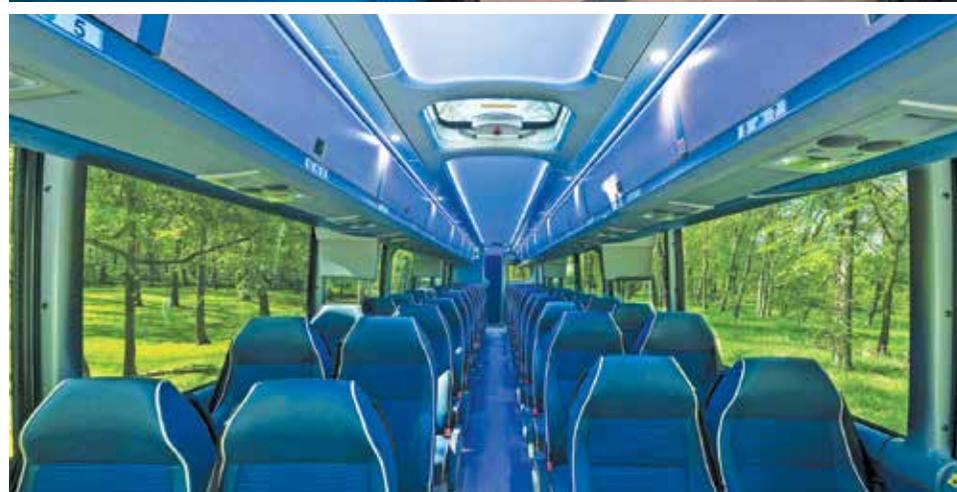
The reconfiguration allowed the last row of seats to move back 20 inches, providing a minimum of 15 inches more usable floor space that translates into at least a half-inch more legroom per passenger than the closest competitors in a 56-passenger seating configuration.

It also created even seat spacing on both sides and provided a more comfortable 60-passenger seating configuration.

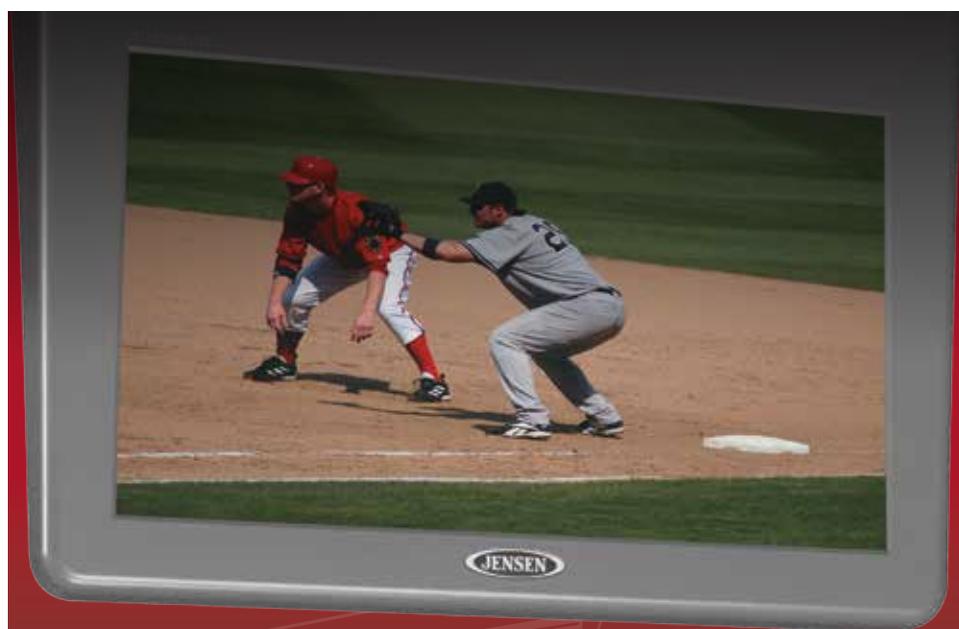
Lowering the air-intake also created space for a rear window and a 500 percent increase in the side rear transom window for better views from the last two seats, as well as mechanical advantages such as improved engine air filtration and easier maintenance. After the redesign came the aesthetics. MCI worked with long-time partner BMW Designworks to upgrade seating, trim and lighting.

Durability and ergonomics also were

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11 ►



MCI's interior upgrade of its J4500 motorcoach includes more legroom, a 60-seat capacity, custom lighting and an integrated instrument panel in the driver cockpit that reduces distraction and provides easier-to-read gauges at all hours of the day.



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MCI J4500

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

considered in the redesign. Upgraded handrails on the J4500's entryway minimize wear and easy-to-lock doors on the parcel racks have finishes that resist scratches, smudges and abrasions.

The parcel racks now integrate with the front interior cap for a cleaner look, and the windshield blinds recess into the front cap, creating a panoramic view for passengers.

Improved cockpit

The new J4500 driver cockpit features an integrated instrument panel that reduces driver distraction and provides easier-to-read gauges at all hours of the day.

