

# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

## UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION MOTORCOACH EXPO 2012



**Excitement at Expo?** You bet. Just ask Dan Eisentrager (below), vice president of Coach America, and several dozen of his closest friends, who couldn't wait for the Expo show floor to open in the Long Beach Convention Center last month. Operators from across the U.S. and Canada trekked

to California for the event, crowding coach manufacturer stands and visiting vendors throughout the floor. Expo coverage begins on Page 3.

**Photos by David Braun Photography, Las Vegas — [www.DavidBraun.com](http://www.DavidBraun.com)**



**Coming in March 15 issue: New buses, new products at Expo 2012**

## UMA backs Senate proposal for letter-grade rating system

LONG BEACH, Calif. — The United Motorcoach Association has endorsed proposed federal legislation that conceivably could take industry safety to a whole new level and force schlock operators to find another line of work.

The association threw its support behind a Senate bill that would create a letter-grade safety rating system for private motorcoach operators, similar to the health-and-cleanliness rating system used for restaurants.

The association's position was adopted by its Legislative and Regulatory Committee and unanimously endorsed by the UMA board at the conclusion of UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month.

Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., a frequent critic of the safety record of some segments of the in-

tercity bus industry and of the current safety rating system, first issued the call for a letter-grade rating system last summer after a string of high-profile crashes in the northeastern U.S.

(See July 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Then, late last year, Schumer turned his idea into action when he introduced Senate Bill 2023, which would establish a safety performance rating system for motorcoach services and operations.

UMA endorsed the bill for a variety of reasons.

It is believed that such a system would blunt or totally eliminate the need — by anyone — for so-called third-party safety inspections, which are being opposed by broad segments of the industry as

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## Top U.S. safety officials zero in on coach industry

LONG BEACH, Calif. — The chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board is looking for the motorcoach industry to come up with a "zero."

And she's calling on tour-and-charter operators from across the country to lead the way.

Deborah Hersman, who has headed the agency since 2009, challenged operators at the opening session of the UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month to work toward going a full year without a motorcoach accident fatality.

"The safety culture in the industry starts at the top," she said. "I encourage you to raise your safety standards."

Although acknowledging the industry's strong safety record, she

noted that 2011 was marred by a rash of deadly accidents that shook up the industry.

Twenty accidents last year killed nearly three dozen riders and seriously injured another 370.

"It was not a good year," she said. "Safety is not just part of your business, but it has to be your business."

Hersman said she was thrilled to see so many motorcoaches equipped with many of the latest high-tech safety features, and she expressed appreciation for the well-trained drivers behind the wheel of many of them.

"We've got to make sure that professional drivers are able to do their jobs properly," she said. "No matter how efficient the technology

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## UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION

## MOTORCOACH EXPO 2012

## Industry business upswing is reflected at upbeat Expo

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Business is perking up across North America for many charter-and-tour bus operators and the excitement generated by the long-awaited upswing was vividly on display at UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month.

It was seen across the exhibit hall floor where hundreds of operators were eagerly mixing with more than 150 vendors.

It was seen during the educational sessions where winning business strategies were discussed and exchanged.

And it was seen during the networking events — receptions, lunches, dinners, golf outings and parties — where much of the table talk was dotted with optimism.

“Everyone around here is smiling,” observed Tom Ready, outgoing UMA chairman and president of Ready Bus Line in La Crescent, Minn.

“They’re all looking forward and they’re all very positive about it, too.”

He said the enthusiasm was most evident among operators who were eager to check out new products and services, to listen to what others in the industry had to say about business, and to collect any information that might help them back home.

“They’re all here to work hard and learn something so they can get a step up on everyone else,” he noted.

**The turn**

Many operators interviewed at the exposition said they began seeing business improve during the latter part of last year and the trend seems to be carrying into this year.

The surge, some suggested, has even turned up competition in the industry and made Expo even more important.

“Business is certainly much better than it was two or three years ago, and it has become even more competitive,” reported Michael Neustadt, president of Coach Tours in Brookfield, Conn. “You can hardly throw a stone without skipping over a bus.”

