

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

January 15, 2015

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Kentucky adds hi-tech system to check buses

FRANKFORT, Ky. — Pulling into Kentucky weigh stations becomes far more problematic and potentially onerous for motorcoaches and over-the-road trucks starting this month.

That's because authorities are expected to begin checking all commercial vehicles that pull into nine weigh stations, using an automated screening system to identify vehicles and carriers that have not paid appropriate Kentucky taxes or that have high rates of safety violations in federal and state databases.

The Kentucky Automated Truck Screening system, which the state calls KATS, uses automated readers to scan license plates and U.S. Department of Transportation numbers as commercial vehicles roll through the weigh stations.

During testing, vehicles singled out by the system for inspections produced a 91-percent rate of violations and a 42-percent rate of driver-out-of-service orders, according to a paper written by the system developers.

The system also increased state tax revenue collections 300 to 600 percent at stations evaluating the technology.

Data collected by the system developers do not segment statistics for motorcoaches and buses.

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UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION MOTORCOACH EXPO 2015



Photo courtesy of New Orleans CVB

This Week in New Orleans. UMA Motorcoach Expo opens in New Orleans on Jan. 18. Late show and exhibitor news can be found inside, starting on Page 14.

Diesel prices are dropping, everything else is climbing

The national average pump price of diesel fuel is the lowest it has been in nearly four years, sliding almost nonstop since the end of June.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the average national price for the motorcoach industry's principal fuel has dropped from a 2014 high of just over \$4 per gallon in March to less than \$3.30 per gallon.

In some parts of the country, it is edging closer to less than \$3 a gallon, a price not seen since September 2010.

The good news on fuel costs is welcome relief for motorcoach operators across the U.S. and Canada, but they aren't breaking out party hats.

That's because continuing upward pressure on other expenses, including the price of new motorcoaches, pay and benefits for drivers and mechanics, and health insurance costs, are offsetting gains found at the fuel pump.

"We count pennies in this industry and any penny helps," said Scott Riccio of Northeast Trailways/Charter and Tour Co. in Lewiston, Maine.

"On the bottom line, the cost of fuel has done extremely well for us. Unfortunately, the expenses of operating buses and breakdowns



Scott Riccio

Jimmy Cantrell

are not helping."

Diesel fuel prices have fallen as a result of increasing crude oil supplies and stagnating economies around the globe, according to the federal Energy Information Administration.

Crude oil has fallen to less than \$60 per barrel, the lowest level in years and down from a peak of \$115 on June 19.

Fuel accounts for 7 to 20 percent of the expenses of operating a motorcoach, say a cross-section of operators interviewed by *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

Falling fuel prices could add \$35,000 to the bottom line at Daniel's Charters in Lula, Ga., reports owner Jimmy Cantrell.

"We looked at one particular trip and the difference for that day was \$60. It was a big difference."

Other operators report similar numbers.

"The falling price of fuel helps

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Prevast invests in its products, service, customers

SAINTE-CLAIRE, Quebec — Prevast, the 90-year-old Quebec-based manufacturer, is basing its business development on evidence the North American motorcoach industry mirrors the global economy — growing but fragile.

The company has no new models on the horizon but, instead, plans to invest heavily in existing platforms and service to enhance reliability, economy and brand image.

ability, economy and brand image.

"The motorcoach business is a cyclical market," notes Michael Power, Prevast director of marketing. "We can see the highs and lows and evaluate the expected lifespans and renewal rate of vehicles to suggest where we should be going in the future."

"Our customer base tells us they are seeing better times," he

said, although the industry is not approaching the vitality realized before the economic crash, often referred to as the Great Recession.

"There is a positive trend, but we are still in a recovery mode."



Michael Power

That mode is "fragile," he adds.

"There are so many things that influence the recovery. We are not just talking about North America, we are talking globally, things that are out of the control of the industry."

Prevast, which also distributes the Volvo 9700 intercity coach, fills about 30 percent of the North American motorcoach market.

The French-Canadian company is owned by Volvo of Sweden, the world's second-largest bus manufacturer after Mercedes-Benz.

Prevast's commitment to the U.S. market was demonstrated in August with the opening of a manufacturing facility in Plattsburgh, N.Y., to assemble the X3-45 commuter coach. That model gives

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Pioneering industry marketing network is shut down

MOUNT JACKSON, Va. — Deciding that the internet and social media have reduced the motorcoach industry's need for national marketing networks, Steve and Linda Kirchner have retired and wound down their 31-year-old National Motorcoach Network.

"The internet has opened opportunities for individual carriers to realistically market their services in the markets they choose to be in, in a quality manner for a very reasonable price. That was not available before," observes Steve Kirchner.

"That has lessened the need for national organizations such as the

National Motorcoach Network."

The network was formed in 1983, following federal deregulation of the bus industry, when Kirchner, then a marketing executive at the American Bus Association, predicted the need for marketing assistance for small- and medium-sized operators.

Prior to 1983, "the most important person on a motorcoach company's payroll was not the owner, it was the attorney. They were buying and selling operating rights. That is how companies were built," he said.

"Everybody played golf with

their competitors. There was no such thing as competition because you could not come into my territory and I could not go into your territory unless a government agency gave me a piece of paper giving me the right to do so.

"Nobody was concerned about too much beyond what the cost of a new coach might be," said Kirchner.

"When deregulation came in, everybody said, 'What do we do now?' We saw the opening for the network."

The National Motorcoach Network developed an early online presence, including creating a "na-

tional reservation center" that became the first motorcoach industry, internet-based bus reservation system.

It also maintained a directory of member motorcoach operators, tour operators, travel resources and vendors. For many years it also held an annual marketplace meeting.

Deregulation opened previously unimaginable possibilities, as well as problems for motorcoach operators, said Kirchner.

"You needed a certificate to operate, but your certificate didn't tell you you were restricted to certain counties in northern Califor-

nia (which had been the case before deregulation). You didn't need a certificate to operate across state lines. You could start advertising in Los Angeles tomorrow. Those were unheard-of concepts when I got into the industry."

Deregulation continues to reverberate, he says.

"As competition expanded, you had national carriers; charter

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Steve Kirchner

New coach purchases increase slightly in 3rd quarter

Buying of new motorcoaches by private bus operators rose ever so slightly during the third quarter of last year.

Five more MCI, Prevost, Setra, Van Hool and Volvo coaches were purchased by private-sector companies during the three months ended Sept. 30 than during the same period in 2013.

A total of 292 45- and 40-foot monocoque models sold by the five brands were purchased from

July through September by private companies, compared to 287 motorcoaches bought during the same three months in 2013.

At the same time, figures compiled by the American Bus Association Foundation show a strong pick-up in third-quarter purchases by public transit agencies.

Public systems acquired 91 new 45- and 40-foot coaches during the three months ended Sept. 30, compared to 26 such coaches

bought in the third quarter of 2013.

Well over half of the third-quarter 2014 public-sector deliveries were MCIs that went to GO Transit, the public system serving southern Ontario, including Greater Toronto and Hamilton.

Public-sector buying increased during each of the first three quarters of last year. Transit systems took delivery of 22 commuter motorcoaches in the first quarter, 72 in the second quarter and 91 in the

third period.

During the first nine months of 2014, private-sector operators purchased a total of 953 new 40- and 45-foot coaches, compared to 929 during the first three quarters of 2013, roughly a 2.5 percent increase.

Public-sector buying totaled 185 new 40- and 45-foot models in the nine months ended Sept. 30 of last year, up from 139 during the same period in 2013.

Combined private- and public-

sector purchases of new MCI, Prevost, Setra, Van Hool and Volvo models during the first nine months of 2014 totaled 1,138 motorcoaches.

That was up from 1,068 new coaches purchased during the first three-quarters of 2013, or a 6.5 percent gain. Figures for the periods include both 40- and 45-foot models.

However, the figures for the

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THE DOCKET

Drivers' legal drug use scrutinized

Medications worry some

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — A Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration advisory committee, as well as its medical review board, have approved recommendations designed to help medical examiners better evaluate the effect of commercial vehicle drivers' legal use of stimulants, depressants and opioids.

The two panels jointly approved a recommendation that primary physicians who prescribe Schedule II drugs to bus and truck drivers fill out a one-page standardized questionnaire verifying to medical examiners that the drivers they're treating have shown no evidence of medication side effects that would adversely affect the drivers' ability to operate commercial motor vehicles.

Other recommendations approved by the two committees included providing greater education on potentially dangerous narcotic drugs and certain over-the-counter drugs that cause drowsiness; issuing guidance for driver use of narcotics, and convening a panel to further study

Schedule II drugs.

The committees said their recommendations would help certified medical examiners evaluate the fitness of commercial vehicle drivers who legally use drugs authorized by the government.

Gina Pervall, chairman of the medical review board, said that after reviewing research on Schedule II drugs the board came to a consensus that drivers who are prescribed the drugs should be kept off the road if they're taking prescribed drugs such as OxyContin and Percodan.

However, Pervall said the group could not recommend such an outright ban on driver use of the drugs because current FMCSA regulations allow their use if they do not impair driving ability.

The FMCSA had tasked the medical review board to update recent research on the government's Schedule II drugs and offer recommendations if changes are needed.

Schedule II opioid drugs have a high potential for abuse and can cause side effects. They are considered dangerous and potentially can lead to psychological and physical dependence, medical experts and the federal government have said.

Current FMCSA regulations allow drivers to use prescribed Schedule II drugs if their treating physician and a medical examiner feel their use will not impede the safe operation of a motor vehicle, said Pervall, a physician who is medical director for Occupational Medicine Services at Johns Hopkins University.

By contrast, the Federal Aviation Administration does not permit airline pilots to fly while using opioids and a number of other drugs.

"Because we have a regulation in place, we can't just change it," Pervall said after a joint meeting of the medical board and the Motor Carrier Safety Advisory Committee here. "We'd have to change the rule."

That could take years, she added.

So instead of calling for an outright ban, the two committees recommended that FMCSA require that a primary treating physician fill out and sign a standardized questionnaire to verify that a patient is taking the drug properly and not exhibiting side effects "that would adversely affect the driver's ability to operate a commercial motor vehicle."

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Congress OKs restoration of tax breaks for business

WASHINGTON — Before they adjourned last month, both the House and Senate passed a bill that could potentially give motorcoach operators millions of dollars in tax breaks for 2014.

The legislation retroactively restored for last year more than 50 temporary tax breaks that expired in December 2013.

One major tax break goes to companies that bought new motorcoaches last year. Under the bill, operators can write off depreciation for new equipment investments during the year.

Under the federal tax code, depreciation write-offs used to be spread over three years.

But, as part of the economic stimulus program adopted during the recession, businesses have been able to use a vehicle known as bonus depreciation, which lets them accelerate the write-off.

The United Motorcoach Association was among hundreds of industry groups that urged Congress to extend bonus depreciation of business assets and the election to accelerate the alternative minimum tax credit in lieu of

bonus depreciation for 2014 purchases.

