

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

February 2015

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Political/regulatory issues add air of urgency to Expo

NEW ORLEANS — UMA Motorcoach Expo 2015, as in past years, featured new buses and equipment, topical education sessions and valuable networking opportunities — along with revamped and revived events presented in a festive Mardi Gras atmosphere.

The Big Easy was a big hit, with the New Orleans setting helping boost attendance 20 percent above last year's Expo in Los Angeles.

But this year there was an added element, a sense of urgency surrounding the UMA political agenda as the new Republican-led Congress is poised to consider a host of issues that are critical to the success of the private motorcoach industry.

Throughout the five-day Expo, UMA President and CEO Victor Parra and other association leaders repeatedly urged members to become more engaged in helping push the industry agenda, both through lobbying efforts and contributions to the UMA Motorcoach Travel PAC.

They also stressed the importance of participating in this year's UMA Capitol Hill Days, during which coach company executives will meet with their congressional representatives to discuss the industry's most pressing legislative and regulatory issues.

Capitol Hill Days this year has been moved up to March 17-18 because the current federal highway and public transportation law expires in May, and House and Senate committees already are working on new legislation.

Hearings on the legislation began late last month.

"One of our primary objectives going into Expo was to get more motorcoach operators engaged in the political process," Parra said.

"The change in Congress, with Republicans gaining control of the Senate as well as (retaining control

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UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION

MOTORCOACH EXPO 2015



Motorcoach Expo...Mardi Gras Style. Terri Marin, left, of Trailways Transportation gets caught up in the excitement of visiting Mardi Gras World, along with more than

2,500 UMA and NTA members, and her colleague, Diane Walden, right. The Expo show floor, below, reflected the 20 percent increase in attendance this year.



Inconsistency of inspections is lambasted

NEW ORLEANS — One of life's early lessons is that it can be unfair.

Top federal safety regulators got a glimpse, during a featured session at UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month, at just how unfair life can be for private motorcoach operators.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration dispatched its safety enforcement leadership to Expo for a "listening session" because — two-and-a-half years ago — Congress directed the agency to investigate whether a passenger carrier inspection program should be established in every state.

"New Jersey (already) is highly inspected," Michelle Petelicki of Panorama Tours in Clifton, N.J., told the panel of federal officials.

"My buses can be inspected and two days later be inspected again. I have a fleet of eight buses and I have had 137 roadides in the last 24 months," she calmly related. Most of those attending the session gasped.

"That is a broken system," said Peter Shelbo, who followed her to the microphone. "She is over-regulated, over-inspected. I am in an area of the country where nobody comes to see me."

Shelbo, owner of Tour West America in Phoenix, said safety-conscious carriers do not warrant the constant inspections they must undergo.

"Most of us in this room do a good job of inspecting ourselves. Don't make it messier than it needs to be.

"We appreciate what you do for us," he told the federal officials.

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UMA Capitol Hill Days will focus on pressing issues

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — On March 17-18, the United Motorcoach Association will host one of its most important annual activities — UMA Capitol Hill Days.

And the association has issued an urgent appeal to members to participate.

The basis of the urgency is the fast-approaching expiration of the current federal highway and public transportation law, and early action by Congress to develop the measure that will replace it.

But Congress' efforts to craft a new highway bill won't be the only critical issue to be addressed during

this year's Capitol Hill Days.

There's also the controversial proposal to significantly boost the liability insurance minimum required of motorcoach operators, and efforts to strip away charter bus service protections, opening the door for more charter work by predatory public transit agencies.

UMA is seeking owners and senior managers of bus and motorcoach companies from across the U.S. to participate in the lobbying event, during which coach company executives meet with their congressional representatives to discuss the industry's key legislative

and regulatory issues.

Typically, UMA Capitol Hill Days is in June, but it has been moved to March this year so UMA members can lobby their representatives about the highway bill before the House and Senate begin taking action on the measure.

UMA Capitol Hill Days begins at 2 p.m. Tuesday, March 17, with a legislative briefing for attendees and guidelines on conducting meetings with congressional members and staff. A group dinner will be that evening.

The next day, attendees will hold prescheduled appointments

with their representatives and senators, often teaming up with other UMA members for joint appointments. A reception and debriefing session will be after the appointments so attendees can share their experiences and highlights of their meetings.

"These Hill visits by operators themselves are critical for the motorcoach industry and have been moved up to the March timeframe to ensure our message is heard before voting begins on the surface transportation bill set to expire May 31," said UMA Chairman Brian Annett of Annett Bus Lines in Se-

bring, Fla.

"We need our lawmakers to hear from us directly, in person, on how our industry — and our own businesses — are impacted by their lawmaking. With so much at stake, this is the time to get involved."

Other issues of importance to UMA members include:

- A proposal by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to double or quintuple the insurance minimum for operators
- Preservation of charter bus protections
- A return to zero of the federal

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Fundraising successes chalked up by Marketing Council

The Motorcoach Marketing Council is celebrating the success of its fundraising efforts at both the United Motorcoach Association Motorcoach Expo and American Bus Association Marketplace last month.

The high point was the live auction of a 2015 TS-35 motorcoach donated by CH Bus Sales of Faribault, Minn. The auction occurred during the Sneak Preview Party on the exhibit floor of UMA

Motorcoach Expo.

The winning bidder — at \$350,000 — was Stouts Transportation of Ewing, N.J.

"This has been an excellent year for the Motorcoach Marketing Council," said council Chairman Peter Shelbo of Tour West America in Phoenix.

"We have been to a number of events around the country, meeting operators and listening to their marketing needs. We have worked

hard to develop a multitude of campaigns designed to help them succeed at their marketing efforts," Shelbo added.

The council held its first Motorcoach Mardi Gras during Motorcoach Expo, with Shelbo calling the funding-raising event "a resounding success."

Additionally, the council conducted a live and silent auction during Expo. Roughly \$26,000 was raised by the events.

"We are confident we will be able to continue developing more marketing tools for operators that are simple to use, creative and professional," said Shelbo.

More than 250 \$25 tickets were sold to the Motorcoach Mardi Gras.

"Everyone had a terrific time and the staff at Razzoo Bar (a New Orleans nightspot on Bourbon Street) was great," said fundraiser coordinator Mike Costa of A Yan-

kee Line in Boston. "We hope to continue the tradition next year in Atlanta."

The council reports that many operators continue to sign up for its Marketing Toolbox, as well as its new, free social media library.

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Peter Shelbo

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THE DOCKET

Losing operating authority: You don't want to go there

ST. LOUIS — Two top Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration officials traveled to the American Bus Association annual Marketplace here last month to make the case that increased federal enforcement activities are not a quota-driven “gotcha game.”

They also stressed that “out of service” is not a place you want to visit.

“We were having a good meeting with some of your ABA board members earlier this year and there was sort of a sense like, ‘Hey, have things gone too far? What is going on out there?’” said Annie Collins, associate administrator for field operations at the FMCSA.

She may not have realized it,

but there was a great deal of irony in Collins’ comment. No other entity in the motorcoach industry has pushed federal bureaucrats harder to pursue a super aggressive enforcement program than the ABA.

Collins spoke to an audience of about two dozen people during a Marketplace session.

“It is not a gotcha game,” she asserted. That’s not it at all.”

Timothy A. Cotter, an FMCSA division administrator, added: “I have been with the agency over 20 years and never throughout that time period have I ever been asked as a supervisor or division administrator, ‘How many companies are we shutting down this year?’”

“It is always going back to how many crashes we are reducing,

‘Like it or not, every time there is a fatal bus crash it forces the bar even higher.’

how many fatalities we are bringing down. That is our measurement out there.”

The authority to order a carrier out of service is a tool “we do have to have,” he added.

The Collins and Cotter presentation at Marketplace was titled, “You’re Out of Service, Now What?”

“The real thrust of the presentation is to say it is not good — so don’t get there,” Collins said.

“It is not a place you want to be, so we want to work with you up front, and have you invest in safety first so you can avoid these consequences.”

Crash catalysts

Collins said the FMCSA came under increased Congressional pressure to bolster safety enforcement as a result of a series of high-profile motorcoach crashes about four years ago.

On March 12, 2011, a speeding World Wide Travel motorcoach struck a guard rail on Interstate 95 in New York, flipping on its side, skidding 500 feet, and hitting two signposts that ripped off most of the top of the vehicle. The crash killed 15 passengers and in-

jured 18.

On May 31, 2011, a Sky Express motorcoach struck a cable barrier on I-95 near Doswell, Va., overturning onto its roof. That crash killed four passengers, caused serious injuries to 14 more, and minor injuries to 35.

“Like it or not, every time there is a fatal bus crash it forces the bar even higher,” Collins said. She noted that the commercial airline industry recently went four years without a fatality.

“There are just as many people traveling by bus as there are flying...we want to keep moving towards that level of intensity.”

After the 2011 crashes, she said, a National Transportation Safety Board report “was pretty critical of the agency (FMCSA) not being tough enough, not getting there before crashes, not being able to spot trouble before it comes, and not preventing fatalities. We take that very much to heart.