The high-definition, 12-inch thin-film-transistor LCD instrument panel provides increased visibility for many key systems including tire pressure status and engine DPF regeneration notices.

The redefined space includes a slimmer left-side console with improved switches, a flexible cup holder and a place for a cellphone or personal items. It also offers better visibility over the dash hood, increased driver legroom and a toe kick.

The spiral entryway, which has always been a J4500 trademark, also has been spruced up. In addition to better visibility with right-and-left entryway white lighting, MCI has provided an option of variable LED lighting for customizable color choices to light up the stairwell and the right- and left-hand grab rails.

The new variable lighting system allows operators to choose between colors including red, green, blue, yellow, magenta, cyan and white lighting with full dimming and programmable customized colors. A super-bright "clean" setting illuminates every interior inch of the coach for spotless clean up between trips.

"Many customers have told us that customization is key to showcase their brand or corporate, sports and other specialized client groups," Maitland said.

New orders

A number of MCI customers have already placed orders for the 2018 MCI J4500, including Peter Pan Bus Lines, which operates a fleet of 250 MCI motorcoaches throughout the Northeast. The 2018 J4500 will allow Peter Pan to move from 54 to 56 passenger seats.

"Two more seats for the life of the coach, that's a significant amount of revenue," said Peter Picknelly, chairman and CEO of

Peter Pan.

Callen Hotard, CEO of Hotard Coaches in Louisiana, said it was "all about the legroom."

"We're excited to see the many enhancements made to the J4500's interior, and legroom is one of things we hear about most from our sports teams and athletes that ride with us," Hotard said.

The company, which has the

J4500 in a previous 52-seat configuration, will take delivery of four 2018 models with 56 passenger seats.

Lighting feature

The company opted for a coach with the programmable multi-color or variable lighting, a feature that will support its sports clients' extensive branding needs.

MCI will showcase the 2018 MCI J4500 during its Reliability Rallies throughout the U.S. and Canada this summer and fall at MCI Sales and Service Centers.

The one-day events, which will feature test drives of the new J4500 and Setra models, special promotions on pre-owned coaches, and parts and supplier partner educational sessions, are scheduled for:

- July 13 in Blackwood, N.J.
- July 25 in Winter Garden, Fla.
- August 3 in Des Plaines, Ill.
- September 7 in Dallas
- September 21 in Los Alamitos, Calif.
- October 19 (at Big Rig Collision) in Calgary, Alberta
- November 14 in Hayward, Calif.

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Ignoring negative online reviews is never an option

By Christian Riddell
Motorcoach Marketing Council



Christian Riddell

I think we can all remember moments in our professional careers when we wished we could have crawled under a rock and made everything go away.

One of the worst crawl-under-the-biggest-rock-I-could-find days I've ever had was as the director of sales for a motorcoach company in Portland, Ore.

It started like any other day but it soon spiraled out of control, and no matter how much I tried to fix things they just kept getting worse: drivers not showing up for their dispatches, mechanical issues, crazy traffic that made us late on every front, and even a passenger-on-board fender bender.

Basically, if it could go wrong, it did.

My phone and email were blowing up with customers who had passed upset and were down-

right angry. I listened to people absolutely scream at me over things that neither I, nor my company, had any control over, including a semi-truck rollover that had shut down traffic in both directions on the freeway.

I remember it was an unseasonably hot day, we had air conditioners failing and people were "hot" in more ways than one.

As much as I wanted to slip under the closest rock and simply put my fingers in my ears until it all blew over, the truth was I had to deal with it, even though it was uncomfortable.

Times have changed

That was 14 years ago, and while trying to work my way through a pile of angry emails and voicemails was a pain in the neck, the long-term damage to the company was different than it would have been if that same incident happened today.

I spent weeks talking with and apologizing to customers as I tried to "fix" what I could. After a few months, those moments were all but forgotten and we, and most of

Marketing Minute GoMotorcoach It's the Smart Move

the customers, had moved on.

Today's world is vastly different. All of those angry emails and voicemails are now heat-of-the-moment reviews posted to Facebook or TripAdvisor, mean tweets fired off directly following a confrontational exchange, or Google reviews that are as venomous as they are permanent.

Today, instead of making nice with angry customers and working things out over a cup of coffee, we are subject to dealing with a very public and personal airing of those moments we work to never have happen in the first place.

These "reviews" are actually not so much reviews as they are Gordon Ramsay-style rants given a public forum, and they're often calculated to shame a company rather than provide meaningful feedback for fellow consumers.

But as much as these reviews

can be a moment of sincere frustration for both the company and the customer, there are a few things to remember before you choose how to — or not to — respond.

The first thing to remember is that these reviews, as well as your response (or lack thereof), are permanent additions to the Web and will be used by future shoppers to determine if they want to work with you.

In a recent survey, 89 percent of consumers viewed online sources of product and service reviews as trustworthy, and another 80 percent have changed their minds about a purchase based solely on the negative reviews they've read.