In a statement, UMA applauded the House and Senate for passage of the legislation and "recognition of the importance of business investment and creating jobs."

A coalition of more than 500 industry associations supported the package of tax extenders.

"We had been monitoring the progress of these tax provisions closely and urged passage at every turn," said Brian Annett, UMA chairman and president of Annett Bus Lines in Sebring, Fla.

Added Victor Parra, president and CEO of UMA: "Studies reveal that once purchased, every motorcoach equals approximately 3.4 jobs."

The UMA legislative team already is urging Congress to make the tax provisions permanent next year.

"Bus and motorcoach company owners need certainty when planning upgrades and expansion," said Annett. "Making tax credits permanent will encourage operators to purchase new coaches and create new jobs."

In the final weeks of last year, after Congress acted, motorcoach manufacturers didn't waste time, offering year-end deals and urging operators to take advantage of the return of bonus depreciation.

MCI, for example, noted that for all coaches purchased and placed into service during 2014, a first-year bonus depreciation of 50 percent of the adjusted basis of the coach was available to qualifying taxpayers.

Lessees could save as well, said MCI, as finance companies took advantage of bonus depreciation and passed the savings to operators in the form of a lower lease payment.

"For many operators, this kind of bonus should make a new coach very attractive, especially as the economy continues to improve," said Patricia Ziska, vice president of MCI new coach sales.

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Michigan voters to decide on tax, road funding plan

LANSING, Mich. — Michigan voters will decide in May whether to raise the state 6 percent sales tax to 7 percent under a convoluted plan to boost spending for highways, bridges, local roads and public schools.

Gov. Rick Snyder and legislative leaders from both parties back the complex deal that would increase annual road spending \$1.2 billion, provide \$260 million in tax relief to low-income residents, and raise \$1.34 billion in taxes on purchases if voters approve a 7 percent sales tax.

The ballot measure contains provisions designed to entice members of both parties. Legislative leaders stressed the plan was the only way to reach a consensus.

The deal ends two years of debate about how to raise more money to repair state roadways.

The sales tax boost would generate revenue partially dedicated to replacing \$752 million in revenue

for schools and cities lost by repealing the sales tax on fuel.

The deal hinges on voters approving an amendment to the state constitution increasing the sales and use tax on May 5.

If voters approve the higher sales tax rate, a new percentage-based fuel tax that would be the equivalent of the current per-gallon fuel tax would be implemented Oct. 1, 2015.

Under the plan, existing fuel taxes would be swapped for a new motor fuels tax entirely dedicated to roads, eventually generating \$1.2 billion in new annual funding for roads and bridges and another \$100 million for mass transit in three years.

The package of measures also would raise \$45 million in vehicle registration fees through the elimination of discounts for new vehicles and \$50 million in additional fees for heavy commercial vehicles.

Fuel tax dips in West Virginia

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Although diesel fuel prices are declining everywhere, motorcoach operators in West Virginia are getting another price break — small though it may be.

That's because the state tax on conventional motor fuels, which includes gasoline and diesel fuel, decreased by 1.1 cents per gallon on Jan. 1.

Under West Virginia law, the state tax department is required to recalculate the average wholesale price of fuel each year and determine the state fuel tax based on

the calculated price.

As a result of the year-end 2014 recalculation, the state fuel tax has been cut by 1.1 cents per gallon this year.

While the decrease will save fuel buyers money, it will mean less revenue for the state road fund, noted state Deputy Revenue Secretary Mark Muchow.

Road fund collections in West Virginia were estimated to be \$701 million during the fiscal year that ends June 30, with \$431 million derived from the motor fuel tax.

Wisconsin moving to convert U.S. 41 segment to interstate

MADISON, Wisc. — A 175-mile stretch of U.S. 41 in Wisconsin, a primary corridor between Green Bay and Chicago, could become part of the interstate system this spring.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation has received the necessary federal waiver to convert the highway and is awaiting final approval from the Federal Highway Administration.

Interstate 41 signs probably will be posted between Milwaukee and Green Bay during the summer.

Tammy Rabe, a project development supervisor for the state transportation department, told a leading

trucking industry newspaper that interstate status can be a useful tool in economic development.

"Some businesses will only locate along an interstate highway," Rabe said, adding that the road conversion means 41 would change "from a regionally known highway to one with national recognition."

The Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association supports conversion of the highway, an inland route that also services Appleton, Neenah and Oshkosh in an industrial part of the state.

The Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association manages the Wisconsin Motor Coach Association.

Truckers get restart provision lifted

WASHINGTON — There probably isn't a soul in the trucking industry who isn't aware by now that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and the roadside inspectors who enforce its rules are no longer applying the strict 34-hour restart restriction that went into effect for truckers 18 months ago.

However, there's still plenty of confusion over what exactly has — and hasn't — changed.

The FMCSA posted a notice on its website that the restrictive version of its 34-hour restart provision for truckers had been suspended, as was ordered by Congress when it passed a huge government funding bill last month.

According to the notice, "Drivers are therefore authorized...to resume use of the previous, unlimited restart provision."

The controversial provision — that was suspended — had required that when drivers used the restart they had to take two rest periods between 1 a.m. and 5 a.m., and could use the restart only once a week. The hours-of-service rules now in effect do not have those restrictions.

The key word in the legislation is "suspended."

The FMCSA has indicated it is only temporarily suspending, not rescinding, the provision.

In rolling back the restart provision, Congress also required the FMCSA to perform "a naturalistic study of the operational, safety, health and fatigue impacts" of the restart provision to determine if the change is justified.

The suspension of the restart rule will continue until Sept. 30, or

until the final report on the naturalistic study has been submitted to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, whichever is later.

It also is important to note that the only part of the truckers' hours-of-service rules that change involve the 34-hour-restart. The rest of the rules stay intact just as they were before passage of the bill.

Despite reports to the contrary, the old, 30-minute mandatory rest break for truckers was not eliminated and the 14-hour, on-duty clock remains.

Truckers have been advocating for elimination of the restart provision since it became effective July 1, 2013, claiming it was unnecessary, didn't improve safety, reduced productivity, and forced many more drivers to roll during daylight hours, increasing roadway congestion.

Senator: Clamp down on chameleon carriers

WASHINGTON — Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., has urged the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to improve its detection of truckers and other carriers that operate under a new name to avoid aggressive safety oversight.

In a letter to FMCSA Acting Administrator Scott Darling, Schumer said so-called "chameleon carriers," which dissolve and reform under a new name to avoid federal monitoring, are a safety risk to motorists.

He asked the agency to include the names of individual drivers in a system that would determine which companies are potential chameleon carriers.

"Very few companies will ever become 'chameleon carriers,' as most companies that receive violations quickly take steps to improve the safety of their operations," Schumer wrote.

But he added that the small number of chameleon carriers affect the reputation of other commercial carriers and pose risks on

roadways.

Although Schumer's letter focused on the trucking industry, chameleon carriers also have been an issue in the motorcoach industry, which also is regulated by the FMCSA.

Schumer has been a consistent critic of schlocky operators and poor enforcement, and was an early proponent of a letter-grade system to denote the safety record of bus and truck operators. (See July 1, 2011, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Painkiller abuse by surgery patients

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — A new study suggests employers need to be vigilant for prescription painkiller abuse by employees who undergo surgery for orthopedic trauma, including broken bones.

One-fifth of patients who undergo such surgery visit multiple doctors for painkiller prescriptions, according to the study.

The findings suggest there is little if any coordination or consultation among doctors about the pain needs of patients.

"There needs to be coordination if additional pain medications are needed," lead author Dr. Brent Morris told *HealthDay*.

"Patients should not be receiving multiple narcotic pain medication prescriptions from multiple providers without coordinating with their treating surgeon."

The researchers studied the medical and pharmacy records of 130 patients who were treated for orthopedic trauma at Vanderbilt University Medical Center here.

They found that patients with a

high school degree or less were 3.2 times more likely to try to obtain prescriptions from more than one doctor, compared to patients with more education.

Those who had previously used narcotic painkillers were 4.5 times more likely to doctor-shop, the researchers report in the *Journal of Bone & Joint Surgery*.

Most of the doctor shoppers used narcotic painkillers for about 3.5 months after surgery, compared to one month for patients who received painkillers from just

one doctor.

Doctor shoppers obtained a median of seven narcotic prescriptions, compared to two prescriptions for patients visiting one doctor.

"Our study highlights the importance of counseling patients in the postoperative period, and that it is important to work together to establish reasonable expectations for pain control as part of treatment plan discussions and follow-up visits," Dr. Morris said in a news release.

Legal drug use

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

"The questionnaire is a big deal," said Steve Owings, chairman of the Motor Carrier Safety Advisory Committee and founder and president of Atlanta-based Road Safe America.

"Medical examiners only get a snapshot of the driver," said Pervall. "So the questionnaire is to give the medical examiner some

support from someone who is familiar with this particular driver and his history, his medications and his responses to the medications."

She added, "It's really a tool that will support the examiner in saying this person is fit, that he's taking his medications and not having side effects related to them. Or conversely, that he's not fit because of these medications and side effects that he's having."



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The Grand Canyon shuttle system provides rides to millions of park visitors each year.

Operator wins Grand Canyon contract

GRAND CANYON, Ariz. — It's more than 2,600 miles from Massachusetts to the Grand Canyon, but a Boston-based bus company has again been awarded the contract to run the shuttle service at the popular national park.

Paul Revere Transportation, the largest private operator of compressed natural gas buses in the country, won a five-year contract with the U.S. Park Service over several other bidders in October.

It will operate and manage the Grand Canyon Visitor Transportation System through Nov. 30,

2019. The system provides free shuttle rides to millions of park visitors each year.

The company operates a fleet of 30 CNG-powered, low-floor New Flyer buses with accessibility for wheelchairs and bicycles.

It employs 57 full-time drivers during the summer months, and 18 operators in the winter, according to Richard 'Doc' Daley, Paul Revere Transportation's general manager.

The service runs from sunrise to sunset and connects visitors with viewpoints, campgrounds, lodges, restaurants, the Yavapai

Museum of Geology, and Grand Canyon Visitor Center, along more than 25 miles of park roads.

It also transports visitors to and from the nearby community of Tusayan during the summer months.

In 2013, more than 89,000 people boarded the Tusayan Shuttle between May and September, reducing by roughly 15,000 the number of cars entering the park.

In all, the shuttles provided more than 6.1 million passenger trips in 2013. The service grew by more 1.5 million visitor trips between 2008 and 2013.

Trump Taj Mahal stays open, Icahn pumps in \$20 million

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — The Trump Taj Mahal casino is still open — for now.

Scheduled to close last month, it remains afloat thanks to a \$20 million injection from billionaire investor Carl Icahn. (See Dec. 15 and Oct. 1 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Trump Entertainment lawyers say the money might allow the Boardwalk fixture to stay viable for all of 2015 while additional efforts aimed at arranging a long-term bailout for the casino are negotiated.