UMA President and Chief Executive Victor Parra said operator interest and excitement in Expo

was just about everywhere throughout the five-day event, especially at the many education sessions.

“The convention exceeded attendee expectations,” he said. “The education sessions were packed, which was somewhat of a surprise given we were competing with outstanding Southern California weather. It said we picked the right topics and hit on the most timely issues.”

The education sessions covered a wide variety of topics, ranging from how to hire and retain the best employees, to tips on using electronic marketing, to how to profit by getting involved in the community, to coping with stepped up regulatory enforcement.

Ken Presley, UMA vice president and chief operating officer, said he, too, heard mostly positive comments from operators about the exhibits and education sessions, especially the meeting of state associations that he said several described as the “best ever.”

“By all accounts, Expo was successful,” he said. “The seminars offered something for everyone, were informative and the speakers came from a rich and diverse background.”

He pointed out, too, that the wide assortment of vehicles and equipment on the show floor reflected the continuing evolution of task-specific vehicles versus one-size-fits all.

**Operators looking**

Many of the vendors were buoyed by increases in foot traffic at their booths and the interest operators showed in their products and services.

“We’re seeing a lot more people looking at our services than in the past few years,” said Michael Gummel of Paradigm Technology Consultants of East Windsor, N.J. “And hopefully, they’re not just kicking the tires and we’ll hear back from them.”

David F. Hobson of the National School Transportation Association in Alexandria, Va., said action at his booth was so brisk on opening day he still had a crowd there 15 minutes after the show floor closed and he had to ask them to leave.

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**First Expo.** Viktoria Petelicki has her badge and her mother Michelle's hand, so she's ready to start net-

working. Viktoria traveled to Expo from Clifton, N.J., where mom works at Panorama Tours.



**Bob Dockerty, vice president and operations manager at American Star Trailways in Pismo Beach, Calif.,**

questions a presenter during the well-attended Expo education sessions.



**Robert Spann, right, of Five Star Charter in Naperville, Ill., and wife, Rosemary, check their Expo game plan.**

# Despite challenges, operators are optimistic about year

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Although many tour-and-charter operators expect to chalk up business gains this year that outstrip results of the past two years, they still face a wide range of issues that could dampen their optimism.

Low-ball competitors and too-high fuel prices, regulatory uncertainty and an underperforming economy are key challenges operators must contend with as they try to bounce back from what some say was a “wishy-washy” 2011 and a worst 2010.

With that as a backdrop, a special panel at UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month suggested that operators who want to fully benefit from the improved business climate — that began late last year — should stop worrying so much.

Instead, they should concentrate on measures they can control rather than waste time and money on those issues they can't influence.

“We can't control everything,” emphasized Brian Annett of Annett Bus Lines in Sebring, Fla. “But there are so many things we can control and we should let go of those that we can't.”

The panelists, who were questioned during a general Expo session by Victor Parra, United Motorcoach Association president and chief executive, pointed to two long-standing areas that operators not only can control but also benefit them the most — managing

costs and finding new revenue sources.

“We have been focusing on cost controls and making sure we're operating as efficiently as possible,” said Annett.

Larry Hundt of Great Canadian Trailways in Kitchener, Ontario, said his company has been cutting costs, too, but also added new revenue sources.

It now offers vehicle service and repairs to trucking companies and sells some of its diesel fuel to truckers and other motorcoach carriers.

“We took a calculated risk on those,” he said, adding that both ventures have paid off well.

Bill Allen of Amador Stage Lines in Sacramento, Calif., whose cost-cutting measures included some staff reductions, boosted revenues by purchasing 10 older-model transit buses for \$3,100 each and using them for a variety of shuttle work.

“It was a no-brainer for us to do,” he said, pointing out that the buses generated \$56,000 in revenues last year and \$100,000 in new bookings already this year.

While operators can't control the low charter prices that have persisted in the industry for years, they can work to maintain their existing customer base, according to the panelists.