The second thing to remember is that you're going to receive negative reviews. They are just part of being in business in an online world.

But, here's the thing: how you respond can be the difference between future success and failure.

The third thing to keep in mind is that, while many negative reviews are embellished by emotion and frustration, they are, at their root, founded in an experience the

reviewer has had with your company.

Get the facts

As an owner, it can be tempting to look at these reviews and simply dismiss them as "crazy" or "impossible" because your staff would never do that. I can only imagine that the management of United Airlines thought that exact thing just moments before watching a YouTube video of a bloodied passenger being dragged from one of their flights.

Reviews, regardless of their content, require action from a company standpoint. Every review, good or bad, gives you a few options. However, before you take any of these actions, it's important to look into the issue and, if need be, communicate with the reviewer to get clear on what actually happened.

There is nothing worse than taking a position, finding out you're wrong, and having to back-track publicly.

The first option you have when dealing with a review is to engage. Engagement is not a simple "Hey,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13 ►



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United Leasing acquires Access Commercial Capital

EVANSVILLE, Ind. — United Leasing & Finance has acquired Access Commercial Capital of Lake Success, N.Y.

Access, an associate member of the United Motorcoach Association, serves the equipment and transportation industries through direct and indirect loans and leases on new and used specialty vehicles and commercial equipment.

The company provides essential equipment financing for medium and small business entities across the U.S. and Canada.

“Access is a wonderful strategic acquisition for United,” said Martha Ahlers, chief operating officer of United Leasing.

“Not only do the various asset classes they finance fit perfectly with our existing portfolio but

having a New York office extends our brand further into the East Coast and will allow us to better serve both new and existing customers,” Ahlers said.

Ahlers said the Access platform will provide originations up to \$100 million dollars annually and will help United achieve its goals.

Edward P. Kaye, Access’s man-

aging member, said the company was looking forward to the numerous growth opportunities in the market.

“United’s technology resources, best-in-class funding platform and experienced leadership and employees will streamline our customer experience and support our growth and profitability for the long term,” Kaye said.

United Companies, a privately owned corporation founded in 1964, is comprised of United Leasing & Finance, Professional Transportation, Inc., and the Romain Automotive Group. It has more than 6,100 associates and direct operations in 40 states and the District of Columbia, while managing assets in all 50 states, Canada and Mexico.

Marketing Minute

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

you’re nuts, that is not what happened at all” type of exchange with a customer.

It is a real effort to communicate with the reviewer, often trying to push the conversation offline so you can speak with him or her directly without the shroud of anonymity that the Web provides. This will frequently allow you to resolve the issue and then summarize the resolution as a response to the negative comments.

It is important to see this opportunity not as a moment in time, but as a record that will live on for all future consumers. This perspective can inform your response, especially when moments come where you simply want to respond in kind to an overly inaccurate or vicious review.

The next option is to make a company statement as a response to the review, something like this: “We are sorry that you did not have a positive experience, and we hope we have a future opportunity to show you that is not how we expect our service to go.”

It is important in these types of responses to avoid pointing fingers, even if they deserve to be pointed. Even if the reviewer is crazy and mostly wrong, keep in mind that pointing fingers will not win you any points with future shoppers.

Third, you can choose to pursue removing the review. This is only an option if you have reason to believe that the review is fraudulent and has been placed as an untrue attack on your company by someone with some reason to come after you.

While these types of situations do occur, they’re likely a one-in-1,000 scenario. Companies that compile reviews such as Facebook, Google, TripAdvisor, and Yelp don’t remove reviews because you don’t like them or because they reflect poorly on your company.

Removal is slow and not guaranteed, but should be sought after if the review is an attack by a com-

petitor, not really about your company, or was posted by someone who has never used or experienced your product or service.

Noticeably absent from this list of things you should do is choosing to ignore a review. This is not an accident, as ignoring a negative review on the Internet is equivalent to saying “Yeah, well, we don’t really care.”

While you and I know this is not the case, it can’t be overstated how much more damaging a review is when you ignore it than when you professionally respond on some level.

Even though reviews can be tricky, both positive and negative reviews are important for companies, and here’s why: People don’t trust companies that only have five-star reviews or one-sided comments.

Consumers are savvy; they know things don’t always go as planned, but they’re interested in seeing how you respond when that happens. That kind of transparency acts as a window into the heart of the company because nothing clarifies who we are as companies quite like those days when everything goes wrong.

Consumers see the marketing text from the website and glossy brochures filled with smiling, happy people, but what they really want to know is if companies are actually responsive and helpful when everything “hits the fan.”

Do they listen to their customers and care about the experience they’ve had? Do they work to make things right? Do they ignore the fact that they messed up or, even worse, make customers feel as though they were somehow in the wrong?

Every review, positive or negative, is an opportunity to tell a story, a story about your company and who you really are. Companies that embrace these moments and craft the story they want told will win the online battle.

Those that ignore them — choosing instead to crawl under their proverbial rock and wait for the storm to blow over — will find themselves dealing with perma-

nent stains that are remarkably difficult to get out.