Icahn holds \$292 million of the Taj Mahal's debt, and has said he would give the property another \$100 million to keep it going, but he needed tax relief from New Jersey and Atlantic City — to the tune of \$175 million.

The state and city governments have balked on this request, however.

Icahn did get a bankruptcy court to cancel existing collective bargaining agreements with the

Paul Revere Transportation has operated the Grand Canyon service since January 2000.

The company has a long history

casino's main union, though, in an attempt to slash about \$14 million in pension and health benefits.

The union has filed a complaint with the state.

The two sides reportedly are still talking, trying to come up with a solution to save the casino. They appeared to come close to a deal in late December, but it fell through.

The bankruptcy court still must approve the \$20 million in financing.

According to one wire service report, Trump Entertainment told U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Kevin Gross that the Icahn money could help keep the Trump Taj Mahal afloat during the winter, the slowest season for the casino, buying time until gamblers return in greater numbers when the weather gets warmer.

So, it looks like the Trump Taj Mahal will not close this year, leaving the number of abandoned Atlantic City casinos in 2014 at four.

of running CNG-powered vehicles for the Massachusetts Port Authority, which owns and operates Boston's Logan International Airport.

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Fung Wah to resume operations after two-year shutdown

WASHINGTON — Pioneering low-fare bus operator Fung Wah has received approval from federal regulators to resume operations nearly two years after it was shut down for multiple safety violations.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration said in a statement it had cleared Fung Wah to resume “limited operations to prove they can safely transport passengers and protect the motoring public.”

The FMCSA said Fung Wah has put new operational safeguards in place, has passed multiple bus inspections and will be subjected to extra oversight.

“FMCSA will aggressively and continually monitor Fung Wah’s operations and subject its vehicles and drivers to unannounced inspections to ensure that the company fully complies with all federal safety regulations,” the agency said.

Fung Wah President Pei Lin Liang issued his own statement, saying the company was “working diligently to resume safe, effective and affordable passenger transportation service between New York and Boston.”

Service is expected to resume before the end of March.

Liang, a former noodle factory deliveryman, started Fung Wah as a local van service in New York City in 1993. Four years later, he expanded service to Boston, charging just \$10, a fifth of the amount being charged by Greyhound.

Liang’s business model of picking up and dropping off passengers at curbside has been imitated by scores of companies and has made the curbside bus industry the fastest-growing mode of intercity travel.

Prolonged battle

Fung Wah has been fighting to get back on the road since it was shut down by the FMCSA in March 2013.

The shutdown occurred after state safety inspectors in Massachusetts found cracks in the frames of some of its buses and federal regulators were denied access to company safety records.

Those records, which the FMCSA obtained through a subpoena, revealed shoddy repairs, falsified maintenance records and a failure to monitor drivers’ hours of service and screen them for drugs.

Fung Wah applied four times in 2013 to get back its operating authority — in July, October, November and December.

The FMCSA rejected the company request to resume operating last January, noting that Fung Wah had submitted multiple applications “in an apparent attempt to

avoid FMCSA’s passenger carrier vetting process.”

Fung Wah appealed the rejection, saying the multiple applications stemmed from confusion over the process. The company also argued that inspectors had made mistakes in their inspections of its buses.

Last October, an FMCSA official denied the company bid for reinstatement, but gave it 30 days to submit additional evidence. (See Oct. 15, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The official also set a 30-day deadline for the agency’s Office of Registration and Safety Information to decide whether to reinstate

the company’s operating authority based on that additional evidence.

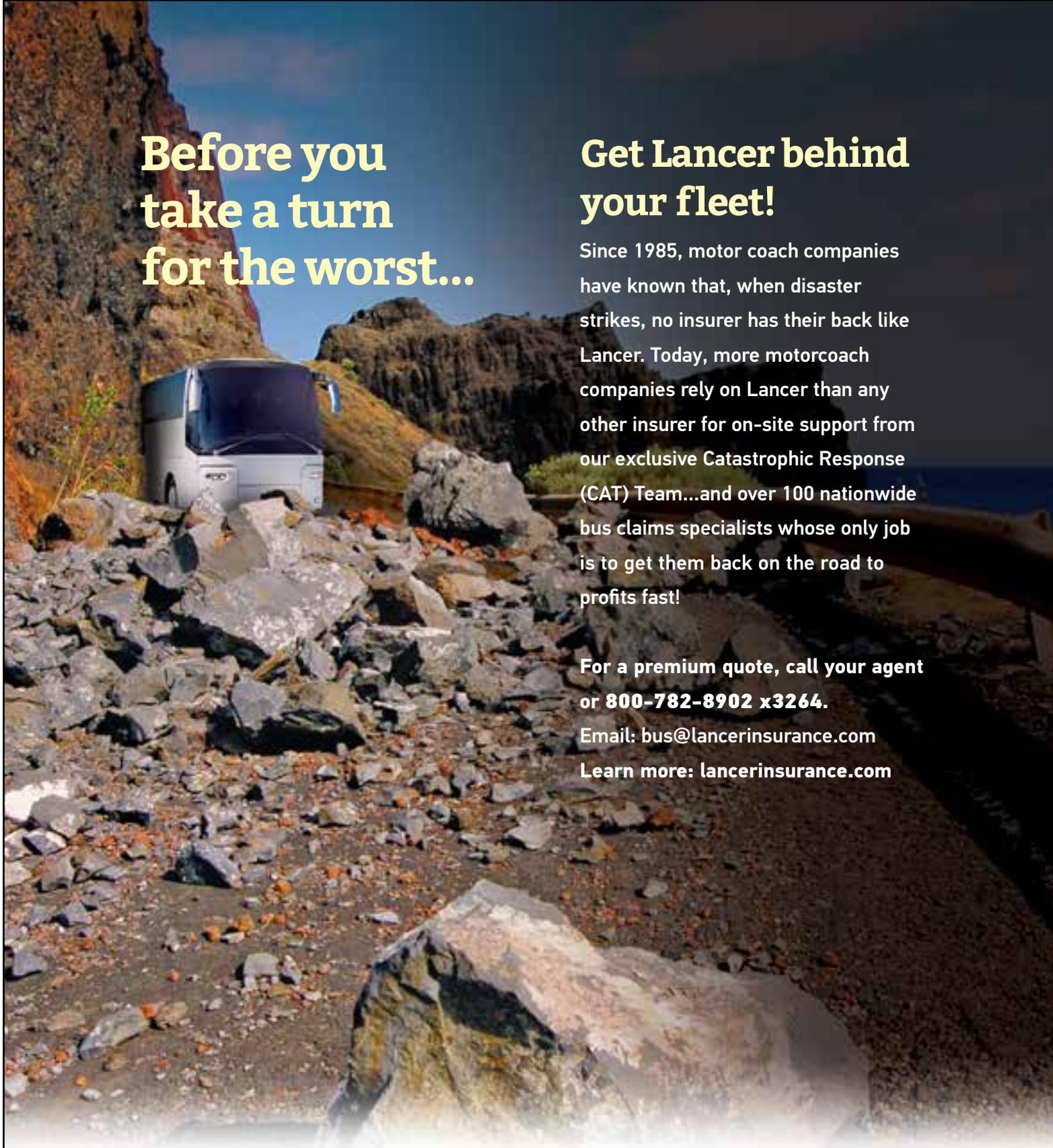
The two sides reached an agreement in November that will allow the company to resume operations. Under the agreement, announced a month later, Fung Wah will be required to:

- Hire qualified management

staff specifically responsible for operational safety and USDOT compliance and implement on-going training to ensure management and drivers understand regulatory safety requirements

- Limit routes and number of trips during the first 60 days of op-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17 ►



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Attorney: Exercise care with job applications, interviews

ASHBURN, Va. — A careful approach to creating job applications and conducting job interviews can yield valuable information for bus and motorcoach companies seeking to hire good candidates without running afoul of federal anti-discrimination laws.

That was the message of an attorney with experience in transportation law speaking at the United Motorcoach Association annual Safety Management Seminar here last month.

“You can be asking some very general questions that will probably get you the information you want from an applicant but without asking a discriminatory question,” attorney Jill Nagy of the Reading, Pa., law firm of Summers Nagy, told the conference.

For example, while a motorcoach company may not legally ask an applicant’s religion, interviewers could ask if the applicant would be available to work seven days a week, if the job description requires it, Nagy said.

This could capture valuable information about candidates who might not be able to work over the weekend for religious reasons, without directly asking the candidate’s religion, which is an illegal question.

It also might be useful to protect against drivers who, after being hired, suddenly claim religious obligations prevent them from working weekends.

Similarly, it may not be legal or advisable to ask on a job application about previous work injuries, but an employer could ask during an interview if the candidate has missed any significant time from work in previous jobs, Nagy said.

Federal law has put a number of questions off-limits to employers during the hiring process, including

questions about age, religion, race, and marital status, among others, generally because they are not considered relevant to job duties and could be used to discriminate against protected classes of people.

Talking a thin line

The line between allowable questions and illegal ones is not always clear, as evidenced by recent litigation over U.S. Department of Transportation-mandated questions on USDOT driver job applications that the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission claimed were illegal.

The two agencies have since worked together to produce a sample job application acceptable to both agencies, Nagy said.

As part of her presentation, Nagy detailed a variety of pitfalls that await companies in writing job descriptions, finding potential employees, and conducting job interviews.

Consistency counts

One of the best ways to avoid problems is to treat all job candidates in a consistent and well-documented manner, Nagy said.

“Do you have an effective hiring process? Do you have a set protocol on how you do your hiring?”

Such protocols might include the circumstances when the company generally hires people, or where it seeks job candidates, and who in the company is involved in the hiring process.

In matters of discrimination, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is looking particularly to see whether the hiring process is consistent, she noted.

Furthermore, companies should place specific requirements in job advertisements, such as re-

‘One of the most important things to do is to document everything in the hiring process — this is key to defending against discrimination lawsuits.’

quired night or weekend work, so as to avoid any surprises down the line, she said. “So if there’s something unique, you want to be sure that’s in there so your candidates know what they are getting into.”

Similarly, job descriptions should be very specific, including even the most basic requirements, no matter how obvious they may seem.

“Some of your job descriptions for a driver don’t even say, ‘Must have a driver’s license,’” Nagy said. So, if a driver loses his license, that driver could conceivably claim the job description didn’t contain that requirement.

It’s also a good idea to give a copy of the detailed job description to the candidate to sign during the interview to show the applicant knows all of the requirements of the job; if the job description changes, the revised description should be distributed to employees.

Job applications are a common place where companies can run into problems.

Felony convictions

Beyond the conflict between USDOT and EEOC regulations on DOT driver applications, there are other questions that may not be asked, Nagy said. For example,

employers may ask on an application if a person has been convicted of a felony, but may not ask about being arrested for one.