Sarah Walker of Star Shuttle and Charter in San Antonio, Texas, said her company carefully re-



Mike Costa



Larry Hundt



Brian Annett



Sarah Walker

viewed all of its past sold-out dates and targeted those customers by focusing on customer service and driver training.

“We held our prices and got some of our customers back and then our confidence grew,” she said.

Michael A. Costa Jr. of A Yankee Line in Boston said his company emphasized its equipment and its driver training to customers who were looking at low-ball rates offered by competitors.

“You have to differentiate yourself,” he suggested.

Meantime, other operators who attended the industry exposition said in separate interviews their biggest worry is the economic and regulatory uncertainty that continues to hang over the industry.

“You can't plan without knowing what's ahead,” said Dan Palmer of American Explorer Motorcoach in Phoenix, citing concerns over possible seatbelt mandates and stricter clean air requirements.

Tom Walls of Premier Charters in Golden, Colo., offered a similar

concern, indicating it's difficult to develop good business strategies when such uncertainty exists. “You just can't plan ahead very well,” he said.

The low-balling of charter rates and the relative high cost of diesel fuel has made operators edgy as well.

“We've had to lower our prices to compete because everyone is lowering theirs,” said Tim Schubert of Trobec's Bus Service in St. Stephen, Minn. “We're at rock bottom now.”

A shortage of good drivers also is among the critical issues creating problems for some operators.

“It's a real problem because we need drivers to get business and business to get drivers,” said Phil Gottlieb of Eagle Trailways in Irving, Texas.

David Richardson of Keller Transportation in Waldorf, Md., said although his company is concerned about fuel costs, public transit agencies doing charters and regulatory issues, he said he is most upset with the Federal Motor

Carrier Safety Administration's complaint process.

“The idea is good, but it needs to be fine tuned so that people can't use it just to hurt someone else,” he said, adding that his company was hit by two unwarranted complaints, including one from a competing carrier, in the span of just three months.

Despite the mixture of concerns among operators, most say they are looking for a financially strong year — based mostly on improvements they saw late last year and early this year.

“This year is going to be amazing for us,” said Costa, noting that some existing customers are growing and some new ones have been added to the mix. “We've got the peaks and now we're trying to fill in the valleys.”

Walker said the tough times of the past actually have been good for her business. “Having gotten through the tough times in the past, we've built confidence for what's ahead,” she said.

Hundt said he senses the marketplace has become more stable and optimism seems to be spreading. “But we have to be cautious, especially because fuel costs could continue to go up,” he cautioned.

Annett said he's excited about the year, too, stressing that he goes into every year with the same enthusiasm. “If you don't get excited every year, you're in the wrong business,” he said.

## Upbeat Expo

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“There's lots of interest here and we're seeing lots of people,” added first-time exhibitor Ernie Cisneros of American Moving Parts of Los Angeles.

New products were in abundance, too.

J.J. Keller brought full-color cell phone and texting ban posters that make new rules more visible; Lantal displayed a flat-woven chenille upholstery fabric; InteriorShield showed an anti-microbial treatment for vehicle interiors that's engineered to eliminate and inhibit the growth of bacteria and viruses, and Westmatic pushed an automatic bus washing system designed to use 50 percent less water than conventional units.

Major announcements were made at Expo, including one by the Motorcoach Marketing Council, which said it was partnering with European motorcoach carriers to promote bus and coach travel.

## Top regulators, too

There also was a great deal of

interest in Expo from federal transportation agencies with two of the government's top transportation safety officials — Anne Ferro, administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, and Deborah Hersman, chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board — delivering major addresses.

The two spoke at the opening session where they discussed safety initiatives and called on operators to raise the safety bar in the industry so there are far fewer fatal and other serious motorcoach accidents than there were last year.

Parra said having both of them at Expo and speaking one after the other was a rarity and confirmation of the importance of the annual event.

“I don't think the heads of the two primary safety agencies have ever spoken together at the same meeting back to back,” he said. “This suggested to me that they both saw Expo as the best venue to communicate and reach our industry.”

The show (and perhaps the prospect of bright California sun)

drew hundreds of operators, many in a buying mood, to the Long Beach Convention Center.