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cil and its programs, go to www.motorcoachmarketing.org.



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UMA board accepting nominations for fall election

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The United Motorcoach Association is seeking nominations from its U.S. operator members for seven open seats on its board.

The coachbuilder associate director seat also is open.

The seats are open as a result of expiring terms of incumbent directors, who may seek re-election. Aug. 29 is the deadline for letters of nomination for the director positions.

The directors and associate director whose seats expire at the end of this year are:

• **Region I (the West)** — Tom Ready of Ready Bus Company in

La Crescent, Minn., and Ray Sargoni of Gray Line of San Francisco, Silicon Valley & Monterey in San Francisco

• **Region II (the Midwest)** — Brian Annett of Annett Bus Lines in Sebring, Fla., and Ralph Young of Young Transportation in Asheville, N.C.

• **Region III (the Northeast)** — Joan Libby of Cavalier Coach Trailways in Boston and Tim Stout of Stout's Transportation in Ewing, N.J.

• **Region IV (Canada)** — Larry Hundt of Great Canadian Holiday & Coaches in Ontario

• **Coachbuilder associate di-**

rector — Roman Cornel of ABC Companies

Nineteen members of the 21-member UMA board are regional directors who must be coach operators and who are elected to three-year staggered terms from the three regions of the U.S., plus a single director elected from Canada (Region IV).

In addition, there are non-coachbuilder and coachbuilder associate-board representatives who also serve three-year terms.

Maps showing the UMA regions are available in the UMA Membership Directory.

The names of the current directors and a list of the states included in each region can be found on the association website, www.uma.org. Click on "About" and then the "UMA Board of Directors" link.

Qualification standards for UMA directors can be found in Article VI of the bylaws (available on the association website by clicking "About" and then "Bylaws").

Among the qualifications for nominees is that they must have been UMA members for at least one year.

Directors serve without pay, but the association generally reim-

burses directors for travel and accommodations while performing UMA business and/or attending association meetings.

Nominations for the regional board directorships must come from active UMA members who are motorcoach operators in the same region as the candidates they nominate. Members may also nominate themselves.

Candidates nominated for the board must represent an active UMA-member company in good standing with the association.

"There is no better way to get

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15 ►

UMA seeking education-session leaders for Expo 2018

SAN ANTONIO — Exhibitors at the 2018 UMA Motorcoach Expo in San Antonio are being offered the opportunity to present education sessions in the exhibit hall on January 8 and 9.

The United Motorcoach Association is accepting proposals from exhibitors wanting to lead an education session on a topic that would help motorcoach operators be more successful.

UMA officials stress that the

sessions are not sales opportunities but will focus on assisting members in growing their businesses.

The sessions will be held on the show floor in the UMA presentation area. When possible and meaningful, some sessions will take place in the presenter's booth.

UMA has offered educational sessions in the exhibit hall for the past five years and is seeking to continue improving those sessions by offering exhibitors the chance

to create educational experiences on success-oriented topics.

In submitting proposals, companies should include:

- A summary and outline of the presentation
- A suggested title for the session
- Names of planned speakers, along with their company names, titles and any pertinent information that would qualify them as experts
- Time needed to complete

the presentation (up to one hour)

• An explanation of how a proposed topic will lead to success for motorcoach operators

• Contact information for the person who will work with UMA staff to coordinate the session

Proposals are due by August 1. The UMA Meetings Committee will review the proposals and select finalists.

The submissions will be judged on educational value and relevance

to motorcoach operators' businesses. Companies selected to present education sessions will be treated as sponsors of the sessions and will be responsible for paying a \$1,500 fee to cover audio-visual and other costs related to the sessions.

Questions about the proposals should be directed to Carrington Blake, UMA meetings manager, at cblake@uma.org or 703-838-2929.

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Diesel engine supplier Stewart & Stevenson acquired

HOUSTON — Kirby Corporation is acquiring Stewart & Stevenson LLC, a supplier of engines and transmissions to the motorcoach industry, for approximately \$710 million.

Houston-based Kirby Corporation is the nation's largest domestic tank barge operator transporting petrochemicals, black oil, refined petroleum products and agricultural chemicals.

Through its diesel engine services segment, Kirby provides after-market service for medium-speed and high-speed diesel

engines and reduction gears used in marine and power generation applications and also distributes and services diesel engines, transmissions and pumps.

Stewart & Stevenson, also based in Houston, is a leading global manufacturer and distributor of products and services for the oil and gas, marine, construction, power generation, transportation, mining and agricultural industries.

It distributes Detroit Diesel engines and Allison transmissions to the on-highway transportation industry.

"The acquisition of Stewart &

Stevenson significantly expands the geographic footprint and capabilities of our distribution and services business," said Kirby President and CEO David Grzebinski. "This transaction creates one of the largest distribution networks in the country with the engineering and technological capacity to successfully address the complex requirements of a large customer base in a competitive national and global environment.