“I personally cried when I read the report because of the idea that there is something we could do that we didn’t do — it was heart-breaking. We have got to do better.”

She blamed the complexity of federal safety regulations in part on operators who are not trustworthy — that is, companies that are deliberately noncompliant.

“The system is always built on the honest guy and then somebody is dishonest and we have to continue to close off the loopholes that have been exploited,” she said.

The enforcement emphasis on registration is needed to keep bad operators off the road, she said.

“There is a real crackdown on the chameleon carriers and the incarnated carriers. It is not okay for the bad guys to hide behind multiple registrations, multiple numbers, multiple identities, mere shifts of accountability.”

Quota myth

“A comment I have heard, and I think it has become one of those urban legend kind of things, is that apparently an investigator went in and said, ‘I am not leaving until I find something,’” Collins said.

Feds keep 50 percent random drug testing rate

WASHINGTON — Federal regulators say motorcoach and trucking companies will have to continue random drug testing of half their drivers this year.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration said its decision to maintain the current 50-percent testing rate was based on data from motor carrier industry

lab results, the 2012 drug and alcohol testing survey, and additional investigations.

Data from those sources indicated positive drug tests have increased among motor carrier drivers.

The investigations found that positive test rates, following an initial positive result, increased by

4.1 percent from 2011 to 2012. Reasonable suspicion positive test rates had a five-fold increase from 2010 to 2012.

The rate of total positive drug test results reported to the U.S. Department of Transportation from independent Health and Human Services-certified laboratories increased from 95,427 positives in

2011 to 97,332 positives in 2012.

FMCSA-regulated industries make up about 80 percent of those reported tests.

In addition, serious controlled-substance and alcohol-testing violations were identified in 24 percent of recent compliance investigations, and a two-week

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FMCSA study reignites controversy over assessing crash fault

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has reignited a long-simmering controversy over how the agency accounts for fault in commercial vehicle crashes recorded in its Compliance, Safety, Accountability safety measurement system.

In an analysis of the issue released by the agency in January, the FMCSA concluded that the difficulty, plus a cost of as much as \$11 million to include crash fault in the CSA system, appears to outweigh the benefits.

It also noted that police accident reports probably don't provide enough information to support determinations of fault.

The FMCSA includes crash information about bus and truck operators in its CSA system even though it does not distinguish or assign fault.

In other words, bus and truck crash data finds its way into the system even though the owner of

the commercial vehicle and its driver may be completely blameless for the incident.

The agency includes the data because the FMCSA and some safety experts contend that past crashes are a strong indicator of future crash risk — no matter who was at fault.

Now, the FMCSA is saying it can't assign blame for crashes because it would be too expensive and difficult to do so.

Many commercial motor carriers and their trade groups strongly disagree, arguing it is wrong to include non-fault crashes in a system that is supposed to be measuring safety performance.

Critics contend that drivers and carriers can be punished even if someone else caused the accident that contributed to a bad CSA score. (See Oct. 1 and March 1, 2013, issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Among the long-awaited FMCSA study conclusions:

'Critics contend drivers and carriers can be punished even if someone else caused the accident that contributed to a bad CSA score.'

- Incorporating fault does not consistently improve CSA's ability to predict crash risk

- The cost of a system that gives the public a chance to weigh in on crash fault determinations would be at least four times greater than the cost of the initial review of the police accident reports

- Police accident reports probably don't provide enough information to support determination of fault

The FMCSA study examined police accident reports obtained from two national datasets: the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Fatality Analysis Reporting System and the National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey. Various statistical and analytical approaches were employed to assess crash-weighting benefits, including an analysis of motor carriers involved in single-vehicle fatal crashes over time.

The study found that changing the crash weights based on a motor carrier's role in the crash did not appear to improve the ability to predict future crash rates when all crashes are considered.

There also was concern about the reliability of using police accident reports to make this determination.

The study pointed out that implementing a crash weighting effort on a national scale would require a method for uniformly acquiring

final police accident reports, a process and system for uniform analysis, and a method for receiving and analyzing public input.

It is estimated that the annual costs for operating a system to process police accident reports, including the acceptance of public input and reviewing appeals, would be between \$3.9 million and \$11.2 million.

It also could take as long as two years from the initial report to completion of an appeal process, the report said.

The FMCSA said the conclusions reached in the report would be used in making a final decision on the issue, but added that it may have to conduct further analysis before such a decision is made.

The agency has invited the public to review the full report and provide feedback. To learn more and weigh in, go to www.fmcsa.dot.gov/mission/policy/crash-weighting-analysis-report-congress.

Operating authority

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"If that happens, please let me know because I am happy to adjust the dialogue that my investigator has with that approach."

She said it is more likely that such an investigator knew the carrier had safety problems and was intent on identifying them and the causes.

"What they are saying is, 'I have evidence in the form of these citations, bad inspections, violations, and I am going to try and help you understand the root cause for that so it doesn't continue to happen."

"Because, if it continues to happen, you are going to lose your business. You are going to be out of service. And hopefully you are not going to kill somebody on the road, especially your driver."

Quick Strike surprise

The results of "Operation Quick Strike," a high-visibility FMCSA mobilization of safety enforcement investigators in 2013, were "alarming," according to Collins.

During the eight-month, stepped-up enforcement action that focused exclusively on the motorcoach industry, the FMCSA conducted 214 "top-to-bottom" compliance investigations and shut down 52 companies. More than 1,300 vehicles were inspected and 340 were ordered out of service.

"There were a number of

maintenance issues going on," she said. "Folks were not using qualified repair personnel. We would go into shops that didn't even have the tools to do any support of vehicle repairs.

"We found recalls not being honored, sometimes very serious safety recalls. We found cracked frames in buses, lots of out-of-service conditions that are of concern, especially as the fleet ages.

"We found carriers that schedule trips that cannot be done within the hours of service. That is a pretty significant base problem — you are telling your drivers to violate the hours of service or speed," she said.

"We were finding other situations where driver log books are not collected, not monitored. Where there is a gap in the safety process is where you see the breakdown in the operation, which is where you see bad results."

Complicated rules

Collins acknowledged that FMCSA safety inspections in the past were overly focused on paperwork.

"I think these rules are complicated. They are hard to know. Folks need to know them...but I think the whole process had gotten out of whack and become very paper-heavy and less really talking about the underpinnings of safety," she said.

"The investigation (process) is now turned on its head so it is 'look safety, think safety, prove safety first.'"

'The investigation (process) is now turned on its head so it is look safety, think safety, prove safety first.'

Nonetheless, she said, problems with safety records generally result from poor safety practices. "The thing we really try to focus on is called the breakdown of safety procedures. What is it about the way the company is structured, operated, run, that generated these results?"

The issues

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration statistics show that four of the top five problems leading to unsatisfactory motorcoach safety ratings are related to hours-of-service compliance and record-keeping, Cotter said.

"If I am an investigator and I know that in motorcoach companies there is significant non-compliance in hours of service, that's an area I am going to focus on."

A carrier given an unsatisfactory safety rating has a lot of work to do to avoid being shut down and just 45 days to do it, Cotter said. The FMCSA will expect a detailed safety management plan thoroughly addressing all issues identified by investigators.

"It is not so much the quantity we are looking at as the quality of it," he said. "Sometimes compa-

nies will bombard us with a whole lot of paperwork thinking that is going to be sufficient. We are looking at you to explain what broke down in your process and now what is going to be your corrective action."

The submitted plan must prove a thorough grasp of needed improvements and actual intent to improve, he added. "If you do not address all the areas, we are not going to upgrade your rating. You can't be partial and say it is pretty good enough. Don't indicate what you will or might do — we want to see what you will be doing but also what you have done."

Carriers that fail to recover from the threat of an "unsatisfactory" rating and end up losing their right to operate will face a much bigger problem — proving that they are "fit, willing and able" to earn back operating authority.

"You think the hoops to jump through an 'unsat' rating are high, wait 'til you see what it is for willing and able," Cotter said.

The "fit, willing and able" screening will review the carrier's safety history for the past six years and determine if it has a history of safety violations, enforcement actions and unpaid enforcement fines, he said.

"It is a long process, folks. If you think 45 days is long, you are talking weeks on weeks for us to be able to go through this process.

"There are a lot of companies we have to look at. We take them as they come in. If there are 10 before you, those are the ones we

will be working on and then they will get to yours. You don't want to fall into this boat."

They're coming

Congress has upped its expectations of the FMCSA by mandating that every motorcoach company receive an inspection and safety rating every three years, Collins said. "That means our scarce resources have to get to everybody."

The administration will continue to focus on carriers whose poor safety data indicators put them on the radar, but "a new minimum level of investigation has been established for everybody to be seen every three years," she said. "That is in our performance standards for the agency. The agency did not grow at the time the requirements grew. That is the current work load and the current mandate."

An audience member asked about the agency's urgency to upgrade a carrier's "conditional" safety rating after it has recovered from the threat of "unsatisfactory," noting the importance of a satisfactory rating to the company's reputation.