## Good attendance

In all, attendance totaled 1,730 operators and others from throughout the industry, down slightly from the 1,770 who registered for last year's event in Tampa, Fla. The number of exhibitors who took part this year nearly matched last year's mark, dropping by just three to 156 from 159.

Larry Hundt of Great Canadian Trailways in Kitchener, Ontario, and chairman of the UMA meetings committee, which stages Expo, said the modest decline in attendees most likely was due to a rule change that limited the number of non-exhibiting vendors allowed on the show floor. There were 89 fewer non-exhibiting vendors at this year's Expo than at Expo 2011.

In the past, Expos on the West Coast — with the exception of San Francisco — have typically drawn fewer people than those held on or closer to the East Coast.

Expo is where the industry an-



NTSB Chairman Deborah Hersman arrived at Expo in a new MCI J4500 coach operated by Bee Line Tours of Tucson, Ariz. During her ride from Los Angeles International Airport to Long Beach she was briefed on new coach safety features and technology.

nually honors its best and brightest, and at this year's UMA Vision Awards Banquet, Windstar Lines Inc. of Carroll, Iowa, was named winner of the Vision Award for large operators (more than 15 coaches); Wise Coaches Inc. of Nashville, Tenn., received the Vision Award for small operators (fewer than 15 coaches); CoachUSA/megabus.com. won the UMA Green Highway Award, and GO Riteway Transportation Group of Richfield, Wis., won the UMA

Safety Leader of the Year Award.

The show was the last one as a stand alone event, at least for the next three years.

UMA and the National Tour Association will co-locate their shows and conferences Jan. 19-23 in Orlando, Fla. They also will combine their shows again in 2014 in Los Angeles and again in 2015 in New Orleans.

“Needless to say, we have terrific momentum going into 2013,” said Parra.

# Industry standouts are recognized at Motorcoach Expo

LONG BEACH, Calif. — The motorcoach industry's top honors were handed out at UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month, with seven major awards going to companies and individuals who were recognized for their achievements.

Expo's gala Vision Awards Banquet and Leadership Luncheon (formerly Operator Luncheon) were the forums for dispensing the honors that each year acknowledge the industry's best and brightest.

UMA Expo has established itself as the premier event for honoring motorcoach industry stars, and the Vision Awards Banquet has become the social highlight of the exposition, with its reception, dinner, awards program, after-dinner cordials, cigars, and dancing.

This year, a whole new cadre of Expo attendees was exposed to the comedic talents of Lou Sardo of Sardo Bus & Coach Upholstery. Sardo is a laidback, joke-telling, mostly amateur comedian who had the audience rollicking with his stand-up routine, which he has done from time to time at previous Expos.

The penultimate awards given at Expo are the two UMA Vision Awards, which were presented this year by UMA board member Dennis Streif of Vandalia Bus Lines in Caseyville, Ill.

The awards recognize a pair of companies — a large and a small operator — that have established high standards of performance, raising the bar in all areas — marketing, maintenance, operations, safety and innovation.

**The UMA Vision Award/Small Operator** (fewer than 15 coaches) went to Wise Coaches of Hermitage, Tenn., a suburb of Nashville.

Wise Coaches is a 13-bus operation headed by Alan Wise.

In announcing the award, Streif said that at Wise Coaches "safety is No. 1. It thinks big and it steps outside the box."

Alan Wise told the banquet audience the award was a "huge, huge honor."

He recounted how he started the business a dozen years ago with two old Eagles. After purchasing his first new Prevost, Wise joked that his sales representative "pushed me out the door with my first \$5,000 bus payment."

That's when Wise decided, "boy, I better get busy."

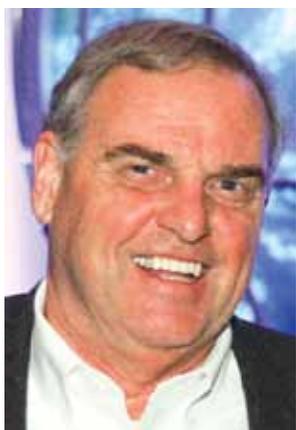
What Wise got busy doing was developing a company that specializes in delivering events, activities, tours and transportation that utilizes the full knowledge, expertise and resources available



Jeff Greteman of Windstar Lines in Carroll, Iowa, and his brothers, Pat, center, and Scott acknowledge winning the UMA Vision Award for large operators.