Furthermore, based on a Supreme Court decision, the EEOC in 2013 prohibited blanket policies barring all convicted felons from employment, Nagy said. Instead, employers must consider “green factors,” such as severity of the offense, the time since the conviction occurred, and the nature of the job at hand.

Many of the questions that are officially barred on job applications can be finessed in the interview process.

“Make sure your application fully covers all the USDOT requirements, and then save more specific information for the interview,” Nagy said.

One of the most important things to do is to document everything in the hiring process -- this is key to defending against discrimination lawsuits, Nagy said.

Put it in writing

When making a hard hiring decision, for example, companies should write down as many valid business considerations as possible for the hire and keep them filed. So, if an applicant may be qualified but near retirement age, be sure to keep on file as many valid business reasons for hiring another qualified candidate to defend against a potential age-discrimination lawsuit.

“You want to document everything correctly and do your due diligence so you can defend your decision,” she said.

Another tool available to companies is the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s Pre-Employment Screening Program, which provides access to commercial driv-

ers’ five-year crash and three-year inspection history, according to Tim Kohout, risk management and operations supervisor for National Interstate Insurance Co.

If a company finds inconsistencies between an applicant’s stated job history and the history contained in the PSP, that is another reason for denying the application, he said. “It’s a great tool.”

Another question companies’ face is what may be done pre-offer and post-offer, Nagy said, particularly regarding invasive tests, such as drug tests or physicals, or criminal background checks.

“More of the invasive tests you’ll be doing will be post-offer,” although some of the most routine ones should be disclosed on the job application, such as a statement that a candidate’s Motor Vehicle Record will be accessed, Nagy said.

Most others, such as drug tests, criminal background checks, and physical examinations, should be performed post-offer.

EEOC regulations now require “a business reason for doing those clearances or those checks,” Nagy said. “Now it has to be job-specific if you’re going to do some of these more invasive tests, whatever they are.”

Furthermore, EEOC now has other administrative requirements, such as requiring companies conducting criminal background checks to provide the results to the job candidates within a specific timeframe.

“If you’re going to do a criminal background check, get a service because they will do all the other administrative requirements and they will assume some liability if there is an issue,” Nagy said.

There are also specific require-

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Do you run your business as a business...or a hobby?

By Dave Millhouser

Barcelona for free...what a deal.

I scheduled a multi-week sales trip in a demonstrator coach to include a weekend in Barcelona . . . New York.

A peek at a map will tell you Barcelona is just to the left of Buffalo, on Lake Erie.

My hobby/part-time work is underwater photography, and Lake Erie was experiencing a real turnaround. A Zebra mussel infestation had sucked the pollution out of what had been a murky, befouled lake, and the water was crystal clear.

There were newly discovered photogenic shipwrecks, and you can stuff a ton of dive gear and photographic equipment in a bus belly.

The diving wasn't a problem for my boss because it had no impact on the "work" part of the trip, and probably enhanced it by reducing travel time (staying at the far end of the route, as opposed to driving home for the weekend). Mixing business and pleasure is often beneficial.

After retiring from bus sales I began helping in a friend's scuba shop, figuring if I could wreck one business why not several? It didn't take long to identify some parallels between the two industries.

Lots of folks in both businesses relish what they do, making a living working at what they love. Divers become instructors or open retail shops in an effort stay close to the water.

Many bus operations were started when drivers, who enjoyed travel and interacting with passengers, decided to strike out on their own.

Tour companies often originate when "group leaders" discover they have a flair for assembling jaunts that their friends love, and decide to make it a career.

There's nothing wrong with loving your work. The concept goes all the way back to when Confucius said "choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life."

A problem can surface (dive pun intended) when we run the resulting business like, well, a hobby.

In diving this may take the form of scuba shops selling gear at

miniscule margins, or offering dive instruction and compressed air at low prices because the enthusiastic hobbyist/owner doesn't understand the value of the services he or she is providing, or the need for adequate margins.

Despite the fact their economic ship is sinking, they forge ahead because it's fun. Lots of diving, with exotic group trips that only lose a little money. Sometimes there's even some death-defying daring-do to stroke the ego.

By the time the dive operation fails, competitors who understood margins and value have lost business and suffered the indignity of customers thinking that their higher pricing was greedy...rather than realistic.

Sound familiar?

I'm stumbling towards a couple of points here.

First, it's crucial that a business be run like a business.

As it grows, more skills are required to stay on track. If you don't have them, hire them. If you can't find them, step back and think about what you really want.

It doesn't matter how much fun

you're having if you're not profitable. "Living the dream" will become a nightmare if the enterprise isn't effectively managed.

As the company grows, you may be forced to spend less time doing the duties you enjoy. Some folks thrive on the new management tasks, but many never learn to love them. Size your company to fit the balance between what you enjoy and what you can truly manage.

A friend sold the family business to a BIG bus company and stayed on to run it. A couple of years later I asked him if he was happy. "Heck, yeah," he said, "I'm doing the things I love, like operations and sales, while the parent company handles the parts I'd grown to dislike."

That's an ideal outcome.

It's also critical to be honest with yourself, to sort out what is business and what is fun. Both are good, but should never be mistaken for one another. Fun and ego often overlap, and I'm lazy, so let's use "fun" for both.

If it's not working, dump it. No matter how much you enjoy it, or how important it makes you feel.

It's OK to have a pastime, but don't kid yourself into believing it's an element of the business.

If the business is paying for your hobby be honest with yourself about it. Fib to the IRS but not yourself.

When work and pleasure converge, it's ideal, but keep them clearly defined and separated as you operate your business. To paraphrase a wise friend, "don't believe your own bull-hockey."

When I was selling, it was tempting to spend lots of time with folks I enjoyed (not always the same people who actually bought buses).

Periodically I had to remind myself, if my boss didn't do it first, that the job was sales, and they weren't paying me to travel around visiting pals.

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



Dave Millhouser

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When does the marketing of your company stop?

By Christian Riddell
Motorcoach Marketing Council

As a professional marketer, I spend the majority of my time working with companies to help manage their public image.

When we work together, we focus on crafting a persona for their company. We talk about their culture, what they want to be, and what they want their customers to see them as.

Once we establish that, we build the tools to help them accomplish it from websites to business cards, employee uniforms to wall art.

In what seems like a short time, we build a new and exciting experience they can share with their customers and potential customers.

For the past two years, this is what we have been doing with the Motorcoach Marketing Council, not for their organization, but for the entire motorcoach industry.

We have been reframing motorcoach travel to help show the world what we truly have to offer. Safe, green, affordable, efficient, group transportation solutions that fit the needs of whatever it is your company wants to promote.

We have helped build a message that the industry can be proud of and that will help shape the future of the industry.

But, with every branding campaign, there is a hidden side that can sabotage even the best attempts to rebrand any product or service.

With my travel to various industry events last year, I had the opportunity to see many places in our beautiful nation. At one event, I was excited that my travel was going to include a long transfer from the airport to the venue.

Anticipating coach ride

After a long flight, I knew it would be a fun opportunity to compare and contrast the two methods of travel. Since I stopped driving a motorcoach professionally, the opportunities to ride on a coach for any duration have been few and far between.

My flight went as expected. I

arrived hungry and confused as to why anyone would go through the trouble of passing out a package with four peanuts in it, and stiff from being crammed into a seat that was obviously designed for someone with a dramatically different stature than mine.

The directions I had received from my assistant were clear, and I was able to make it to the coach pickup point without any issues. Although the departures were hourly, my timing was impeccable as I was there only a few minutes before a coach pulled to the curb. It was a nice coach, and I was excited immediately to see the Wi-Fi onboard sticker by the door. I thought of all the work I could accomplish via emails and calls during the ride.

I was truly excited. Then, it all went sideways.

The door opened and the driver stepped off the coach.

His first words to the waiting passengers were "Step back...give me some room." His gruff tone was an indication of what was to come.

He seemed older than he probably was. He slowly made his way back to the luggage bays and opened them. Then he barked at the confused crowd to "make a line over here," pointing at a spot of discarded gum on the sidewalk. Obediently, we all neatly formed a line.

"Where are you going?" he asked the first passenger in line. The man answered, the driver grabbed his luggage and moved it towards the middle bay. He grimaced and groaned as he picked up the bag and slid it into the bay.

The noises he made caused the entire line to shoot concerned glances at one another. He returned to the line and called out to the next person, "Where are you going?" Again he was answered, and he slid the bags into a different bay.

I was next. "Where are you going?" I answered that I was there to attend a motorcoach conference and that...

Cutting me off in mid-sentence, he growled again, "Where are you going?" only louder this time. I was taken aback, I looked at him con-

Marketing Minute

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fused. He then rattled off four destinations and asked me which one I was going to. None of them sounded familiar.

I told him I was not sure, but the conference coordinator had given me this transportation information. He then said, "I don't know where you are going," and pushed my bag out of line and stepped around me to query the next passenger. I panicked, frantically trying to figure out which of the four stops I was supposed to say. I checked my phone, my hotel reservation, nothing seemed to help.

No ride for you

By this time the line was gone, and he was beginning to close the doors to the luggage bays. He had every intention of leaving me on the curb for the next bus. I then blurted out "I will go to the last stop," hoping the hours on the coach would give me time to figure out where I really wanted to go.

He responded, "Are you sure because these bags are going to that location, and you won't be able to get them if you want to get off earlier." I looked at him dumbfounded. I told him that what I really wanted was to go to my hotel and told him where it was. He then said, "Oh, OK that is the third drop-off, why didn't you just say that?" and proceeded to shove my bag into the middle bay.

I got on the coach and shuffled to the back, hoping to put that experience behind me. Onboard, the driver made his obligatory announcements. At first they were standard but then he said something I could not believe. "Please do not make any phone calls unless they are emergencies. It is rude to me and your fellow passengers."

I watched as the other passen-

gers, who were already on the phone end their conversations, and slide their phones into their bags.

The coach pulled away. For the next few hours, we all rode in near silence. The ride was great. The seat was infinitely more comfortable than the one on the airplane. Unfortunately, there was an air of confusion and discomfort on the coach. People were casting glances at one another about this strange experience.

Stop by stop, people got on and people got off. Every time, we were reminded of our responsibility to not use our phones unless it was a dire emergency, and that if we were going to use a computer or tablet we should do so with respect to our fellow passengers. It felt remarkably like being scolded by an overbearing middle school bus driver.

Finally, my stop arrived, and I proceed to get off the bus. As I came down the stairs, the driver stood at the bottom. His face was as stoic and cold as it had been all afternoon. He was holding a sign that said "tips cheerfully accepted."

So, what is the moral of this story and why is it in a marketing column?

Marketing goes far beyond brochures and websites. It goes further than the uniforms the drivers wear or even the age of the coach.

Vision of the future

Marketing is about crafting a perception about your business or in the case of the motorcoach council, the entire motorcoach industry. But how that promise is delivered is as much, or more, marketing as anything we can do.