"That is a very good point," Collins said. "We go back to the point of the earlier question...it is all coming out of the same work force. It is something we take seriously but it is not as urgent of a priority.

"Again, it is another reason to stay ahead of the curve and avoid getting into that conditional situation."

FMCSA issues sleep apnea guidelines after congressional criticism

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration quietly posted a bulletin last month telling medical examiners that if they suspect a commercial vehicle driver may have sleep apnea, the driver should be sent to a sleep specialist for evaluation, not tested by the examiner.

The FMCSA didn't publically announce it had posted the bulletin on its National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners website.

The bulletin stems from criticism by Rep. Larry Bucshon, R-Ind., and Rep. Daniel Lipinski, D-Ill., who sent a letter to the FMCSA last year asserting that some organizations that train certified medical examiners were skirting federal law by telling examiners to test over-the-road bus and truck drivers for sleep apnea.

Drivers are required to obtain their physicals and medical cards from a certified examiner.

Many motorcoach operators also told the United Motorcoach Association that their medical examiners were ordering sleep tests based on a driver's weight, body mass index, neck size, overbite, snoring and other criteria. (See Nov. 15 and Oct. 15 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The congressmen noted that a bill passed by Congress and signed by the president in October 2013 prohibits the FMCSA from "implementing or enforcing a requirement providing for the screening, testing or treatment of individuals operating commercial motor vehicles for sleep disorders" unless the agency adopts such a requirement through its formal rulemaking and public comment process.

FMCSA officials hinted at the time it received the letter from the congressmen that they planned on launching a rulemaking process for sleep apnea, but the bulletin

suggests the agency is taking a lower-profile approach to the issue by just trying to clarify that there is no federal mandate that drivers be tested for the disorder.

The bulletin, published in mid-January, instead refers medical ex-

aminers to advisory materials published in 2000, which note the recommendations on screening and evaluation.

The bulletin states that the FMCSA "recommends that, if a medical examiner believes the

driver's respiratory condition is in any way likely to interfere with the driver's ability to safely control and drive a commercial motor vehicle, the driver should be referred to a specialist for further evaluation and therapy."

The FMCSA also points out that sleep apnea "is a treatable condition, and drivers with moderate-to-severe OSA (obstructive sleep apnea) can manage the condition effectively to reduce the risk of drowsy driving."



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BANY adds directors

ALBANY, N.Y. — The Bus Association of New York State (BANY) has named two board members — Glenn Every of Tonche Transit in Mount Tremper, N.Y., and Rob Swarthout of Swarthout Coaches in Ithaca, N.Y.

In a notice to members, association President Cam Morris said Every and Swarthout are expected to be active directors, benefiting the entire association and making it stronger.

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Full registration reciprocity under IRP now in effect

Charter bus exemption to end on Jan. 1, 2016

ARLINGTON, Va. — Full reciprocity under the International Registration Plan went into effect nationwide last month for motor carriers registering under the IRP.

Under the “full reciprocity plan,” a bus and truck operator registering under IRP will automatically be qualified every year — for purposes of vehicle registration — to operate in the 48 contiguous states, the District of Columbia and all Canadian provinces.

No more estimated mileage, no more extra fees for adding a state during a registration year, no more permits to go into a state — or the District of Columbia — not already on a vehicle’s IRP cab card.

The changes brought by the full reciprocity plan should benefit both large and small carriers, and also make the plan easier to administer for states and provinces.

The only catch, and it’s a temporary one, is that for individual fleets registered under the IRP, full reciprocity takes effect when the fleet

renews its registration this year.

In states with staggered registration systems, where registration expires at various points during the year for different fleets, this will cause a discrepancy in when the provisions of the full reciprocity plan take effect.

Companies operating in such states should check with their base jurisdiction’s International Registration Plan agency.

While full reciprocity has gone into effect for companies registering under the International Registration Plan, charter bus operators that haven’t used IRP registration will have to switch to the system, starting next year.

That’s because the 40-year IRP exemption granted to charter bus companies comes to an end on

Jan. 1, 2016, meaning every motorcoach company that crosses state lines as part of its operation will have to purchase apportioned license plates under IRP.

The change is occurring because state motor vehicle administrators voted overwhelmingly late last summer for an amendment to the plan that requires charter buses operated in interstate service to be registered under the International Registration Plan. (See Oct. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Basically, the IRP facilitates commercial vehicle registration reciprocity among U.S. states, Canadian provinces and the District of Columbia. It provides for payment of apportionable registration fees on the basis of total distance operated in all jurisdictions.

Ninety percent of the state and provincial motor vehicle administrators participating in the voting approved eliminating the charter bus exemption.

In comments leading up to the vote, an overwhelming majority of state and provincial officials indicated that interstate charter bus companies should be treated the same as all other commercial motor carriers.

Charter bus choice

Since the International Registration Plan was established in the early 1970s, individuals and companies registering charter buses have been allowed either to apportion fees under the plan or to operate under registration reciprocity.

That option was put into the

plan because charter bus operators often don’t know from one year to the next what states they may be traveling in, and there has been no way under IRP to handle the situation equitably.

The amendment removes the registration option. Starting Jan. 1, 2016, all intercity operators must register under IRP.

Some IRP observers have viewed the charter bus amendment as reasonable, since, under the full reciprocity plan, an IRP registrant will automatically be registered for all states and Canadian provinces.

On the other hand, some bus operators may be unprepared for the higher registration fees some will have to pay under IRP.

Only so-called “apportionable vehicles” can be registered under the IRP.

That means any “power unit that is used or intended for use in two or more member jurisdictions” (i.e., that crosses state lines) and is used for the transportation of persons for hire, and has two axles and a gross vehicle weight or registered gross vehicle weight in excess of 26,000 pounds, or has three or more axles, regardless of weight.

Drug tests

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strike force in 2014 resulted in 205 driver enforcement cases and 138 enforcement cases against carriers for substance violations.

These included drivers operating passenger-carrying vehicles and transporting hazardous materials.

While results of FMCSA’s 2012 Drug and Alcohol Testing Survey of approximately 2,000 carriers indicated that positive random drug testing results had decreased for a second year, the agency said it will continue to monitor industry testing programs before re-evaluating the controlled substances random test rate again in 2016.

Random drug and alcohol testing has been mandated for U.S. commercial drivers since the late 1980s, with 10 percent of a carrier’s drivers picked randomly each year for alcohol testing and 50 percent chosen for drug testing.

The same formula applies to the U.S.-certified drivers working for Canadian operators.

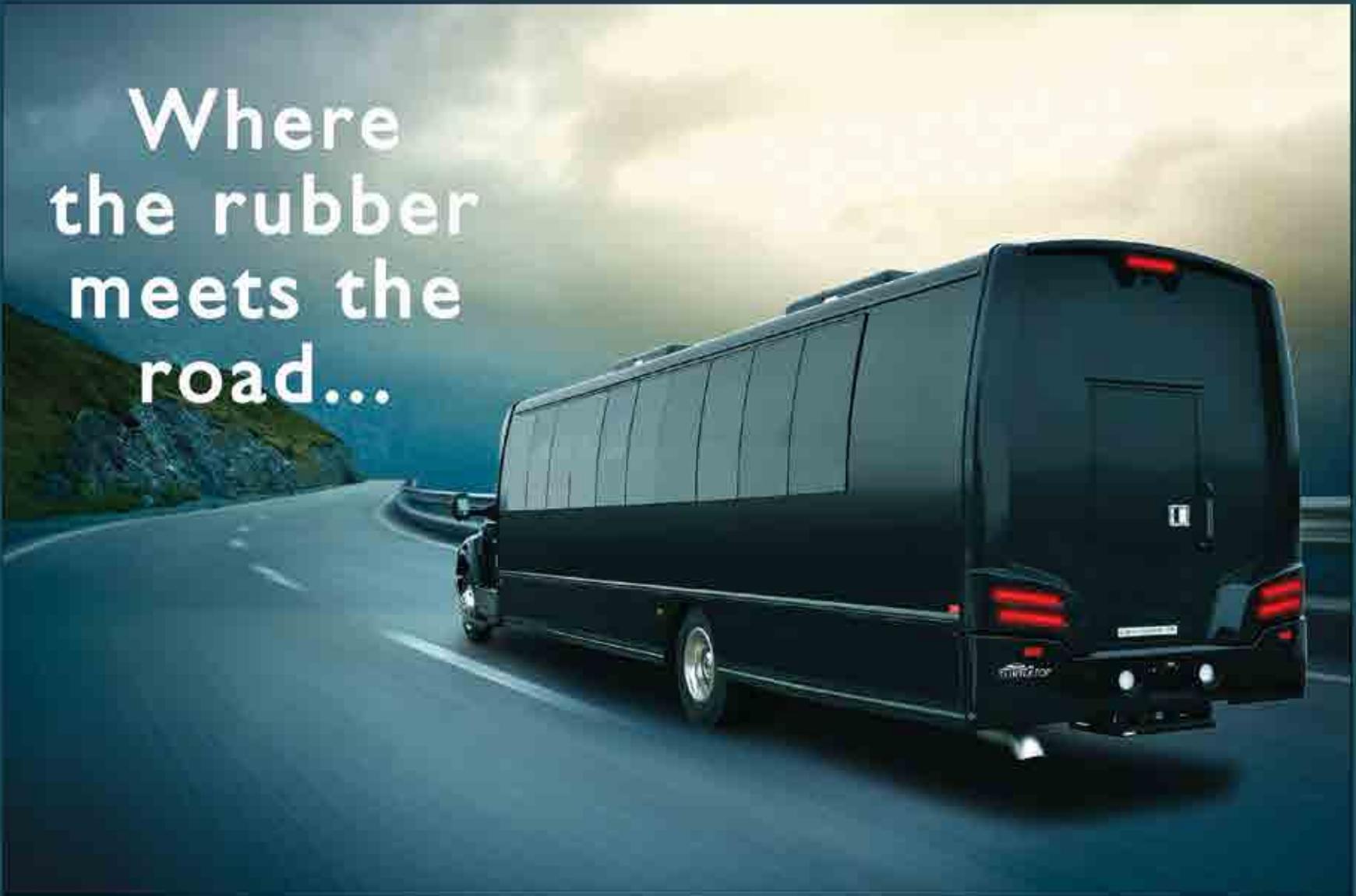
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States take the lead on transportation funding reform