"In this period of accelerating demand in the pressure pumping and industrial sectors of the econo-

my, Stewart & Stevenson's leadership in these sectors and its longstanding, close relationships with the world's major industrial companies provide an excellent opportunity for us to expand our participation in the national and international arenas," Grzebinski said.

"We expect this to accelerate diversification of our combined product lines, boost facility utilization and improve productivity."

The acquisition will be funded equally through Kirby's revolving credit facility and its common stock valued at approximately \$355 million, subject to certain closing adjustments.

The closing of the acquisition is expected to occur in the third quarter and is subject to customary closing conditions, including regulatory approvals under the Hart-Scott-Rodino Act.

Insurance subsidiaries rebranded

INDIANAPOLIS — Baldwin & Lyons has announced the rebranding of its subsidiaries, including Protective Insurance Company, Sagamore Insurance Company and Protective Specialty Insurance Company.

Protective, Sagamore and Protective Specialty will now all exist under one brand, Protective Insurance. The company also unveiled a new logo.

"For the past 80 years, we have been diligently acting on our mission to create and deliver the high-

est quality, customized insurance products," said Randy Birchfield, president and CEO of Baldwin & Lyons. "By bringing the subsidiaries under the Protective brand shield, we'll be able to continue providing customers with the highest caliber of service, backed by the advantage of nearly a century's worth of experience and client relationships."

Birchfield said the rebranding will help simplify and streamline operations across the companies, allowing Protective to better manage

multiple product lines and deliver greater sales and service flexibility.

Distribution clients will also have the added advantage of being able to leverage the well-known Protective brand and its strong reputation within the transportation industry, he said.

"We don't view this as simply a logo change and rebranding, but rather a reflection of where we are heading through our commitment to innovation," Birchfield said. "From the start, our company's business model has been pioneering."

UMA election

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

the greatest value from your UMA membership than in volunteering and helping to shape the future of our industry through leadership positions," UMA President and CEO Stacy Tetschner said.

An eight-member nominating committee made up of one member and one non-member from each region will vet all board nominees, checking to make sure they qualify and are willing to stand for election and to serve if elected.

Written letters of nomination must state the candidate's name, company affiliation and home-base location. Nomination letters also

must be postmarked, emailed or faxed between July 15 and Aug. 29.

The nominating committee will produce a list of candidates for each region no later than Oct. 1.

Ballots will be mailed to UMA members by Oct. 15, and must be returned no later than Nov. 15. Winners will be announced in *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

UMA members with questions about nominations should contact the association at 800-424-8262. Mail nomination letters to: UMA Nominations, 113 S. West St., 4th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314-2824.

Nominations also may be faxed to 703-838-2950 or emailed to UMA President and CEO Stacy Tetschner at stetschner@uma.org.

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Leasing rule

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

they have no direct oversight or control over the carrier's business operations.

FMCSA said the purpose of the rule was to shut down illegal carriers trying to skirt federal oversight by operating under the cloak of another carrier.

But UMA contends the rule would add more regulations and paperwork to leases and farm-outs between coach operators and hurt legal operators who depend on providing contract services.

The liability exposure carriers would face could preclude leasing and farm-outs from ever being practical again, UMA contends.

The rule would have no affect on safety, UMA argues, but would instead stifle the ability of motorcoach operators to work with one another, which happens frequently.

If two carriers who both hold operating authority from the USDOT choose to assist each other in times of capacity issues or emergencies, no formal lease should be required, nor should one carrier be responsible for the other carrier's safety performance, the association contends.

When the rule was first an-

nounced, it was greeted with an onslaught of criticism from the industry, with UMA and the American Bus Association filing a joint request to extend the 30-day deadline to submit petitions for reconsideration. FMCSA agreed to extend the deadline to Aug. 25, 2015.

The agency subsequently received 37 petitions for reconsideration. Acknowledging that some of the criticisms of the rule had merit, FMCSA extended the compliance date of the rule from Jan. 1, 2017, to Jan. 1, 2018, to allow the agency time to complete its analysis and amend the rule where necessary.

Then, in August 2016, the agency announced that it intended to consider changes to four aspects of the regulations. The changes would:

- Exclude chartering, or subcontracting, from the leasing requirements
- Amend the CMV requirements for the location of temporary markings for leased/interchanged vehicles
- Change the requirement that carriers notify customers within 24 hours when they subcontract service to other carriers
- Expand the 48-hour delay in preparing a lease to include emergencies when passengers are not actually on board a bus

FMCSA held a roundtable discussion about the rule last October to allow industry officials to discuss their concerns and to share additional details about their specific operations.

Attending were representatives of small and large bus companies and charter and regular-route operators from across the nation, as well as two insurance company representatives invited to attend because of liability concerns raised in the petitions for reconsideration.

During the roundtable, industry officials argued that FMCSA had taken a regulatory scheme from the trucking industry and applied it to the bus industry, which has an entirely different operating structure and liability regime.