That day, on that coach, I was excited to see that the very demographics that we, as marketing people for bus operators, want to talk about were present and accounted for. They chose to GoMotorcoach.

Kids, college students, retirees, professionals — all together on a coach. Yes, that coach took cars off the road. Yes, that coach safely delivered us from point A to point B and yes, that coach was

comfortable.

It had power outlets and Wi-Fi onboard. But, in that coach were 35 people who had an experience they would not want to repeat. They will not think of chartering a coach when they are planning their wedding or family reunion.

They won't want to gather a group of their friends and do a pub-crawl or book a coach for a three-day wine tour.

Marketing is about crafting an experience...and then delivering on that promise. The future of the motorcoach industry is in our hands. If we want to grow, if we want to flourish, if we want more and more people to choose motorcoach travel over other forms of transportation, then we, as an industry, need to drive that into reality.

Every driver, every sales person, every bus washer needs to understand the role they play in creating this reality. They need to understand how they fit into the big picture of moving this message forward.

Every day millions of people step aboard motorcoaches all over North America. Each of these interactions are opportunities to establish your company and this industry as an exciting option. I challenge each of you to look at your business and see what message you are delivering, day-in and day-out.

I challenge managers and owners to engage your entire staff in the vision of a future where more people are using motorcoaches every day and to help those employees better understand where they fit in that vision.

The fact is, marketing never stops. It is time for all of us to realize we are not in the transportation business, we are in the experience business. When we do, when we make that paradigm shift, we will see that our consumers will respond like we never thought possible.

For more information about the Motorcoach Marketing Council and its programs, go to www.motorcoachmarketing.org.



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New hires

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

ments attached to the physical exam, some of which are new, Nagy said.

Industry specific

A court case from a few months ago held that additional employer-mandated physical requirements beyond the USDOT physical must be job-specific, and must be performed by someone outside of the

company.

Since it is such a recent decision, the full impact has yet to be determined, Nagy said, but it may be that different physical tests must be prepared for different jobs, such as for coach drivers versus school bus drivers.

Companies may also choose to use a personality assessment tool, which is becoming "trendy," Nagy said, but there currently is no law governing their use, such as whether it should be administered pre-

post-offer.

But, if a company chooses to use such a tool, it must be specific to the bus industry and not just for generic commercial drivers, according to Bob Crescenzo, vice president and director of loss prevention for Lancer Insurance Company.

"Many of the transportation-based assessments are truck-oriented and not bus-oriented," he said. "That is critical...or you may not get the information you need."

Motorcoach Network

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

carriers; local charter carriers, and regional carriers purchasing other carriers, Kirchner said.

“You do not have any restrictions on what you can do. What we all learned is that you have the right to expand — and you have the right to fail. And you could fail spectacularly, as we have seen.”

Consolidators' Impact

Those developments and others drastically reduced the size of the National Motorcoach Network. “Our peak was in the late 90s. Then a guy in Houston decided he was going to roll up the industry and half of our members went there.

“The other half went to IMG (International Motor Coach Group). We had to rebuild after that,” said Kirchner.

The “guy in Houston” was a former Arthur Andersen executive by the name of Richard Kristinik, who thought he could consolidate much of the motorcoach industry, starting with \$95 million raised through a pair of 1995-96 public share offerings in a company called Coach USA.

Dallas-based Coach America was an example of spectacular failure.

Coach America was formed after Coach USA was broken up early in the last decade. It began buying motorcoach companies in 2003.

When it filed for bankruptcy protection in 2012, and was eventually liquidated, Coach America had a mountain of debt and more than 3,000 vehicles in its fleet, making it the largest tour-and-charter bus operator in the country.

Better marketing

As a marketer, Kirchner said he admires the work of many motorcoach companies.

“The internet is the face of so many companies these days. The effort that goes into creating a quality face says, ‘I am part of the local community. I am based here. I have quality equipment and a quality staff,’” he said.

“Now, I am seeing social media being used to promote tours and promote people. One builds on the next.”

Modern businesses view marketing activities as essential, he said. “A lot of companies have assigned one person to be the internet and social media person. It may cost you, but it is extremely effective in keeping your company in front of your customers.”

The current National Motorcoach Network Directory lists 19 motorcoach operators and one tour operator as members. When the network announced its 20th-anniversary meeting in 2003, membership stood at 41 motorcoach lines.

“Our numbers have tradition-

ally been in the 25 to 30 range,” said Kirchner. “We have had close to 150 different carriers come through. Some were here for the entire 31 years.”

A notice sent to members last month announced the Kirchners were retiring so network dues were not being billed for 2015. The note also said, “For the past six months we have retained a consultant to see if there is interest in someone

taking over the network’s assets, and those efforts continue. These assets include the name, logo, programs and the motorcoach.com URL address.”

Kirchner would consider selling the web address separately, he said. “It should be the most valuable URL in the industry.”

Byways to continue

The Kirchners will continue to

publish *Byways* magazine, which they said is a separate corporation that “will continue to highlight the destinations along the highways and byways of North America.”

“It started 30 years ago as an onboard publication,” Kirchner said. “It is something we still want to do as an electronic publication. We got in the forefront of going digital when we did that three years ago.

“It is still fun to do and puts domestic destinations in front of tour operators and consumers. A lot of tour operators and motorcoach operators like it and there are people who read it.

“The advertising is so inexpensive — it might be costing advertisers one or two cents apiece to reach these operators.”

Find *Byways* at <https://byways-magazine.wordpress.com/>.

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MOTORCOACH EXPO 2015

Expo social/networking events given major upgrades

NEW ORLEANS — Two of the major, traditional networking/social events conducted during UMA Motorcoach Expo have been revamped for Expo 2015 here this month.

The “Sneak Preview Party,” which opens the Expo Exhibit Hall the evening before the show floor officially swings into full gear, has been extended and expanded.

And, the UMA Vision Awards banquet and party has been rechristened the UMA Leadership Awards Celebration and has been modified from a black-tie optional evening to a less formal event, honoring the industry’s best operators in a fun atmosphere.

Plus, there is a new reception this year and the return of an entertainment event that quite likely is without equal in the travel indus-

try, the Broadway Luncheon.

These events are included with a full Expo registration.

Here’s a quick rundown on the upgraded events for Expo attendees:

Sneak Preview Party – Expanded and Enhanced (6-9 p.m. Monday, Jan. 19). The Exhibit Hall Sneak Preview serves as the opening of the Expo tradeshow floor.

This year, UMA has kicked the Sneak Preview Party up a notch by expanding the hours. The additional time can be used to preview the latest products and services in the industry while enjoying an evening filled with food, refreshments, and New Orleans entertainment.

Note: There no longer will be private parties hosted by large exhibitors after the close of the Sneak

Preview; the Sneak Preview Party is taking the place of those events.

Now, all of the action, including tons of food and drinks, stays in the exhibit hall, providing extra time with friends and colleagues to appreciate the exhibits and have fun.

UMA Leadership Awards Celebration and Cigars & Cordials – UMA exclusive event (6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 20). Everyone is invited to this event that recognizes the brightest professionals in the motorcoach industry.

Awards will be given to visionary companies. In addition to the awards, there will be drinks, great food, music and drawings for \$4,000 worth of prizes.

The evening will conclude with the popular cigars-and-cor-

dials reception sponsored by Bridgestone Americas Tire Operations, as well as live entertainment. Dress is business casual.

UMA Chairman’s Welcome Reception – New Event (5:30-6:30 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 18). By popular demand, UMA has created this exclusive-for-UMA-members Chairman’s Welcome Reception to kick-off UMA Motorcoach Expo.

UMA says it’s the perfect place to meet up with bus buddies and industry friends, and for new attendees to come and feel welcomed.

The casual gathering also is a wonderful time to make connections with potential partners in a fun social setting. The event will be hosted at the New Orleans Mar-

riott Hotel.

Broadway Luncheon – Don’t Miss (12:15 p.m. Monday, Jan. 19). The Broadway Luncheon, sponsored by Group Sales Box Office-Broadway.com-Broadway Across America, gives attendees the opportunity to enjoy lunch while seeing performances from the hottest Broadway shows — by actual cast members.

For those who appreciate first-rate, live entertainment, this event is without parallel.

All Motorcoach Expo networking events are included for motorcoach operators when they purchase a full registration.

For the latest news on Motorcoach Expo, go to www.motorcoachexpo.com.

Bus & Motorcoach Academy plans announcements at Expo

NEW ORLEANS — Bus & Motorcoach Academy, the online continuing education program operated under the aegis of the United Motorcoach Association, will use Motorcoach Expo 2015 as the forum for announcing its New Year schedule.

The schedule announcement — for both the academy’s Clarence Cornell School of Business and the Prevost Preparatory School for Professional Motorcoach Drivers — will be made during the UMA Active Member Meeting at 9:30 a.m. Monday, Jan. 19.

Motorcoach operators attending Expo will be able to sign up for Clarence Cornell School of Business courses at a special discount rate that is being underwritten by

ABC Companies. Clarence Cornell is the founder of ABC.

A form with the discounted rates will be available at the UMA booth, No. 825, on the Expo show floor.

The discount is exclusively for attendees of Motorcoach Expo 2015 and the special registration form must be used to receive the discounted rate.

On the academy’s horizon is an expected “exciting announcement” regarding the Prevost Preparatory School for Professional Motorcoach Drivers. That announcement, when it comes, will be reported in *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

More information about the Bus & Motorcoach Academy can be found at www.uma.org/academy.

Detroit to offer smaller engines

SAN DIEGO — Detroit Diesel announced that it will offer Detroit-brand medium-duty engines beginning in 2016.

The DD5 and DD8 will expand Detroit’s engine lineup, which currently features 13-, 15- and 16-liter diesels.

The initial bus industry applications of the engines will be in Thomas Built Buses and Freightliner Custom Chassis vehicles.

The DD5 and DD8 will be built and shipped from Daimler’s

powertrain facility in Mannheim, Germany. A transition to North American development is expected in 2018.

In addition to engines, Detroit offers axles, transmissions and telematics products for the commercial transportation industry in the on-highway and vocational markets.

To learn more, visit Expo Booth No. 1235. Or, go to www.DemandDetroit.com.

Thomas Built Buses can be found at Expo Booth No. 701.

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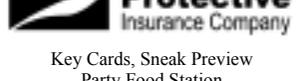


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Icebreaker, Sightseeing Tours, Airport Transportation



Key Cards, Sneak Preview Party Food Station



Sneak Preview Party Bar

Atlas for commercial drivers is released by Rand McNally

SKOKIE, Ill. — Rand McNally is offering the 2015 edition of the *Motor Carriers' Road Atlas*, the No. 1-selling print atlas line for over-the-road drivers.

"The *Motor Carriers' Road Atlas* is the indispensable routing reference tool for commercial drivers," said Stephen Fletcher, CEO of Rand McNally.