By Kenneth Orski

Although some members of Congress are pressing for an increase in the federal fuel tax, responsibility for funding transportation projects is increasingly shifting from the federal government to the states.

With gasoline and diesel fuel prices at a five-year low, a chorus of voices, including several influential Republican senators — John Thune of South Dakota, Bob Corker of Tennessee, Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, and Orrin Hatch of Utah — seem to think this the perfect time to raise the federal fuel tax.

President Barack Obama does not seem to agree, though.

He did not include a gas tax increase among his tax proposals in his January State of the Union address, nor did he mention it in the context of his proposed “bipartisan infrastructure plan,” whose perfunctory mention disappointed transportation advocates.

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest has repeatedly reminded reporters that the Obama administration continues to believe the best option to pay for a long-term surface transportation bill is through a windfall from corporate tax reform.

However, a tax reform bill isn't a sure thing, and certainly is not likely to be passed before the current transportation measure expires at the end of May.

Dead on arrival

In the House of Representatives, the probability of a fuel tax hike is virtually zero.

“While there may be some voices in the Senate in favor of raising the gas tax, the sentiment in the House is overwhelmingly

against it, and this includes Speaker Boehner,” one senior House aide told reporters.

Paul Ryan, R-Wis., chairman of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, and Bill Shuster, R-Pa., chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, have also ruled out a fuel tax increase.

Given the House Republicans' solid opposition, political observers do not see a gas tax increase as a practical reality.

If that is the case, perhaps the time has come to reconsider the way we pay for transportation.

Taking the lead

The transportation advocacy

group Transportation for America thinks the solution lies in shifting a larger share of funding responsibility to the state and local level.

“States that want to continue investing will have to explore new ways to raise funding for transportation on their own,” said T4America director James Corless, announcing the November launch of a new initiative, supporting state efforts to raise transportation funding through their own legislation.

During the past two years, a number of states have sought to compensate for the lack of Congressional action with their own funding initiatives.

For a growing number of states that are working to secure a stable

source of funds for their transportation programs, a long-term federal transportation authorization is no longer a necessity.

Laboratories for innovation

Surveys conducted by the American Road and Transportation Builders Association and the National Conference of State Legislatures show that state governments have become laboratories for fiscal innovation.

Eight states — Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wyoming — have increased local fuel taxes.

Other states — Delaware, Florida, and Ohio — have floated the

idea of toll revenue bonds, or higher highway tolls.

Arkansas, Minnesota and Wisconsin have enacted, or are thinking about enacting, dedicated sales taxes for transportation.

Minnesota state senate leaders have introduced a comprehensive transportation funding plan to generate more than \$800 million in new recurring revenue, and \$1.5 billion in bonds for that state's transportation infrastructure.

In total, at least 20 states are poised to tackle transportation funding this year, according to the Council of State Governments.

Saving themselves

States are not standing idly by, waiting for Congress to come to the rescue with higher federal fuel taxes and more money.

Instead, governors, state legislatures and local governments are responding to uncertain prospects for future federal funding by taking aggressive steps to become less dependent on federal aid.

Collectively, these measures will generate billions of additional revenue for state and local transportation programs. The states' added revenue is expected to largely replace the absence of increased federal funding.

With the 2014 midterm elections boosting Republican majorities in statehouses to historic highs not seen since the 1920s, the movement toward greater self-sufficiency and financial innovation at the state and local levels is likely to grow in strength.

Kenneth Orski is a public policy consultant and former principal of the Urban Mobility Corporation.

Reprinted from Innovation NewsBriefs.

With diesel down, will fuel taxes rise?

WASHINGTON — Now that the price of diesel fuel has fallen below \$3 a gallon, its lowest level in nearly five years, there are increased rumblings from state officials about possible increases in fuel taxes to cover a decline in revenue needed for transportation repairs and improvements.

A few states implemented fuel tax increases last month. And several other states are reportedly looking at alternative ways of raising money for transportation projects independent of federal funding. (See article on this page.)

The federal diesel tax rate currently is 24.4 cents per gallon (compared with 18.4 cents for gasoline), and the average state diesel tax is 30.02 a gallon, for a combined average tax rate nationwide of 54.42 cents a gallon.

Diesel taxes increased on Jan. 1 in three states, led by Pennsylvania's 13.2-cent increase, which raised the tax total in that state to 64.2

cents a gallon.

North Carolina's diesel tax went up a penny a gallon to 37.5 cents, while Florida's tax increased by 0.3 cents, to 31.6 cents.

On the flip side, the America Petroleum Institute reports that fuel taxes went down slightly in New York, Nebraska, Vermont, West Virginia and Kentucky. Most of those states have fuel tax provisions that are based on the price of gasoline and diesel, meaning when fuel goes up in price, so do taxes, and when fuel moderates in price, taxes come down.

At the federal level, the fuel tax was last increased by Congress in 1993.

One far out idea for revamping the nation's transportation financing system has been put forth by Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif.

Huffman has introduced a bill that would replace diesel and gas taxes with a carbon tax. His proposal would require the U.S. Environ-

mental Protection Agency to develop a life-cycle assessment for certain sources of crude oil, biofuels and other inputs into diesel and for vehicle transportation.

The assessment would be used to calculate total emissions, which would be taxed initially at \$50 per metric ton of carbon dioxide emissions.

“While the strides we have made for vehicle fuel efficiency has saved consumers millions of dollars at the pump, the antiquated and inflexible federal gas tax has left our nation's transportation infrastructure demands unmet,” Huffman said in a statement, adding that his proposal “would help spur advancements in clean energy technology, reduce carbon pollution and fight climate change here at home and abroad.”

It is seen as highly unlikely that Congressional Republicans would endorse any financing scheme that involves a carbon tax or the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION

ISSUE NO. 278

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Keys to winter driving: Whether you go, how you go

By Dave Millhouser

There are several ways to look at getting old.

You can lament the fact that now that you finally understand how things work you're too old to actually do them.

Or, my personal favorite, you can tell stories of all the wild, stupid stunts you survived "back in the day."

In other words, bask in the glow of past "successes," without having to actually do them again. Impart wisdom without fear because the statute of limitations has expired.

Which leads to the subject of winter driving. There are at least two major considerations here: If you go and how you go.

Modern weather forecasting is remarkably accurate, and readily available. Sure, those playful meteorologists fib now and then, just to keep us alert, but generally they get it right.

But try not to do what my wife does: listen to 38 forecasts and believe only the odd one she likes.

If nasty weather is forecast, and you forge ahead with a trip, an

accident or a stranding will have legal as well as logistical consequences. Both management and the driver are on the hook.

Pressure based on airline flight schedules or events needs to be weighed carefully against safety concerns. If an experienced driver is available, it tilts things a bit, and if the bus has all the latest electronic do-dads, that helps, too.

It's naive to think there isn't a balance here, but the customers' vocal push to reach their destination will quickly be forgotten if the coach only makes it partway. In these situations there are lots of voices clamoring for attention. In this rare case, the customers' is least important.

If you (and the driver) decide the trip can be done safely, how you go matters.

Sometimes you have choices with regard to routes. Heck, you get it...coach your drivers to choose wisely based on traffic, road type and geography.

Scuba divers believe in the "buddy system," which is akin to traveling in a convoy if more than one bus is involved in a move. If there's a problem, sometimes the

other coach (or coaches) can offer help.

Renegade divers have concluded that "buddy diving" is the prelude to a serial killing. Once you've reached a certain level of experience, your buddy is more likely to create a problem than solve one.

Translate that into "bus speak" and it looks like this: A convoy of GM Buffaloes was southbound on the Pennsylvania Turnpike Extension in a slush storm when a Cadillac inexplicably decided to stop in the right lane. Even though we were not following closely by normal standards, the lead bus (mine) was forced to hit the Caddy to leave the left lane open so the rest of the coaches could roar by, only fishtailing a bit.