FMCSA said the most significant objection raised at the roundtable and by petitioners for reconsideration was that the final rule wrongly treated chartering, or subcontracting, as equivalent to leasing.

The petitioners contended that passenger carriers with FMCSA-issued active passenger carrier operating authority have long subcontracted work to other carriers with operating authority to handle demand surges, emergencies or events that require more than their own available capacity.

They said subcontractors with

their own operating authority have traditionally assumed responsibility for their own vehicles and drivers. Under the 2015 rule, however, a passenger carrier that subcontracted work to a second carrier would be responsible for the second carrier's regulatory compliance.

Opponents claimed that making a carrier responsible for the subcontractor's vehicles, drivers and liability would make most short-term subcontracts impossible.

Based on the roundtable discussions and after further analysis of the petitions to reconsider the rule, FMCSA announced last month that it was again postponing the compliance date, this time to Jan. 1, 2019. During the delay the agency will develop the four changes announced last August. Public comments on the proposed changes are due July 31.

"FMCSA believes that less

burdensome regulatory requirements should be considered," the agency said. "Subjecting passenger carriers with operating authority to the full requirements of the leasing rule is not necessary."

Stacy Tetschner, UMA's president and CEO, credited U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao and members of Congress for FMCSA's decision to postpone the rule and "rein in burdensome and ill-conceived regulations holding back our nation's passenger carriers."

"UMA has led a broad coalition including state and regional partners as well as the American Bus Association on this critical issue for bus and motorcoach operators," Tetschner said. "Along with Secretary Chao, we are appreciative of congressional support to strike and revise the most onerous parts of this final rule."

Calendar

July 2017

29-Aug 2 SCMA-GMOA-AMA Regional Meeting 2017, Sheraton Arlington, Arlington, Texas, Info: www.southcentral-motorcoach.org

August 2017

6-9 IMG Strategic Alliance

Meeting, Nashville, Tenn. Info: www.imgcoach.com

14-15 Midwest Bus & Motorcoach Association Annual Convention and Rodeo, Traverse City, Mich. Info: www.mbmca.org/convention

17-20 National Association of Motorcoach Operators Annual Conference, Alexandria, Va. Info: www.namocoaches.org



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People

PEORIA, Ill. — **Peoria Charter Travel** is opening a new location on College Avenue in Normal, Ill.

Peoria Charter Travel is owned and operated by *Bill and Cindy Winkler*. The Winkler family has been providing services to central Illinois travelers for more than 75 years with its charter bus company, **Peoria Charter Coach**.

Peoria Charter Travel is a full-service travel agency that offers more than bus tours. The company's agents assist customers in booking international and domestic vacations, cruises, honeymoons, destination weddings or individually customized tours.

CASTROVILLE, Calif. — *Terry Fischer* of **Transportation Charter Services** in Orange and *Gary Buffo* of **Pure Luxury Transportation** in Petaluma have joined the **California Bus Association** Board of Directors.

The recent revision to the association's bylaws increased the number of operator board positions from 10 to 12 and allowed CBA President *Tony Fiorini* to appoint one new member.

Fisher ran for election on the 2016 ballot and received the next

highest number of votes, giving him a spot on the expanded board until the 2018 election. Fiorini appointed Buffo.

Fisher joined the bus industry in 1986 as a driver for a company in the Canadian Rockies while attending the University of Calgary. After graduating, he joined his family's bus company and was instrumental in growing it into one of the largest bus operations in western Canada, offering both motorcoach and school bus services.

Fisher's family sold the company in 2005 and he stayed on for a few years with the new ownership before joining a large West Coast company.

He ended up in Southern California when he purchased Transportation Charter Services in 2011. Fisher also is a member of

the boards of the **American Bus Association** and the **International Motorcoach Group**.

Buffo is the founder and owner of Pure Luxury Transportation, with offices in Sonoma, Napa and San Francisco (Foster City and Hayward). He is actively involved in several business organizations in the tourism and wine industries.

Buffo appreciates involvement in successful, well-run organizations and provides experience and implements training to help move such organizations forward with a positive and energized approach, Fiorini said.

A California native, he is passionate and ambitious in assuring the success of the state's tourism sector and understands the dedication it takes to attract tourists from all around the world.

STEVENSVILLE, Md. — *Hans Herrera* has been promoted to service manager at heavy-duty vehicle lift leader **Stertil-Koni**. He previously was a service technician.

Herrera brings an extensive technical background, a keen eye for problem solving and a strong, practical familiarity with hydraulics and vehicle lifts to his new position.

His new responsibilities include providing technical support, equipment troubleshooting, vehicle-lift installation oversight and heavy-duty lift equipment training for Stertil-Koni distributors and their customers.

Herrera also will administer technical equipment training and development programs for Stertil-Koni distributors and service

providers.

Prior to joining Stertil-Koni in 2015, he worked in the automotive industry for more than five years and taught college-level automotive classes.

He also has experience in budgets, payments and collections, having worked with the Office of Management Services for the Department of Agriculture.