Updated with new routes and critical state safety information, and cross-referenced to Rand McNally's IntelliRoute® TND™ devices, the new edition includes content specifically tailored to the needs of the commercial driver.

The 2015 edition includes:

- Revised state and province maps, including updated mileages in the state mileage guides, and 500 changes to state contacts — such as operating authority officials, emergency police, and vehi-

cle registration.

- A 22-page mileage directory has more than 40,000 city-to-city mileages.

The 2015 edition year also marks the return of the Large Scale *Motor Carriers' Road Atlas* to wide-scale distribution in travel centers.

This version of the atlas features maps that are 37 percent larger than those in the regular *Motor Carriers' Road Atlas*; anti-glare, tear and water resistant pages; and a tough spiral binding for stay-flat pages.

The *Motor Carriers' Road Atlas* is available in paperback format, in a spiral-bound, laminated deluxe version, as well as the large-scale edition.

To learn more, visit Expo Booth No. 816. Or, go to www.randmcnally.com.

Cummins unveils iPhone, iPad service applications

COLUMBUS, Ind. — Cummins has released a service application for Apple iOS devices.

Dubbed QuickServe Online, it offers users mobile access to Cummins' parts options, parts catalogs and engine dataplate info for 15 million Cummins serial numbers, the engine maker says.

It also has a fault code analyzer for Cummins electronic engines, providing specific fault code details and analysis.

The app is free and available in Apple's App store.

To learn more, visit Expo Booth No. 1217. Or, go to www.cummins.com.

MGM releases brake monitor

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — MGM Brakes announced the release of what it calls "advanced vehicle safety technology available for motorcoach applications."

The new MGM onboard electronic brake monitoring system is available for coaches equipped with air disc brakes.

"It is well recognized by industry and safety regulators that air disc brakes are nearly impossible to visually inspect," said MGM.

Couple this with the recent

public concerns over motorcoach vehicle safety, and you have a very strong case for onboard electronic brake monitoring for today's motorcoach operations."

MGM says its patented electronic brake monitoring technology can improve vehicle safety, reduce potential liability and lower operating costs through preventive maintenance benefits.

To learn more, visit Expo Booth No. 421. Or, go to www.mgmbreaks.com.

ZF buying TRW Automotive

FRIEDRICHSHAFEN, Germany — The acquisition of TRW Automotive Holdings Corp. by ZF Friedrichshafen AG is expected to be completed by the middle of 2015.

Under the proposed deal, ZF will acquire all outstanding shares of TRW, based in Livonia, Mich., for roughly \$13.5 billion.

The combined companies will make ZF the second-largest automotive supplier in the world, trail-

ing only Bosch. Sales of the combined companies will be approximately \$41 billion, while employment will total 138,000.

ZF is a major player in driveline and chassis technologies for both passenger and commercial vehicles, while TRW is a significant supplier of active and passive safety technologies, including advanced driver assistance systems.

Visit ZF at Expo Booth No. 1317. Or, go to www.zf.com.

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Booth 437

MCI plans series of events, activities at Expo stand

NEW ORLEANS — At the 2015 UMA Motorcoach Expo stand of Motor Coach Industries, there will be the expected — two brand-new MCI J4500 coaches, along with a spiffy two-door Setra S 417.

In addition, MCI will be offer-

ing education programs, discussions of new and revised customer-oriented programs, drawings, and a busload of German-style fun.

The educational aspects include special, in-booth seminars focusing on total cost of owner-

ship, drivers training and the effect of both on efficient coach operations.

The seminars will be led by David Kestenbaum of eRating.org, the Certification for Sustainable Transportation program at the University of Vermont.

In addition, members of the MCI “customer solutions” team will share details about the coach builder’s new Learning Management System, a comprehensive online technician training program that has been in pilot operation with several customers.

MCI expects to roll out the virtual training program to a larger audience in coming months.

Operators also will have an opportunity to learn how MCI is bringing in house the management of its emergency roadside assistance program. MCI executives will be on hand to talk about that process and other MCI service upgrades.

To make navigating MCI’s products and services more fun, MCI says it will again offer its “Roadmap to Win” guide that encourages operators to get “roadmap” cards stamped at various MCI information stations.

Completed cards will entitle bearers to enter a drawing for a variety of “valuable prizes,” says the company.

The roadmap “will highlight at least six distinct features, including the three coaches on display; service, support and MCI reliability enhancement, and MCI’s total-cost-of-operation advantage,” says the company.

And since Motorcoach Expo “is also about fun, MCI will host a German fest, complete with beer, pretzel and cheeses, in honor of its two years of Setra distribution.”

MCI is at Booth No. 116 on the Expo show floor.

Sys2K celebrates 30th anniversary

ALTAMONTE SPRINGS, Fla. — Sys2K is marking its 30th year in the dealership software industry.

Founded as Systems 2000 in 1984, Sys2K began servicing automotive dealerships with its initial product, an MS-DOS accounting system.

Starting with just one account, a local Ford dealer, Carl Sconnely had his original in-house software team develop the first Sys2K DMS modules to meet dealership needs.

Sys2K says its software was designed with the customer in mind and has revolutionized communication flow within the dealership.

Today, Sys2K says it is a global leader in dealership software solutions and continues to pioneer new technologies and ways to implement them successfully in the business environment.

“With 30 years of building profitable and successful solutions for businesses around the globe under its belt, Sys2K is consistently focused on harnessing tomorrow’s technology for today’s dealerships,” says the company.

To learn more, visit Expo Booth No. 1444. Or, go to www.sys2k.com.



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New coach sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

third quarter and nine months of last year do not include purchases of motorcoach shells by converters. A total of 27 shells were purchased during the third quarter. That was a sharp increase from the first two quarters of 2014.

A total of 22 shells were bought during the first half of last year, with 12 delivered in the second quarter and 10 in the first quarter. Comparable figures for 2013 are not available.

Cummins: Still No. 1

Cummins continued to be the dominant engine in new motorcoaches and buses delivered during the third quarter of last year, going into 187 new models sold by MCI and ABC/Van Hool.

By comparison, 123 Prevost and Volvo coaches were delivered with Volvo engines, which are only available in those brands.

Detroit and Mercedes engines, which are essentially power-plant twins, went into 102 new MCI, Setra or Van Hool coaches.

Cummins' motorcoach-sector share in the third quarter was just over 45 percent, compared to just under 25 percent for Detroit/Mercedes and about 30 percent for Volvo.

Allison remains the dominant transmission.

A total of 394 new coaches and buses were delivered during the third quarter of last year with Allison, compared with 1 ZF and 17 Volvo transmissions. Both the Volvo and ZF are semi-automatic transmissions, while Allison is

fully automatic.

The engine and transmission figures include both 45- and 40-foot models, public and private purchases, plus shells.

The complete dataset for the ABA Foundation coach sales report is expected to be posted on the ABA website at www.buses.org. Click on "ABA Foundation," click on "Research," and scroll down to "Quarterly Motorcoach Sales Data."

Calendar

JANUARY 2015

16-18 IMG Maintenance & Safety Meeting 2015, New Orleans Marriott Hotel. Info: www.imgcoach.com.

18-22 UMA Motorcoach Expo 2015 at Travel Exchange, New Orleans Convention Center. Info: www.motorcoachexpo.com.

18-22 NTA Convention at Travel Exchange, New Orleans Convention Center. Info: www.ntaonline.com/convention.

26-28 2015 Tennessee Motor Coach Association Convention and Marketplace, Franklin Marriott Cool Springs, Franklin, Tenn. Info: (866) 721-8622 or www.tnmca.net.

FEBRUARY 2015

17-18 California Bus Association Maintenance Seminar, ABC Companies, Costa Mesa, Calif. Info: www.cbabus.com.

23-24 South Carolina and North Carolina Motorcoach Assocs. Joint Coach Rodeo, Michelin Laurens Proving Grounds, Mountville, S.C. Info: www.scmotorcoach.org.



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

eration and submit a written petition to add additional routes and/or daily trips upon successful compliance and safe operations during the first 60 days

- Install and use automatic on-board recording devices on all vehicles to record and document driver duty-status information

- Ensure drivers do not exceed the posted speed limit, through training, monitoring and disciplinary action

- Allow heightened monitoring, investigation and review of operations by the FMCSA for a four-year period

"We are in the process of working with federal, state and local authorities to demonstrate that a new page has been turned," said Liang.

"We understand that the bar is high for our company and we are excited to have the opportunity to demonstrate that we can operate in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations."

Costs climb

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

us put approximately \$5,000 per month on the bottom line as compared to April of this year,” said Steve Abegg at Journey Lines in Lynnwood, Wash. “We use about 8,000 gallons of fuel each month and are paying about 70 cents per gallon less.”

Adds Richard Illes of Sun Diego Charter Company in National City, Calif.: “It’s definitely having a positive impact. However, it probably is just a matter of time before clients start asking for a price reduction since our industry is always looking for fuel surcharges.

“Now that the shoe is on the other foot, I am sure there will be a certain expectation.”

At the same time, the bottom-line benefits of lower fuel prices are being offset by other expenses at Vandalia Bus Lines in Caseyville, Ill., said company Vice President Dennis Streif. “I haven’t noticed any change in our profitability.”

Actually, he said, “our profitability is down a little bit. We are buying more equipment than we have in the past. We decided we wanted to upgrade our fleet a little more aggressively in the past two years.”

Streif is not alone.

“The decline in diesel is having a positive effect on costs,” said Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City. But other costs are “up significantly,” he adds.

Motorcoach executives report that costs in some expense categories, like tires and parts, have been rising at manageable rates.

Currently busting budgets, however, are the costs of getting and keeping key employees, especially drivers, and motorcoaches.

Driver shortage

“The past three years our biggest struggle has been with that category — finding and keeping drivers,” said Streif. Vandalia Bus Lines operates 60 coaches.

“We have increased our entry-level pay 20 percent over what it was a year and a half ago just to get people in the door.”

Vandalia also has boosted pension, medical and vacation benefits to make driving more attractive and overcome the job’s drawbacks, he said.

“Getting people into a CDL, the sleep apnea requirements, the inconsistent working hours and working weekends seems to be deterrents to people. The varying hours make it a struggle for sleep patterns as well as family patterns.”

Streif’s lament was echoed by others.

“The ability to hire new drivers is increasingly difficult,” said Tim Stout of Stout’s Transportation in Trenton, N.J. “Our driver pool continues to grow older. Young applicants are not able to travel due to family commitments. The responsibility of transporting an expensive piece of equipment with passengers is a concern.

“Driver wages in our industry are well under what they are worth. Unfortunately, due to the increased expenses we are all facing, and the pinch from companies that are not increasing their pricing, it is increasingly challenging to increase driver’s pay,” he said.

Nonetheless, Stout’s has increased its daily and overnight pay for drivers, he noted. “We needed to increase our starting rate to try and influence new applicants into coming in the door.”

But who will drive ‘em?