If we hadn't been traveling as buddies, there would have been no accident, and we nearly had a serial crash.

The car was totaled but miraculously no one was hurt, and that was the day I came to fully appreciate the "two hill" rule of convoying. It's fine for the lead vehicle to lose sight of the following one behind a hill. If things stretch out to

the point where separation is two hills, then the leader slows down. Each bus is responsible for the one behind it.

Substitute "turns" for "hills" in the city, and it still works (if every driver knows the route...and they SHOULD).

The number of crashes where coaches — involved in the same move — end up in a rear-end incident is stunning. There's no reason a convoy can't stretch out over miles.

If a bus is having a problem, put it in front and the others will find it eventually.

Another reason to stay spaced out is because your convoy is surrounded by vehicles operated by less-skilled drivers.

A mentor once told me to "always assume the other guy will do the wrong thing; they'll rarely disappoint you." Words to live by, which are enhanced when conditions are bad.

On the other hand, you can use the doo-dos as test subjects.

As a kid, we always sent the fat guy across rickety foot bridges first, assuming that if it held me, it would hold normal people.

On icy grades, let others go first, if they make it, your chances are good. If they don't...the German "Schadenfreude" applies.

You know: Deriving pleasure from the misfortune of others.

Years ago, Leon, our best driver, was climbing a narrow mountain pass with a group of senior citizens when he hit a patch of black ice.

For the uninitiated, black ice is clear and very hard to spot.

The bus lost traction, spun 180 degrees, and headed back down the mountain. Leon calmly turned around in a parking lot and slooooooowly retraced his route over the mountain. The rest of us learned.

We're not sure what Leon's passengers thought, but they were VERY quiet.

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



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Gale Ellsworth attended Motorcoach Expo 2015 during her final days as president of Trailways Transportation. She retired Feb. 1, after 17 years as CEO of Trailways. UMA President and CEO Victor Parra wished her well.

Members added by Trailways

FAIRFAX, Va. — Mlaker Transportation of Pennsylvania and Bus Supply Charters Inc., of Mississippi are the latest motorcoach operators to join the Trailways Transportation System network.

Mlaker (now Mlaker Trailways) has been operating for 30 years under three generations of family management. The company fleet includes 40 school buses and 17 other full-sized passenger coaches and trolleys for weddings and other private event use.

“My grandfather began our company and now my father and I

run it,” said Matt Mlaker, vice president. “We began by running school buses — which we continue — but in recent years, we’ve added a lot of charter-and-tour business.”

Bus Supply Charters (now doing business as Mississippi Trailways) is based in two small towns, Madison and McComb, but the locations are strategic because they are about a 100 miles from both Baton Rouge and New Orleans and not far from Jackson, Miss.

Keith Sanders and his wife, Karen, founded the company in 1986 with one bus and a jazz band road touring contract from Preser-

The Keystone Pipeline and you...

On the fence whether to participate in UMA Capitol Hill Days next month? Well, consider this:

Late last month, the U.S. Senate approved legislation that would permit construction of the long-delayed Keystone XL pipeline that would transport crude oil from Canada to the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Most oil analysts say the pipeline will increase marketable oil supplies, keeping downward pressure on fuel prices, including diesel fuel.

The Senate vote was 62-36, with nine Democrats joining Senate Republicans to approve the measure.

The rub, as most everyone knows, is that President Obama

threatened, long before the vote, to veto the pipeline bill, and the Senate approval was not wide enough to override an Obama veto.

Sixty-seven votes are needed to override a veto.

Senators from 21 states voted against the pipeline.

It certainly wouldn't hurt and possibly could help pipeline advocates in the Senate if motorcoach operators lobbied those senators who voted against it.

As the United Motorcoach Association says in urging its members to participate in UMA Capitol Hill Days: every voice counts.

Here's a list of the states with at least one senator who voted against the Keystone pipeline:

California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin. In some states, the senators split, with one voting for the pipeline and the other against.

Republican lawmakers, upon taking control of the Senate in January, vowed to make green-lighting the pipeline among their first orders of business. They kept their word.

However, they need five more Democrats to have enough votes to override a presidential veto.

Capitol Hill

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

fuel tax for over-the-road buses

- Increased opportunities for contracting with public transit agencies

Additionally, there are a host of regulatory-related issues, including bus inspections at weigh stations and along roadsides, due process for imminent hazard and out-of-

violation Hall in New Orleans.

Since those days, the company

service orders, third-party inspection requirements, local entity requirements for registration of charter bus operators, and public transit operators competing with private coach companies.

Participants will stay in Washington, providing easier access to their meetings and other events. The Cambria Suites Washington, D.C./Convention Center will serve as the host hotel for the two-day event.

has seen its fleet and tour-and-travel business grow, mostly with

There is no fee to attend. However, all attendees must register.

To encourage participation, UMA will significantly subsidize part of the hotel cost for attendees. The hotel rate is \$129 a night.

A complete schedule, registration and hotel information is available in a brochure in this issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News* and at www.uma.org/capitolhill, or by calling UMA at (800) 424-8262.

church and school groups. It operates 15 motorcoaches.



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Is it time to adopt social media in your company?

By Christian Riddell
Motorcoach Marketing Council

Is social media really something your company should be doing?

Or, do you think your customers aren't actually on social media?

And, if you are using social media, how do you know if what your company is doing is working?

Over the past few years, these are the most common questions I have heard when I talked with owners about the need for social media in their businesses.

So, let's address each of them here.

Is social media really something your company should be doing?

Yes. Social media is now the most popular activity on the internet.

In North America, more than 70 percent of internet users have a social media account. The popularity of social networks like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+ are reshaping not only how we advertise our companies but how we relate to the world.

What started out as a way to

share what you ate for breakfast is now one of the most powerful tools on the web. In fact, if all Facebook users lived in one country, it would be the third largest in the world.

With the proliferation of mobile devices, what used to be something that you did when you sat down at your computer is now being done standing in line at the DMV, or waiting for your lunch to be brought to the table.

Things have shifted to the point that in today's mobile-driven world there are more people who own a mobile device than own a toothbrush.

A fad it isn't

Social media has moved way beyond a fad and has turned into something that even the most technically reluctant companies need to be doing. With statistics like more than 90 percent of shoppers' buying decisions being influenced by social media, there is no doubt that what may have been an option even five years ago, is now a necessity.

Maybe you're convinced your customers aren't actually on social media.

This is probably the most com-

Marketing Minute

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mon misconception for those who are not familiar with social media. Facebook alone has more than 1.35 billion users worldwide, and more than 41 percent of North Americans spend an average of 40 minutes daily on their Facebook account.

Seven out of 10 internet users are on Facebook.

Perhaps most surprising is the age of these users. In 2014, Facebook added 12.4 million users who are over the age of 55. That represented a staggering 80 percent growth rate.

Twitter has more than 232 million active users of which more than 53 percent recommend products or services in their tweets.

Seniors, too

I get it, though, that's just Twitter right? A bunch of college students talking about some designer brand of coffee? Not anymore.

Most people are totally shocked when they learn that the fastest growing demographic on Twitter is grandparents.

I could go on with other powerful statistics like the fact that LinkedIn is growing at a rate of two users every second. Or, that 22 percent of adult internet users visit Google+ at least once a month. Or, maybe that more than 100 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube every minute.

Social media is here to stay; it is NOT a fad and most certainly it is not just for young people.

Eric Qualman, an online marketing pioneer, said the return on investment of social media for today's businesses is that they will still be businesses in five years.

Three little rules

Like any marketing avenue, adopting social media requires attention to do well.

In a recent class taught by Eric Elliot of BusRates.com and myself, we discussed some of the things companies can do to leverage the social marketplace.

First, establish a "time budget" that you, or your staff, will spend dedicated to participation in social

media. Then spend it.

Second, decide in which networks you want to participate. You don't have to do them all; choose those you feel you can regularly do and then forget the rest for a while.

Third, be consistent.

Although you can get away with not participating in some of the social networks, you can't get away with inconsistency.

Don't get caught

Customers and potential customers use these tools to start to build a case why they should or should not purchase your services. If it's June and your last post says Happy Thanksgiving, it does not go unnoticed.

Make posts, tweets, status updates, and add photos regularly. If you can't do it regularly, then wait to start your accounts until you can.

The realization that consistency is important inevitably leads to the question: what should I post and how often?

The key to social media is to give people things they want, not what you want.

One of the biggest mistakes

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17 ▶

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American Bus Association selects officers, board members

Lobbyist Clyde Hart honored at retirement

WASHINGTON — The American Bus Association has announced the election of new board members, as well as a new chairman, vice chairman and treasurer.

In addition, the association announced the retirement of Clyde Hart, head of ABA government affairs and policy.

John Meier, president of Badger Bus and Coach in Madison, Wis., was chosen by ABA board members to be chairman for the next three years.

Don DeVivo, president of DATTCO, a diversified motorcoach and transportation company in New Britain, Conn., was picked as ABA vice chairman.

Craig Lentzsch, executive chairman of All Aboard America! Holdings in New Orleans, was chosen ABA secretary/treasurer.