DALLAS — *Libby Scourse*, director of financial operations at **First Bus**, has been named controller at **Greyhound Lines**.

Scotland-based FirstGroup, a leading transportation provider in the UK and North America, owns both First Bus and Greyhound.

Scourse's transfer is part of FirstGroup's intent to share talent and ideas across its divisions and provide development opportunities for its best people.

"We look forward to Libby sharing her knowledge and previous experience with First Bus and expect she will make a huge contribution towards Greyhound's ongoing initiatives and synergies across the business," said Bill Giesecker, chief financial officer at Greyhound.



Hans Herrera

Lucky Star joins N.E. association

CAPE COD, Mass. — The New England Bus Association's board of directors has approved membership for Lucky Star Bus of Boston.

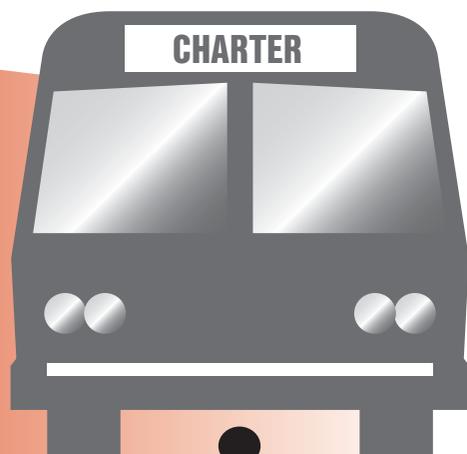
"We're delighted to have Lucky Star onboard as our newest member and contributing to the growth and success of NEBA," said Gregg Isherwood, president of the associ-

ation and owner of Custom Coaches in Maine.

Lucky Star operates scheduled service from Boston to New York City.

"We are pleased to join the New England Bus Association and become a part of its long, rich, history," said Maria Wong of Lucky Star.

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Maintenance champs

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“Every time I see one of my coaches on the road, it is like one of my kids. I see the unit number and I can think of particular long nights I spent with it. Every coach has a story. It is neat to see the guests going to Denali and other destinations because of what we do to keep them on the road and keep them safe.”

The 2017 Maintenance Challenge attracted more than two dozen top technicians. It consisted of a written exam and hands-on motorcoach inspections, both designed to be ridiculously difficult and requiring detailed knowledge of maintenance issues and safety regulations.

“The written exam is so tough, I doubt you could hire a mechanic off of it,” said Kevin Whitworth, president and CEO of Whitworth Bus Sales in Miamisburg, Ohio. He has chaired the UMA Maintenance Interchange and Maintenance Challenge since they were

introduced.

“They guys have really stepped it up and do a lot of practice and studying,” Whitworth said.

Competitors also have to inspect two motorcoaches rigged with defects. One is suspended on a hoist or parked over a pit.

The mechanics are presented a scenario.

“These buses just came back from a 30-day trip but the driver left in a hurry and took all his paperwork with him,” Whitworth said. “We don’t know if anything is wrong with them, but we just got an emergency call and need to know if we can take one of them out in an hour.”

Defects might be hiding in plain sight, such as a missing inspection decal, or stashed in the dark, such as a cut in the spare tire’s sidewall.

“Very seldom does a mechanic ace the written exam,” Whitworth said. “In 19 years only one person has found every defect on the coaches.”

“They really know how to bug



Eric Hale, left, shop foreman for Holland America-Princess at the McKinley Princess Lodge near in Alaska, and Peter Haunold, shop foreman for Holland America-Princess in Anchorage, were first and second runners-up in the 2017 Maintenance Challenge, which was held during UMA Expo 2017 in St. Louis.



a motorcoach,” agreed Haunold.

Brown, 56, who has been a bus mechanic since 1983, said his father was a motorcoach driver.

“Sometimes he would do night dispatch and I would go in with him and watch the guys work on buses when I was a kid,” he said. “Even then I was taking everything apart — motorcycles, bicycles, watches. My dad would want to kill me.”

Brown’s victory in St. Louis earned him \$500 and, more importantly, a plaque recognizing him as the best in a challenging, crucial profession. The first and second runner-ups also received plaques, plus cash prizes of \$200 and \$100.

Why has Brown worked in motorcoach shops throughout his career?

“It is interesting. It keeps you entertained. There are a lot of challenges keeping up with what the equipment needs and with what the company needs,” he said.

The Huskey headquarters is about an hour south of St. Louis between Interstate 55 and the Mississippi River. Brown and two other mechanics are responsible for “22 motorcoaches, seven school buses, miscellaneous vans and trucks and some tractors and farm equipment. The boss likes to farm,” he said.

Technology has come a long way in the past three decades, Brown said, but many advances created new problems.

“The buses gave you less trouble in the 80s because they didn’t have so many trinkets like Wi-Fi and DVD players. Back in the day, if the air conditioning went out people just opened the windows. Today, people won’t ride if the air conditioning breaks,” he said.