Alan Wise



John Oakman



John Benjamin



Alan Thrasher



Craig Fong

through his staff and company.

He strives to partner with customers to achieve their objectives by coming up imaginative special events, fun-filled tours and unique theme parties "that make a lasting impression." He describes Wise Coaches as "your door to the exciting sites, attractions, venues that represent Music City USA."

**The UMA Vision Award/Large Operator** (15 or more coaches) went to Windstar Lines of Carroll, Iowa, and the Greteman family.

Jeff and Cathy Greteman founded their company 17 years ago, and it has grown into the largest motorcoach operation in Iowa. It has a fleet of more than 50 coaches operating in four Iowa markets and a terminal in Lincoln, Neb.

It was ranked No. 33 among the 50 largest North American coach operators by *Metro Magazine* its latest compilation.

The company has grown organically, as well as by acquisitions. At the end of January it completed the purchase of the motorcoach division of Stratton Charters of Cuba City, Wis.

Russ Stratton, who sold the

unit that operated five coaches and one Stallion midsize bus, will continue to own and manage his school bus business.

Windstar operates casino, racing and fishing tours, plus specializes in tours throughout the Midwest and charters to anywhere in the U.S.,

In presenting the award, Streif noted the high standards and principles practiced by the Gretemans in operating their company.

Today, Windstar is managed by Jeff and Cathy Greteman and their three sons, Jeff, Pat and Scott.

In accepting the award, Jeff Greteman effusively thanked a trio of executives at ABC Companies — Sales Manager Clint Guth, Senior Account Executive Pete Bachrach and Parts Territory Manager John Peckels — for their assistance in helping make the company successful.

He also acknowledged Matthew Daecher of Daecher Consulting Group for help in managing risk through the National Interstate captive program.

Finally, Greteman thanked UMA for "another first-class convention," his fellow coach opera-

tors for their support, and he dedicated the award to the Greteman brothers' parents "for their faith."

Other awards presented at the Vision banquet were:

**UMA Safety Leader of the Year:** Ronald Bast of GO Riteway Transportation Group in Richfield, Wis. (Last year, the company changed its name from Riteway Bus Service, reflecting its purchase of GO Airport Connection in the fall of 2010.)

The safety leader award is co-sponsored and selected by the Daecher Consulting Group and honors an individual who has made a measurable impact on the safety culture of the industry or of their company.

In presenting the award, Matthew Daecher said that providing safe transportation has been "critical to the success" of GO Riteway.

The company has event recorders on all 650 vehicles it operates, including its more than 500 school buses that serve 25 school districts.

Daecher said GO Riteway may have been the first motorcoach operator in the U.S. to institute a sleep apnea screening program. It also requires all of its employees to

sign a "safety commitment."

Besides its school buses, GO Riteway has a fleet of more than 30 motorcoaches, 7 midsize buses, 2 executive motorcoaches, 2 limo buses and scores of airport shuttles, plus limousines and executive sedans.

Pat Ziska, vice president of sales and marketing at Motor Coach Industries, accepted the award for Ronald Bast, who was attending to the burial of his father, Riteway Bus Service Founder Roland Bast, who died last month. (See article on Page 18.)

**UMA Green Highway Award:** Coach USA/megabus.com of Paramus, N.J.

The award, which was established in 2008 and is sponsored by Motor Coach Industries, recognizes companies that demonstrate organizational leadership in reducing carbon emissions and a



Ronald Bast

## Best 'n brightest

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

commitment to “environmental stewardship” — internally, externally and industrywide.

In presenting the award, MCI's Pat Ziska said Coach USA and megabus had raised the bar on environmental programs within their organization and in consumer awareness programs.