Meier joined the ABA board in 2004 and served as ABA Marketplace chairman in 2008. The company he heads, Badger Bus and Coach, says it operates one of the largest and most modern motorcoach fleets in the Midwest. The



John Meier



Don DeVivo



Craig Lentzsch



Clyde Hart

95-year-old company has 51 motorcoaches and buses, plus 90 school buses.

Meier previously was ABA vice chairman and succeeds Tom JeBran, whose term as chairman expired last month. JeBran is president of Bethlehem, Pa.-based Trans-Bridge Lines. He was elected to a new term on the ABA board and remains a member of the ABA executive committee by virtue of being immediate past chairman.

The ABA board added three new at-large members to the executive committee: Steve Haddad, president/CEO of Bieber Transportation; Gene Berardi Jr., president/CEO of Adirondack Trailways, and Stephanie Lee, president of Group Sales Box Office/Broadway.com/Broadway Across America.

Stephanie Lee is a travel segment ABA board member, and her

elevation marks the first time a travel industry representative has been given a seat on the ABA executive committee.

The ABA said it changed its bylaws this year to permit a travel industry board member on the executive committee. Previously, only bus operator members could sit on the executive committee.

The change, the ABA said, reflects the association "commitment to travel and tourism and its significant importance to the motorcoach industry."

Two members joined the ABA board for three-year terms: Camilla Morris is manager of Oneonta (N.Y.) Bus Lines, and Terry Fischer is president of Transportation Charter Services in Orange, Calif.

Board member Bryan Cole, president of Super Holiday Tours in Orlando, Fla., was elected to a one-

year term as ABA Marketplace advisory committee chairman. ABA Marketplace 2016 will be in Louisville, Ky., in early January.

Four members left the ABA board at the conclusion of their terms: Woody Blunt, Ron Eyre, Sara Hamlin and Bruce Neuharth.

Blunt, of Concord (N.H.) Coach Lines, and Eyre, of Eyre Bus, Tour and Travel in Glenelg, Md., were named honorary board members, recognizing their years of service to ABA. Both are former chairmen.

Hamlin is vice president of tourism at the Great Birmingham (Ala.) Visitors and Convention Bureau, and Neuharth is an industry consultant. At one time, he was president of Arrow Stage Lines in Norfolk, Neb., and later Gray Line of Nashville.

The ABA board and membership recognized JeBran at ABA Marketplace in St. Louis last month. He served three years as ABA chairman and three as vice chairman. JeBran remains chairman of the association governance committee.

Clyde Hart also was recognized during Marketplace.

During his 14 years at ABA,

Hart functioned primarily as the association's chief lobbyist, holding the title of senior vice president for government affairs and policy.

He spent nearly 40 years in Washington, both in government and with ABA.

Before joining ABA in 2001, he served as administrator of the U.S. Maritime Administration. He was involved in carving out the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration at the USDOT in 1999, serving briefly as a top administrator in the nascent agency.

Earlier, he was appellate litigation attorney for the Interstate Commerce Commission and then senior counsel to the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation.

In 2004, *The Hill* newspaper identified Hart as one of Washington's 35 best association lobbyists, and in 2011 *Association Trends* magazine selected him as one of the most "effective association lobbyists."

Said ABA President and CEO Peter Pantuso of Hart: "The entire industry is indebted to Clyde for his tireless work at ABA, and during his many years in the Senate and at the regulatory agencies."

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IMG adds TCS in Los Angeles, has 52 members

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. — The International Motorcoach Group has added Transportation Charter Services of Orange, Calif., to its North American network.

TCS joins IMG's Pacific Coachways Trailways of Garden Grove in the Los Angeles market, bringing the IMG network to 52 companies in the U.S. and Canada.

TCS, which has been operating for 30 years, was acquired in 2011 by Terry Fischer.

"We are very proud to join IMG and the other great operators that form the IMG organization," said Fischer. "IMG brings to us a certification and commitment of shared philosophy of exceptional operating foundations and customer care."

IMG President Bronwyn Wilson said that adding TCS to the organization's Los Angeles presence "strengthens our coverage in that market and brings to our organization another outstanding company."

IMG members operate more than 7,000 vehicles and provide services to more than 21 million charter-and-tour customers in the

Aesys announces new team

EMERSON, N.J. — Aesys Inc., the bus and motorcoach destination- and passenger-information sign company, has announced new management precipitated by the retirement of Colin and Evelyn McGregor.

For nearly 10 years, Colin McGregor has been North American managing director of Aesys, while his wife, Evelyn, has been finance and administrative manager.

Darin Mulcahy, who joined Aesys in October as national sales manager, has taken on the additional title of managing director.

Mae Bogdansky, who joined the company about 18 months ago, has succeeded Evelyn McGregor as finance and administrative manager.

Previously, Mulcahy was with Badger Daylighting of Grand Rapids, Mich., a leading provider of non-destructive hydrovac excavation services. Badger's key technology is a truck-mounted hydrovac excavation unit that is used primarily for digging carefully in areas with buried pipes and cables.

Prior to joining Aesys, Bog-



Darin Mulcahy



Mae Bogdansky

dansky was an accounting and finance professor at Eastwick College in Ramsey, N.J.

Steven DeSilva, who has been with Aesys for a dozen years, remains with the company as director of operations.

Aesys, which specializes in the design and manufacture of LED signs, is headquartered in Bergamo, Italy. The company was founded in 1977.

Aesys' U.S. operation started in 2003.

More information at www.Aesys.com.

U.S. and Canada each year. Member companies must adhere to strict standards and qualifications for invitation-only membership.

Safety consultancy formed

CLEVELAND, Tenn. — Bruce Walters, a long-time project manager for CSS-Dynamac (formerly Consolidated Safety Services), has established a consulting firm offering compliance assistance, safety support and regulatory guidance for bus and motorcoach companies.

Walters is known by a large segment of the bus and motorcoach industry because of his 11-years-plus association with the U.S. Defense Travel Management Office bus inspection program, which has been supported by CSS-Dynamac for 25 years.

"My many years associated with Consolidated Safety Services and the Department of Defense has afforded me great insight into passenger carrier operations, regu-

latory compliance, and proven safety techniques," said Walters.

Walters firm, B. Walters & Associates LLC, offers training and recommendations for improving a company's overall safety standing and compliance rating, focusing on the motorcoach industry.

He also provides driver training in classroom settings.

"I am offering an affordable alternative to companies that want the confidence they are safe and compliant; but, cannot afford a fulltime professional," said Walters. "Without question we can prepare carriers for today's regulatory environment."

Contact Walters via email at brucewalters47@aol.com. He is based in Cleveland, Tenn., and operates nationally.

Calendar

FEBRUARY 2015

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

20-22 Heartland Travel Showcase, Hyatt Regency, Chicago. Info: www.heartland-travelshowcase.com.

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

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Listening session

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“You are out there to protect us and the industry and our customers and the people on the roads. Whatever you do at the end, make it consistent so one state is not doing one crazy thing, another state is doing something else, and all the states have different agendas.”

The MAP-21 mandate

The mandate for the study by the FMCSA was included in the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, known as MAP-21, signed into law by President Obama in July 2012.

MAP-21 directed the Obama administration “to complete a rulemaking proceeding to consider requiring states to establish a program for annual inspections of commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) designed or used to transport passengers.”

The law also directed the FMCSA to assess “the effectiveness of existing federal standards for the inspection of such vehicles in mitigating the risks associated with improperly maintained vehicles and ensuring the safe and proper operation condition of such vehicles.”

During the afternoon listening session on the first day of Expo, safety regulators heard consensus on two questions.

First, the industry doesn’t need another layer of state motorcoach inspections. Second, the current system is often ineffective and wastes resources.

No agenda

Jack Van Steenburg, assistant administrator and chief safety officer of the FMCSA, told the audience, which was largely composed of motorcoach operators, that the administration had an open mind on the rulemaking process, which he emphasized was mandated by Congress.

In his remarks, he acknowledged that 85 percent of the country’s 4,000 registered motorcoach operators have BASIC (Behavior Analysis and Safety Improvement Categories) scores within acceptable thresholds, “which is pretty good.”

For the other carriers, “The No. 1 thing they can have over threshold is vehicle maintenance,” Van Steenburg said.

“Certainly an inspection program in the states aligns itself with our strategy to maintain high safety standards because we want to make sure our equipment is good and safe. If it isn’t, we want to remove those unsafe passenger carriers. This potential rulemaking will align with how we operate at FMCSA” he said.



Peter Shelbo of Tour West America in Phoenix told the panel that companies that have demonstrated they operate safely do not warrant being inspected repeatedly.

However, he said, “We have no preconceived agenda on how to move forward. We want to hear what the experts in the industry have to say and certainly you are the experts.”

Also sitting on the FMCSA panel were Larry Minor, associate administrator for policy; Annie Collins, associate administrator for field operations, and Loretta Bitner, chief of the passenger carrier enforcement division and a frequent attendee at Motorcoach Expos.