“We also have a lot of problems with toilets. And if the Wi-Fi doesn’t work, you might as well cancel the trip.”

The success of Alaskan mechanics in the Maintenance Challenge may result from their annual work cycle, Hale said. After a brief, intense tourist season, all the

vehicles are subject to detailed inspections so parts can be ordered for winter maintenance and upgrades.

Hale and two more mechanics maintain 23 motorcoaches, a luggage truck and four airport cutaways.

“We go 100 miles an hour, 24/7, all summer long,” he said.

“Then we take a deep breath and get everything ready for the next season. I have been inspecting buses for seven years. I have generated a procedure in my mind that enables me to do a thorough inspection as smoothly as I can.

“I applied that to the competition and it worked out real well.”

The Holland America-Princess shop at McKinley Lodge may boast the best view of any bus depot in the world — just over a nearby hill is a panoramic vista of the 20,310-foot-high Denali peak.

“I tell my guys a lot that we see this million-dollar view every single day and need to remember that our guests spent a lot of money to share that experience,” said Hale, 25, who was born in Anchorage.

Haunold, 39, began working on motorcoaches 16 years ago.

“At the beginning it was probably just a job. Now I absolutely love it,” he said. “Once I left the industry for three months and missed it every day. I suppose it is the uniqueness on the technical side.”

Haunold and seven mechanics at the Holland America-Princess shop in Anchorage maintain 58 motorcoaches, 20 trucks, three

semi tractors and six trailers that haul luggage.

“The motorcoach industry is a lot more advanced than what you see in trucking with the air disc brakes and multiplexing in the electrical systems,” he said.

From May through September, his fleet is on the go. Then his diagnostic skills are applied to inspections. “When October hits we bring the coaches in one by one and do a seven-page inspection to make sure every component is ready to make another season,” he said.

Whitworth will be overseeing his 20th Maintenance Challenge at the 2018 Motorcoach Expo in San Antonio in January because he believes the industry’s mechanics often are overlooked.

“I know how important that driver is. He is the one who gets his picture taken with his group at Mt. Rushmore,” Whitworth said. “But think — one mechanic could be responsible for as many as 10 or 20 motorcoaches on the road at time. That is a pretty big deal. The Maintenance Challenge is a way to say ‘thanks’ and give credit where credit is due.

“The mechanics have a very tough job. Whenever there is a mechanical problem, whatever time of day or night, they are going to get a call.”

But being overlooked can be a mechanic’s goal, Brown said.

“When I have motorcoaches all over the place — in New Orleans and Orlando and D.C. and Utah — and they don’t call me, I really like it.”

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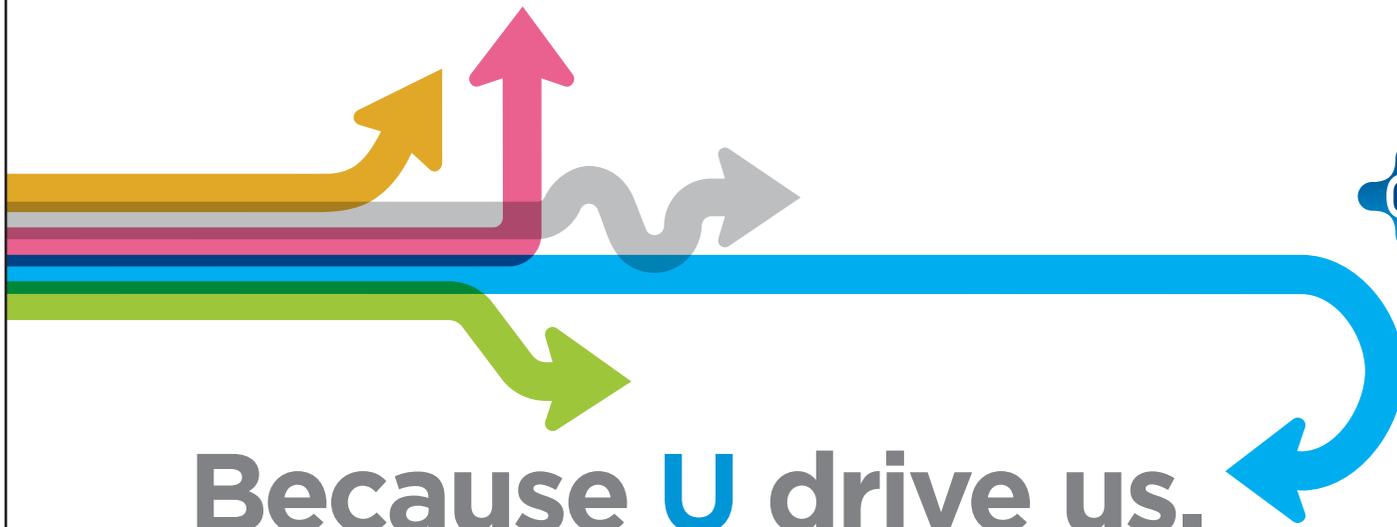
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