Adds Cantrell of Daniel’s Charters: “We can buy as many buses as we want, but there is no use buying them without drivers.

“In this industry there are no extra drivers. We have to work on attracting younger people with things like a 401(k) and a benefits package and put them on salary to get the younger person in this business to stay.”

Northeast Trailways/Charter, which runs 23 coaches, has instituted driver pay incentives based on individual performance and company profitability, said owner Riccio.

“We took a look at that a couple of years ago. We take a look at the big picture at year end. Most drivers got a 3 percent raise last year.”

Pay enhancements also have been necessary at Red Carpet Charters, said Polzien. “It is harder to hire drivers now than any time in my 29 years here.”

Adds Abegg of Journey Lines in Washington: “We have problems hiring drivers that have the right personality and are a good fit for the driving positions we have. We have many applicants but few have the experience, physical appearance, youth and health that we look for. We usually find one person for every 10 applicants.”

Looking elsewhere

Northeast Trailways/Charter ran a busy summer schedule using school bus drivers off during the school break.

“In the fall we struggle with drivers. We think this fall has been busier than in years past. We were pulling safety directors and myself out of the office to drive vehicles,” said Riccio.

Motorcoach operators must now recruit and train their own drivers, notes Roxanne Gillis of



Sun Diego Charter Owner Richard Illes expects customers to ask for lower charter rates.



Richard Illes



Dennis Streif



Jeff Polzien



Tim Stout



Roxanne Gillis

Northwest Navigator in Portland, Ore. “The days of hiring trained drivers are gone. Everyone is going to have to produce their own.

“We had to turn away quite a few charters this past summer because we had the vehicles but didn’t have the drivers,” she said. “I never had that problem until (last) year.”

Northwest Navigator has advanced wages for new drivers by two to three dollars an hour, more quickly reaching scales paid to drivers with more time at the company, she said. “We have increased all wages. And we pay overtime. We don’t have to, but we do.”

Mechanics, too

“It’s getting harder and harder to find qualified individuals in our industry and when you do the salary expectations are much higher,” said Illes.

Looking for drivers? “Qualified mechanics are even harder to find,” he said.

“A good diesel mechanic is worth his weight in gold and you have to pay them the going rate,” adds Cantrell.

Stout pointed out the increasing demands placed on the motorcoach mechanic.

“Skilled maintenance technicians are becoming much harder to find also because of the increased technology on coaches.”

New skills

Information technology and marketing skills are becoming ad-

ditional necessities for a successful transportation business.

“The need for an (information technology professional) full-time on staff is increasing because of the innovation and marketing that we are all being forced to do in our industry,” said Stout. “This is an added cost whether we outsource or hire someone. We all should be considering this in pricing our trips moving forward.”

“(Informational technology) is going to be a big part of the motorcoach company,” said Cantrell. “There is so much electronics, computers and social media, you have to have a full-time IT person or a part-time person who is available when you need them.”

Marketing is another important expense, he said. “Several years ago the bus industry just waited for the telephone to ring to get a call-in order. It has changed. You have got to have sales people with the ability to make contacts and the sale. With that comes more sales and revenue.

“You have to pay for those people also. You can’t take a housewife and ask her to answer the phone.”

Northwest Navigator has increased its salaries for skilled positions. “To get the qualified people we need we are paying more,” said Gillis. “But we also are being very clear about their job descriptions and doing regular reviews to make sure they are worthy of what they are being paid.”

Her company has added two

positions to enhance regulatory compliance, Gillis said. “We have added a safety trainer — a full-time driver who leads safety. I also have added a position that does dispatch, operations and compliance because I believe those three all work together.”

The two employees track every driver log and piece of paper associated with regulatory compliance, Gillis explained. “Compliance is costing the motorcoach carriers who do it a lot more money.”

Expensive new wheels

New coaches are costing bigger money, largely due to increased content.

Some operators who feel the need to offer newer equipment are trying to handle the upgrade by buying newer-but-used coaches. Those are becoming more expensive, too, company executives report.

“The prices of new coaches have gone up significantly. They are fabulous vehicles, but for a small operator it is tough to justify that amount of money sometimes,” said Riccio. “We’re not the kind of company that can do a lot of that. We are better off buying decent pre-owned coaches.”

Riccio believes many carriers are trying to make do with coach refurbishments to delay purchases. “I have some older coaches that are in really good shape,” said the Maine-based operator.

Since he is located in the eastern

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Costs climb

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

end of America's salt belt, the feasibility of a refurbishment is often determined by metal decay. "We see a lot of salt in the Northeast. We have to ask ourselves, 'How is the undercarriage?'"

Cantrell said he spent an additional \$38,000 to \$40,000 per coach on recent purchases to comply with current or anticipated regulations.

"I attribute that to what I call 'government relations,'" he said. "We ordered a different engine that costs \$10,000 or \$12,000 more and now we put in seatbelts, fire suppression systems and tire monitoring. All of these are things the government is going to tell you you have to have, so you are afraid to buy a coach without them and have to install them later."

Motorcoach purchases planned by Northwest Navigator for 2015 are somewhat more costly because the carrier is ordering them with wheelchair lifts or with the basic structure for future lift installation, Gillis said.

"The increasing cost of equipment has forced some operators who used to buy on a more regular basis to invest in their current equipment to extend the life of those vehicles," said Stout. The newer engines do offer some payback, he said. "We have seen a significant savings with the miles per gallon on the new engines."

At Journey Lines in Washington, Abegg said his company has "not purchased any new coaches, but we have purchased five used coaches in the past six months. They (were) priced higher than we paid in the past because we are buying newer used coaches to meet the demand for newer equipment."

Health coverage costs

Employee medical coverage has been a major hurdle for some operators, while others have seen those costs moving in pace with other expenses.

Stout expects medical benefit costs to increase 7 percent at Stout's Transportation in New Jersey, while Streif, in Illinois, said "healthcare costs have not affected us drastically."

Polzien, however, said the federal Affordable Care Act brought Red Carpet a 36 percent increase in premiums, along with high co-pays and deductibles.

"Healthcare is going to be the kicker that has a lot of expense tied to it," said Riccio. "Obamacare is what it is, and it is going to be a major problem for the industry. I don't know the specifics, but I know it is going to be expensive."

Illes of Southern California agrees: "The rising cost of healthcare certainly takes a big bite out of the bottom line."

Gillis is expecting the Affordable Care Act to hit her company next year. "We have experienced some great growth this year and we are getting very close to being large enough that it will be mandatory."

A healthcare plan may have an indirect benefit, she said. "Supposedly you can draw more drivers if you offer it."

What's ahead?

Even with other expenses rising, pocketing extra change at the fuel pump obviously is better than shelling out more dollars there.

"In the Northeast we have been busier than ever," Riccio said. "People are traveling much more by motorcoach. It is not just the traditional tours, it also is specialty travel and events. The colleges are always doing things. We have had more people using charter coaches and school buses for weddings."

The motorcoach industry is "being pushed from both directions," Gillis said. While the industry faces its own challenges, "We are being pushed by what people can afford to pay. Our customers are under a budget, too."

But, she says, her business is up to 17 coaches and growing.

"We could have grown a lot faster if I had six more drivers. We had to give a lot of runs away because we didn't have drivers."

She was interviewed on a Fri-

day afternoon and facing two trips the following Wednesday that, at that point, did not have drivers.

"Early in the week our yard is full of buses," Cantrell said. "For Thursday, Friday and Saturday we are probably turning down 20 percent of our requests."

Notes Abegg: "We have operated this business since 2012 and are having the best year we ever had. We have been able to increase prices and improve the bottom line."



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Kentucky scan

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Buses checked, too

However, “buses and motorcoaches are required to pull into open weigh stations,” notes Lisa Tolliver, a spokeswoman for the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. “KATS attempts to screen every vehicle that comes into the weigh station.”

The screening system was developed by the Kentucky Department of Vehicle Regulation, the Kentucky

State Police Commercial Vehicle Enforcement division and the Kentucky Transportation Center at the University of Kentucky.

It was funded with grants from the Performance and Registration Information Systems Management (PRISM) program of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

In late October, the project was named the 2014 Project of the Year by the Intelligent Transportation Society of the Midwest.

“With limited staffing available

at the weigh stations, it is difficult to inspect more than this small percentage... Identifying the right trucks for inspection can lead to fewer unsafe trucks on the roadways and increased revenue for Kentucky as uncompliant motor carriers are forced to pay required fees and taxes.”

When a vehicle enters the automated system, scanners seek numbers from the license plate, USDOT identification, and the Kentucky Usage license as it crosses over the ramp weigh-in-motion scale and

sorting system.

Database checks

“The record is checked against Kentucky’s Commercial Vehicle Information Exchange Window, which houses data from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Safety and Fitness Electronic Records (SAFER) system, and several state systems,” explains the newsletter.

“Most checks occur on the motor carrier level but, when data is available, some checks occur at the vehi-

cle level (i.e., registration, prorate, and registered weight) as well.”

The system can run 16 tests on each vehicle, including credentials and liability insurance, registration, Kentucky Usage tax status, registered weight and indicators of carrier safety — federal out-of-service orders and out-of-service percentages for drivers, vehicles and hazmat.

Colored signal lights on the ramp tell inspectors which vehicles should pass through and which should be directed to the inspection line.

“Research has shown that inspections initiated from KATS tend to have more violations and are also more likely to result in increased revenue for Kentucky. In a blitz conducted with (the Kentucky State Police Commercial Vehicle Enforcement division) in the summer of 2013, nearly 91 percent of vehicles identified by KATS for inspection had one or more violations.

“This is significantly higher than what was seen on a national level in 2013 when only about 60 percent of all inspections had at least one violation,” according to the newsletter.

“The blitz also resulted in a 42 percent driver out-of-service rate for motor carriers with a high (driver out-of-service rate) in their history. The national (driver out-of-service) rate for all inspections is 5 percent.

“KATS also automatically identifies motor carriers that are under a federal out-of-service order, which indicates a significant safety concern by FMCSA. The impacts on revenue are even more drastic.

Six-fold revenue jump

“At one facility, revenue collected prior to the installation of KATS was \$15,990 for a six-month period. After the system was installed, revenue increased to \$95,994 for a six-month period.”

The system has been installed at seven Kentucky weigh stations, according to Tolliver.

They are on Interstate 71 southbound in Boone County; I-75 northbound and southbound in Laurel County; I-75 northbound in Scott County; I-64 eastbound in Shelby County; I-75 southbound in Kenton County, and I-65 northbound in Simpson County.

The system also was scheduled to arrive this month at the eastbound and westbound stations on I-24 in Lyon County.

The newsletter states Kentucky is making its system available to other states.

A research report published in 2013 by the University of Kentucky Transportation Center said: “The results demonstrate the system’s most basic benefit...efficient identification of those carriers and vehicles most likely to have safety and compliance problems. Ultimately, the system provides tangible benefits to every stakeholder in the truck screening process.”