Issue: Redundancy

Redundant inspections were a common theme among the UMA members who spoke during the session, which filled one of the midsize meeting rooms used during Motorcoach Expo.

Several speakers cited quota-driven inspection requirements in some states, resulting in inspectors meeting their goals by picking off easy targets at tourist destinations or inside nice, warm shops.

North Carolina’s highway patrolmen need to conduct enough inspections over time to maintain their inspection certifications, said Ralph Young of Young Transportation of Asheville, N.C.

“I invite them to come in, particularly in the winter, where it’s warm and I’ve got a lift,” said Young. “But maybe they don’t go to the small operators that don’t have a shop. They’ve got a gravel parking lot, and maybe (the inspectors) don’t get down there. Make what we have balanced to every operator.”

“I’ve got lifts. I’ve got a shop. They get a good inspection with me,” said Jimmy Cantrell of Daniel’s Charters and Tours in Lula, Ga. “But the people down the road have nothing except for a gravel yard. I don’t think I got the same inspection they got.”

Added Alan Thrasher of Thrasher Brothers Trailways in Birmingham, Ala.: “We would really like to have a way to avoid being inspected three times, one

right behind the other.”

Issue: Reciprocity

Lack of reciprocity by inspecting agencies contributes to redundancy, several speakers said. Inspection decals designating passage of a Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance standard inspection often are ignored by subsequent inspectors.

“In Oregon we have been going back and forth about roadside inspections,” said Joe Gillis of Northwest Navigator Luxury Coaches.

The Northwest Motorcoach Association, he said, encourages quarterly vehicle gatherings for inspectors.

“We end up with a CVSA sticker,” Gillis said. “If another organization wants to inspect you and sees that you have been looked at in the last month or three months, that should be good enough. They should go on to bigger and better things.”

“They are going to spend tax dollars looking at a bus that already has been looked at when there are a thousand out there that haven’t been looked at for years.”

The CVSA decals often are not considered, he said. “Washington is not recognizing a sticker that was done in Oregon because they want to inspect more vehicles. I just had two inspections of the same bus in two days in the same state, even.”

Issue: Consistency

Sister companies Minnesota Coaches and Voyageur Bus Company in Duluth, Minn., operate school buses and charter coaches in Minnesota and Wisconsin, meaning it must comply with four inspection regimens.

“We get different flavors of inspections. There is too much difference,” said Mike Krois, president of the carriers.

“I literally have to think of what that bus is doing today. I can have a school bus inspected in Minnesota. Over in Wisconsin I’ve got to run a

different inspection. We do a marathon once a year, so I have to get a special permit and have my mechanics go through and do a third inspection on that bus.”

Richard Tisone of Stouts Transportation Services in Ewing, N.J., said “difficulty arises in that our state inspectors differ from our roadside inspectors. There is so much subjectivity.

“Also I find some ambiguity with our federal requirements as well as the state requirements because our state has such strict inspection regulations. There has to be some consistency,” he added.

Operators in southern California have experienced roadside inspections conducted without the knowledge of the state highway patrol’s leaders, said Kevin Creighton of West Valley Trailways in Campbell, Calif.

“The California Highway Patrol has decided to take it upon themselves, in southern California at one of the weigh stations, to pull over buses in route. At Sacramento, the headquarters of the highway patrol didn’t know what southern California was doing.”

Issue: Training

State-level inspectors often lack the training needed to conduct thorough inspections, other speakers noted. “They are not fully educated. Most of us in this room know more than a state trooper about a motorcoach,” said Thrasher.

For some inspectors, “I don’t think there is enough training. I think there are some misunderstandings,” said Tom Giddens of Pacific Coachways Trailways in Garden Grove, Calif.

On one visit to the Thrasher Brothers shops, “Our mechanic was outside showing troopers how to inspect brakes on a European coach,” Thrasher said. “I am not saying they didn’t know, but when this started we had a bus put out of service. I said, ‘Can I see those specs?’

He was looking at an MCI on his computer and the bus was a

Van Hool.”

Thrasher said the motorcoach industry should offer training assistance to inspectors. “We learn through experience what can really happen to a coach, versus a state trooper who has been taught law enforcement. He can’t just walk up to a bus and know what is necessarily wrong with it. I think our industry is willing to help them.”

Issue: Roadside blues

Frustration bordering on anger was expressed on the subject of roadside motorcoach inspections.

“I have a conscious objection to roadside, unwarranted inspections,” said Thrasher. “If something is falling off the bus or it’s doing 90 miles an hour, sure, pull it over.”

“But I have had a situation where I had to take 45 senior citizens off a bus in a rest area for a half hour, with them standing in the cold.”

Speakers overwhelmingly endorsed official inspections being conducted at carrier shops.

“We like that because we can get information from them. We want to know what is not correct because we want to be correct,” said Marcia Milton of First Priority Trailways in District Heights, Md. “To me that is a better system than to be on a roadside and get blindsided. That is the fear of all operators, especially small operators.”

An out-of-service order at some weigh station can be devastating, she said. If another carrier needs to be called on short notice to pick up those passengers, the cost is likely to be higher than the earnings from the trip.

“I have inconvenienced a customer who now wants all of their money back, and I have a driver who is not going to get a tip,” Milton said. “I now have 56 people spreading rumors about my company.”

And, she said, she cannot repair her coach at that weigh station. “I can’t do anything on a roadside.”

Who does it?

If state inspections are mandated, operators differed on the wisdom of self-inspections versus third-party inspections. Several carriers expressed satisfaction with the self-inspections conducted by their own experienced technicians.

On the other hand, said Gillis of NW Navigator, “When using a third party to come in and do those inspections, the guy can write up a thousand dollars you need to have done to that bus. He is just trying to get some work for himself.”

Gillis did say, however, that he hires third-party inspectors to look at specialized items such as engines and transmissions.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ►

Social media

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

companies make is posting things that are interesting to the company, but not so much to the buying public. The fact that Bill made driver of the month, or that you just purchased a new midsize bus is great, but does your buying audience really care? Probably not.

Look for things you can share that help establish you as an expert, that show that when it comes to group transportation there's no one that knows more than your company.

A social library

Content development can be one of the most difficult parts of this equation. It takes time and is the foundation of the Motorcoach Marketing Council's new social library.

This library gives companies the ability to simply copy and paste posts, photos and tweets out of the library into their own social media networks.

All of the content has been developed to help educate, inform and entertain your audience and establish you as a social resource.

This library can be found at www.motorcoachmarketing.org, and is available to the entire industry after registering for a free account.

Launched at UMA Motorcoach Expo with two campaigns, including weddings and wine trips, the library will be growing in the next few months to include more than 20 campaigns.

Now, no matter where you are, or how technical you are, there is no reason you can't be posting at least once a day with the help of these libraries.

Fundraising

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

"It's really a one-stop marketing shop, for all operators in the industry," said Chris Riddell of Deliverabilities on Lopez Island, in Washington state, the vendor responsible for the creation and implementation of the council's marketing products.

The Motorcoach Marketing Council is a coalition of motorcoach operators; coach vendors; state, regional and national associations; suppliers; vendors, and travel and tourism partners working to improve the image of the industry and foster motorcoach travel.

The operator-driven organization has a volunteer board composed of coach operators and the executive directors of UMA, ABA and IMG.

To learn more about council products or how to get involved, go to www.motorcoachmarketing.org.

Measure success

Once you have chosen the networks you are planning on using, committed to spending time on a daily or weekly basis, and posting good content consistently, the next question you will have is how will you know if this social stuff is actually working?

The first and perhaps most important answer is that your sales staff will ask everyone who gets a quote how they heard about you, and some number will say they found you on Facebook, or that someone recommended you on

Twitter. (If this sort of basic research is not happening at your company, make sure it starts.)

You also can use your Google analytics to see how many people came to your website directly from your social pages. You can offer specials or discounts that only exist on those platforms so if someone uses them you know they came from those efforts.

Social media can be a powerful tool in a motorcoach operator's toolbox, but it requires attention, planning and effort, like any marketing. The payoff can be big,

however.

People are using social media as more than just a way to see what their old high school girlfriend is doing these days and are, instead, making buying decisions, researching brands, and talking about their experiences with the companies they use.

But remember, social media is not a soapbox to stand on and sell your services; it is a conversation that you are having with the buying public and like any conversation there will be times when people respond.

Listen as much as you talk. Be consistent polite and professional, even to those who don't deserve it.

Remember that, unlike a phone call, your interactions on social media live on forever for future customers to see and to use to determine if they will choose you or your competitor.

The social revolution has reached the motorcoach industry. It's time we all get on board.

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



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Feds listen

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

“You are opening up the barn door for them to find all types of issues they can make money off of,” said George Childers of Magic Carpet Ride in Vero Beach, Fla.

But Childers also expressed concerns about legal liability risks if a self-inspecting carrier is involved in an accident. So, he said, “I am kind of in favor of the third-party. If we were to do it ourselves, we would need to have certification, and there is a lot involved in self-certification.”