The company's “green achievements” extend from its dedication to fuel conservation and idling reduction policies to its maintenance procedures, recycling programs and facilities management.

It continues to update its fleet with the latest clean-diesel engine technology and is testing new technologies that offer 4 to 6 percent reductions in fuel usage, and it equips its fleet of 1,642 coaches and buses with GPS units that trigger alerts through the company's command center when idle times are exceeded.

Coach USA's organization-wide environmental efforts also include upgrading its facilities with energy-saving lighting fixtures and adding LED lights in its parking lots, moves that are furthering the 20-percent reduction in energy usage it already has achieved.

Additionally, the company

communicates its environmental commitment to consumers, noting on its website and in other communications the energy efficiency of motorcoaches. Ziska said those efforts have helped the company attract new riders.

In accepting the award, John Oakman, Coach USA senior vice president for fleet, maintenance and procurement, noted that Coach USA was among the first companies to join the University of Vermont Green Coach Certification (pilot) Program and it “proudly displays their certificates” on its buses.

“Whether you are an old gun, young gun or new gun, we challenge you to give back to the environment what you have taken from it,” Oakman said.

Later, Dale Moser, president of Coach USA, said the company was “committed to furthering our environmental practices and educating the public on motorcoach travel as a ‘green’ and affordable alternative to automobiles and airplane travel. We're honored to receive this year's Green Highway Award.”

**The UMA Maintenance Interchange Maintenance Competition** was conducted for the sixth consecutive year as part of UMA Motorcoach Expo. Those individuals attending the Interchange were invited to participate in a competi-

tion involving a written test and a timed diagnostic inspection.

The competition was conducted at Pacific Coachways Trailways facility in nearby Garden Grove, Calif.

This year's champion was Craig Fong of Coach America/Franciscan Lines in San Francisco. He was presented with a plaque and took home \$500. Fong tied for runner-up in the same competition at UMA Motorcoach Expo 2008 in San Francisco.

The runners-up at this year's maintenance competition were Randy Allwood of Annett Bus Lines in Sebring, Fla., and Dave Meyerhofer of Kobussen Trailways in Kaukauna, Wis. Allwood and Meyerhofer won \$200 and \$100 each, respectively.

The winners were announced by Kevin Whitworth of Whitworth Bus Sales in Dayton, Ohio, who coordinates the Maintenance Interchange and maintenance competition. This year's Interchange was the 15th such event.

Two awards were presented at the UMA Leadership Luncheon:

**Metro Magazine Motorcoach Operator of the Year:** Larry and John Benjamin of Northfield (Minn.) Lines.

The award is given to an individual or individuals who have

made significant contributions to their organization, as well as the industry. It was the 22nd time the magazine has given the award.

The Benjamin brothers were honored for transforming their company during the past two decades into an operation respected for its safety, driver professionalism, equipment quality, top-notch service, friendly support services, and providing enjoyable travel experiences.

In accepting the award, John Benjamin noted the company was notified it had been selected for the honor just eight days before his brother, Larry, died late last year of cancer at the age of 58. (See Dec. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

“We were able to share it with him,” said John Benjamin.

Larry Benjamin was a longtime director of the United Motorcoach Association and chairman of its Meetings Committee, which stages to UMA Motorcoach Expo.

Northfield is a member of the International Motor Coach Group and operates a fleet of 20 motorcoaches, 10 midsize buses and about 75 school buses.

John Benjamin accepted the award from *Metro* Publisher Frank Di Giacomo.

**BUSRide Motorcoach Industry Achievement Award:** Alan

Thrasher of Vectour Group (formerly International Trailways) and Thrasher Brothers Trailways in Birmingham, Ala.

The award primarily recognized Thrasher for co-founding Vectour, a ground passenger transportation management company.

Five years ago, Thrasher and Vectour co-founder, Reggie Haslam Sr., organized International Trailways to manage the transportation needs of large events, including golf tournaments, conventions and sporting events.

In 2010, it was involved in two high-profile events, the Winter Olympic Games in Canada and the BP oil spill on the U.S. Gulf Coast.