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Prevost

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Prevost a wedge in the public transit market long dominated by Motor Coach Industries.

“The New York plant is a turning point for Prevost,” says Power. “Time and time again we have been approached by transit agencies asking us for an alternative in the market. We obviously are looking to grow our business and the fit was very good. We had a golden opportunity and the market was ready for change and new solutions.”

The then-planned New York plant was cited by the Metropolitan Transit Authority of New York City in 2010 when it announced the purchase of 90 Prevost X3-45s to serve Staten Island express routes. The new coaches were priced at \$549,568 each, the *Staten Island Advance* reported, then about \$15,000 less than a comparable MCI.

The X3s targeted for public transit systems will have no difficulty meeting federal Buy America requirements with the Volvo engines assembled in Maryland. In 2012, Volvo announced it also would assemble the I-Shift transmission at Hagerstown, Md.

Product pipeline

When the Volvo 9700 was introduced a half-dozen years ago at UMA Motorcoach Expo 2009 in Orlando, it was the first new Volvo bus introduced to North America in 20 years. It will continue to be one of the brand's flagships for the foreseeable future.

“The 9700 has done quite well,” Power said. “We have focused on the reliability and the

quality of that vehicle and the comments from our customer base are very positive.

“The engine has been performing well. It has a dedicated powertrain with the I-Shift transmission and engine which are built to work together. The fuel economy has been positive also.”

Prevost and Volvo do not have a new model on the motorcoach horizon, Power said. “Right now we continue to focus on our existing product lines. For us, it is always trying to improve quality and reliability. We aren't developing new models but we have got a new commuter product. It itself is a new model on the well-known and well-developed platform, the X3-45.”

I-Shift transmission and the PRIME energy management system have enhanced the Prevost and Volvo platforms, Power said.

I-Shift is a 12-speed, automated manual transmission designed to maximize passenger comfort, safety and fuel efficiency. PRIME is the acronym for “power recovery by intelligent management of energy.”

“PRIME is one of the main products we are bringing to the market to improve fuel economy,” Power said. “It uses the alternator and batteries to collect free energy. It is a great system, particularly when you have mixed hilly and flat terrain. When there is that free roll coming down a hill, it takes off the throttle and uses the roll to charge the batteries. We have seen 2 percent and higher improvements in fuel economy using this system.”

Other upgrades to the 9700 will be announced at this month's 2015 Motorcoach Expo in New Orleans, he added.

Although Greyhound has been a steady buyer of X3-45 coaches for intercity service, Prevost expects the public transit sector to be the primary market for that platform and a significant contributor to the company's future.

“We have a great focus now on the public sector,” said Power. “We are very well implemented in the private-sector motorcoach segment. We also have a great conversion business, which is very important to us and has brought a lot of benefit to our product lines because of the high expectations it brings in quality, performance and overall pure design,” he said.

Meeting competition

Van Hool plans to introduce a 35-foot model to North America.

Turkey-based Temsa, a major player in Europe, is making a mark in the U.S., offering motorcoaches in three sizes, the TS-30, TS-35 and TS-45.

“The TS-45 (introduced last year) is aimed at our (Volvo) bus, but to tell the truth we really haven't seen much in the market so far,” said Power.

“It has been very limited as an entrant. When we compare the design, the interior and the brand name, there is much more value in the (Volvo) 9700. Temsa did a good job in focusing on the 35-foot market, but I don't think the 45-foot market will be as appreciative of the product.

“All the support that is backed by the Prevost service network is another big factor, being able to count on all the tools and service and support that are synonymous with the Prevost brand. That has quite a value also.”

Service and parts are brand builders for Prevost.

During 2014, the company instituted around-the-clock service, from Monday through Saturday, at its center in St. Nicolas, Quebec. The parts warehouse in Richmond, British Columbia, was enlarged. The Houston service center is being relocated to a new and larger facility. In December, Prevost put a second mobile service truck on the road in the Montreal area.

“Supporting our customers has always been one of our priorities and I think that is one of our differentiators,” said Power. “Our customers appreciate that we are there to support them for the long run, contrary to several competitors that are down-sizing and having to reevaluate their expenditures.

“We have an industry-leading amount of service centers at 10 right now. We have expanded service centers in Houston and Toronto, key places where we are seeing



Prevost continues to win orders from Greyhound for X3-45 models.

customer needs growing. We have over 150 service providers that we deal with today. We now have 34 service trucks on the road in different markets. Again that is industry-leading,” he said.

“Motorcoaches today go everywhere. That is the differentiator from other modes of transportation. We go into the smallest rural parts of the country. Our customers need that support. That is an added value that can be priceless.”

Applying value

“We have put a lot of emphasis on (smart-phone and tablet) applications because we think those things are very important for our customer base,” Power said.

The Prevost service app provides warranty information, technical publications, e-commerce systems and service contacts

“We have an application for our service centers. A driver who is in the middle of nowhere can use our service application to locate the nearest service center for the powertrain or complete coach, get the directions to the service center and press a button to call the center directly,” Power said.

“Other applications assist customers in evaluating the fuel-efficiency ramifications of various equipment options and calculating life-cycle costs for coaches,” he said. “We have some really interesting plans going forward for more applications to help our customer base.”

The company's AWARE collision avoidance system utilizes a radar transmitter and receiver to maintain safe following distances, warn of fixed objects or possible impacts and assist in adaptive use of the cruise control. This system also provides some fuel efficiency benefits by expanding possible usage situations for cruise control, Power said.

Industry applications

Prevost realizes that one of the issues facing all motorcoach operators — shortage of skilled professionals — also is limiting its growth.

“We do continuous surveys

and focus groups of our customer base to understand exactly their needs. One thing that is resounding that we always hear about is the driver and mechanic shortage,” Power said. “We have had customers tell us they would buy more vehicles but they don't have enough drivers to operate them.”

At UMA Motorcoach Expo 2014 in Los Angeles, Prevost announced it was making a major commitment to UMA's online Bus and Motorcoach Academy, adding the Prevost Preparatory School, which helps drivers learn industry rules and regulations.

“Prevost Prep,” as it is called, readies drivers for the commercial driver's license written exam and reviews the rules and regulations of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. The prep school also provides driver training for insurance renewals.

Prevost has committed 10 years of support to expand the curriculum, update courses and provide scholarships.

When Prevost Prep was inaugurated last February, the company donated \$10,000 to cover \$200 of tuition costs for the first 50 individuals who registered for the spring semester.

“We saw this as a way to channel our efforts to recruit, train and retain drivers,” Power said. “Joining the Bus and Motorcoach Academy was a great fit for us.”

Prevost also has joined the “Hire Heroes USA” program to assist motorcoach operators in recruiting drivers and maintenance personnel from the ranks of military veterans.

“Through Hire Heroes we found a channel to bring some fabulous people into the industry,” Power said. “Hire Heroes has built a national reputation for excellence in helping unemployed veterans find jobs. We thought it would be great for the industry and for the drivers and mechanics.

“We think that by having a best-partnership approach with our customers, we help them do better business,” he said. “By helping them do better business, it helps us.”

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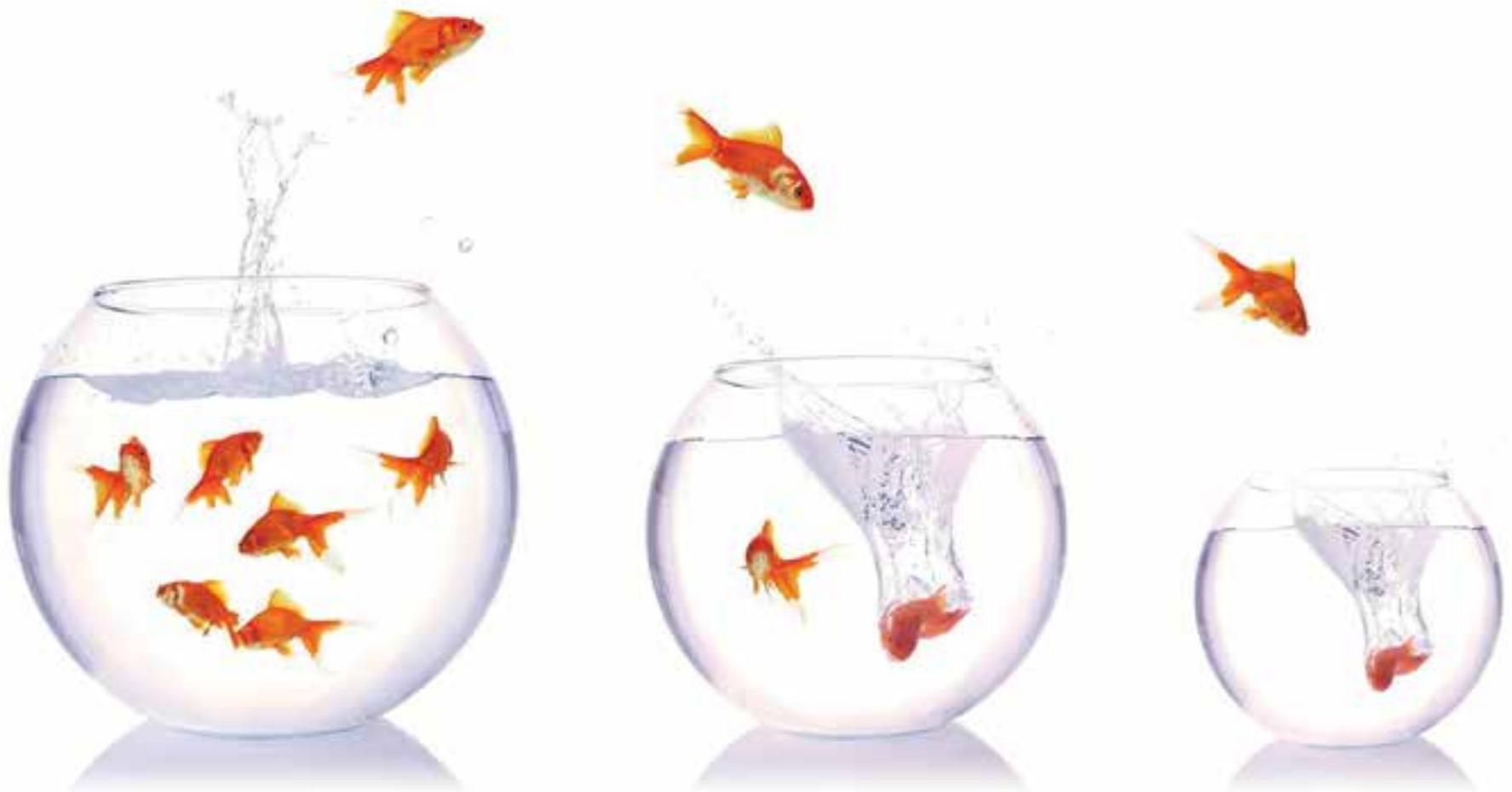


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