Concerns about funding and regulation were expressed by Brian Annett of Annett Bus Lines of Sebring, Fla. “When we talk about potentially unfunded third-party inspections, obviously the question is, ‘Where does the money come from?’ The other question is, ‘Are we creating a whole other industry that we have to regulate?’

“We need to take that (inspections) in-house and make sure we do it right. I don’t want to turn that responsibility over to a third-party. We have been successful doing it,” Annett said.

Milton called for self-inspections along with assistance in training and certifying carrier mechanics. “That is something a small company can boast about — we have certified inspectors who inspect our buses.”



Tom Casazza of Starline Luxury Coaches in Seattle weigh on the inspection proposal.

Issue: Costs

The FMCSA also was charged by Congress with determining the costs of additional motorcoach inspections. Speakers offered a range of \$200 to \$400 for inspections by competent third-party inspectors with motorcoach experience. Those inspections also require the time of a company mechanic.

Van Steenburg agreed with speakers who noted the lack of a funding mechanism for new inspections in the MAP-21 proposal.

“The funding is not there,” he said. “When we do a rule-making we have to show the benefits and all these costs that you have, and the benefits have to be greater than the costs. We will look at all those things, the redundancy and the

multiple inspections and try to put a cost on what is going on out there across the country.”

Bottom line

The announcement for the listening session included a request for any state data linking crashes to improper maintenance. None were offered.

So, do all of these inspections make the industry safer?

“Unfortunately, I don’t think it improves crashes,” said Godfrey LeBron of Paradise Travel in Hicksville, N.Y.

“Our New York inspections are done twice a year — very strict inspections. The taxpayers are probably shelling out several million dollars a year to fund that program. ...

New York is a fairly high crash state, and I think the same thing can be said about New Jersey.”

A number of speakers called on the FMCSA and state inspectors to focus more resources on companies that are more likely to suffer from maintenance defects.

“Comments were made about the shade-tree operators they never find,” Thrasher said toward the end of the afternoon. He said he often has asked his state inspectors if they have inspected such operators. The response, he said, is, “Well, we can’t find them.”

“I said, ‘How hard did you try?’ I offered to put them in the car and take them over there — their buses are behind an abandoned gas station,” Thrasher said.

“There should be a level playing field. If we have to go through this they should as well. As we know, they are a greater safety hazard. We are all looking to be cooperative in helping the FMCSA identify risky operators.”

Said Krois: “I tell my inspectors, ‘I’m the good guy. Go find the bad guys. They’re still out there.’”

Added Young: “I think what we need to do is fine-tune and make what we have got work the way it is supposed to.”

What’s up?

One of the last speakers was UMA President and CEO Victor Parra, who asked where the FMCSA would go next with the rulemaking process.

“It is fair to say we have heard a whole lot of great information,” said Minor, the associate administrator for policy. “We really don’t have any hard facts and figures. Probably the first step we will take is to publish an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking to put it out there for everyone to weigh in.

“No funds were appropriated to actually do this. So, how exactly will we set up this national network of safety programs in a meaningful way?” Minor said. “We have a lot of additional work to do.”

Van Steenburg said the administration had no timetable for further work except for a listening session at a CVSA workshop in April.

The federal docket number for the proposal is FMCSA-2014-0470.

Expo overview

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

of) the House, created an opportunity for UMA to advance the industry’s political agenda.

“Based on the overwhelming response we received (from Expo attendees) to participate in our Capitol Hill Days in March, and to contribute to the UMA Motorcoach Travel PAC, I’d say we accomplished our objective.”

Parra identified issues that are considered critical to the motorcoach industry, including:

- A proposal to increase liability insurance limits from \$5 million to \$10 million — and possibly to as high as \$25 million.

- The possible elimination of private-sector protections, such as the charter bus rule that protects charter work from being taken over by publicly funded transit agencies.

- The outside possibility of a rise in fuel taxes to help pay for the highway bill.

- Efforts to eliminate the ability of private operators to partner with public transit entities.

Motorcoach operators who attended this year’s Expo were given the opportunity to voice their concerns about proposed regulations during a “listening session” conducted by officials from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

The focus of the session was state bus inspections. (See story on Page 1.)

Jack Van Steenburg, chief safety officer at the FMCSA, told operators the agency has no preconceived agenda concerning potential rules governing state safety inspections. “We want to hear what the experts in the industry have to say and certainly you are the experts,” he said.

Meanwhile...

While political and regulatory issues played an important role at Expo, they certainly weren’t the only focus of the event.

As always, new buses and equipment took center stage on the Expo show floor, and attendees could choose from 30 educational sessions on topics ranging from choosing the right electronic log-



Brian Annett

Larry Hundt

ging device, to diversifying services, to the tax aspects of selling a coach company, to fatigue management, to the effective use of social media.

Expo 2015 also offered new and upgraded events, such as an exclusive, for-UMA-members-only Chairman’s Reception that kicked off the activities, and an expanded and enhanced three-hour Sneak Preview Party in the exhibit hall, which served as the official opening of the trade show floor.

The Sneak Preview allowed attendees to view the latest products and services in a more social setting, with food, refreshments and New Orleans entertainment in abundance.

“We made modifications to freshen the experience for attendees

and help them maximize the value of the entire event,” Parra said.

“For the most part, these changes were very well received by both operators and vendors. For example, the Chairman’s Reception gave UMA attendees a chance to get reacquainted with their colleagues and catch up on the past year.

“We also held the awards evening as a UMA-only event, and added fun and great entertainment, creating an exciting evening for everyone,” said Parra.

Competing with the best

“Probably, our most difficult challenge was lengthening the Sneak Preview Party to three hours. We competed against some of the best restaurants in the world in New Orleans and held our own as the business bustle on the exhibit floor extended right up until our 9 p.m. closing.”

Parra said this year’s education sessions “proved to be right on the mark. The session rooms were crowded and packed with plenty of ‘take-home’ value. One attendee even remarked that UMA always

has the best seminars.”

Larry Hundt, chairman of the UMA Meetings Committee and a driving force behind Expo, said this year’s event attracted 320 operator companies, a 27 percent increase over last year, and most of them attended the sneak preview.

“Vendors were pleased with the number of operators on the floor,” Hundt said. “It was the most productive Sneak Preview ever.”

He said here were 170 paid exhibitors, occupying 62,200 square feet of space on the show floor; there were 40 new and used motorcoaches and buses on display.

UMA realized a 31 percent increase in Expo revenue, and bookings for next year’s Expo in Atlanta were up 30 percent from last year at the close of the show in Los Angeles.

“This year we took a big step toward improving the show as a place to do business,” said UMA Chairman Brian Annett.

“We had more people, more equipment and a bigger show overall. It was more dynamic and there was more stuff to look at. And New Orleans was great.”

Falling loonie 'good' for Canadian tourism; outlook uncertain

VANCOUVER, B.C. — The slide in the value of the Canadian dollar has made British Columbia a more attractive tourism destination for Americans seeking a bargain travel destination.

At the same time, however, the lower value of the Canadian dollar, or loonie, could signal that a recession is coming, which would have a negative impact on tourism.

"A falling dollar represents better value for consumers coming here, so it's good for tourism," Tourism Vancouver Vice President Stephen Pearce told the *Vancouver Sun*.

"But we have to be cautious of a tipping point. Tourism can be very fragile and if people begin to feel insecure about the economy and we start to move into a recessionary environment, then people may be reluctant to travel."

The good — or bad — news comes at a time when tourism is on the upswing in Vancouver. Overnight visitors increased to a record 8.94 million last year and the number is expected to rise another 2.9 per cent this year.

Another plus to the sliding loonie is that Canadians who normally fly south to warm areas of the U.S. will travel in their own country instead.

Pearce said tourists from China, India and Mexico showed the strongest growth rates in Canada last year; the U.S. still accounts for the largest share of foreign visitors. But he said American tourists, especially those living far from the Canadian border, aren't always aware of fluctuations in the

exchange rate.

That would seem to create an opening for America motorcoach

operators that run tours to Canada to use that country's lower dollar value as a marketing tool to attract

American travelers.

"People from border states are very aware of the exchange-rate

difference but when you go farther south, many people just don't know about it," Pearce said.

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Ontario crossing for buses, trucks

SAULT STE. MARIE, Ontario — A new commercial entrance is now open at the Sault Ste. Marie border crossing. It's designed to direct larger commercial vehicles away from city streets.

Commercial traffic will access the Canadian Customs Plaza by way of the new commercial entrance from Carmen's Way instead of the commuter vehicle entrance on Huron St. Signage has been updated to reflect the change.

Parking stalls are available for motorcoaches wishing to visit the duty-free store before entering the U.S. Bus traffic may enter the plaza from either the new Carmen's Way entrance or the existing Huron St. entrance.

If buses need to visit the Canada Border Services Agency prior to leaving Canada, they must use the Huron St. entrance and park across from the CBSA outbound office.

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DD S60, B-500R. 56 Passenger, white exterior, aluminum wheels, monitor video system. VIN #00309. **Only \$150,000!**



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DD S60, B-500. 43 Passenger + Bunk, steel wheels, 3 monitor video system. VIN #52998. **Only \$66,000!**



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