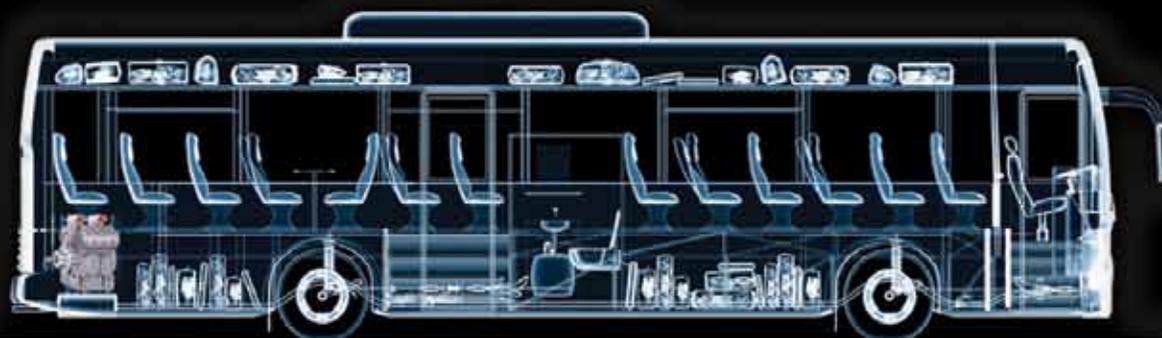
In announcing the award winner, *BUSRide* Editor David Hubbard cited Thrasher's innovative thinking and entrepreneurial spirit. Hubbard also noted that Thrasher had launched his own entertainer coach company.

Thrasher grew up in the motorcoach industry, coming of age in the tour-and-charter company founded by his father Jim Thrasher.

The next UMA Motorcoach Expo will be Jan. 19-23, in Orlando, Fla., and be called UMA Motorcoach Expo at Travel Exchange, reflecting the co-locating of Expo with the annual National Tour Association Convention.

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# One word could help assure tour business success

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Motorcoach companies that want to operate a profitable, customer-friendly and largely trouble-free tour business needed to know word — communications.

That was the suggestion from a UMA Motorcoach Expo panel of the three key individuals involved in any successful tour operation — the motorcoach operator, the tour operator and the coach driver.

“The most important thing is communications,” emphasized Laurie Lincoln, a long-time tour operator and president of Main Street Tours in Torrance, Calif.

She said getting the trio to speak to each other and work together before the tour hits the road usually can head off any problems that might surface during a trip, preventing a bad experience for tour passengers.

Her comments won the endorsement of the other two panelists, motorcoach operator Steve Brown and motorcoach driver Martin Martinez Jr., both of whom stressed that discussing all of the details early on is critical.

“It’s a partnership and it’s our job to bring everyone together,” said Brown, vice president of Brown Coach in Amsterdam, N.Y.

He said the communication process should begin with the tour company providing the coach operator with a detailed itinerary so the trip can be priced correctly and the route planned accurately.

“If the group has a special route they want to take, then we need to know that, too,” he noted.

### Avoiding trouble

However, Brown said the trip planners should avoid putting time sets too close together, which could create problems with a driver trying to get from one place to another in too short a time.

“It’s just an invitation for trouble,” he stated.

After a tour is booked, the trip information then should be passed on to the driver who then can factor in hours-of-service regulations for the trip and study the route for possible road closures, general traffic conditions, lodging and restaurant locations and destination parking facilities.

“The directions are most important because route mistakes can be one of the biggest problems on a tour,” noted Martinez, a personable and experienced driver for Pacific Coachways Trailways in Garden Grove, Calif.

He said although a GPS unit can be useful, they sometimes are inaccurate so every driver should still carry maps for every trip.

“I’m old school and I still have to have those maps,” he said.

Lincoln said while the tour groups generally set the destinations, she likes to leave planning of the precise street-by-street route to the drivers because they usually know the areas and the best routes to take to get in and out of a destination quickly and safely.

### Handling special requests

Despite the coordinated planning, the panelists warned that some issues still can develop during a trip that require the three-member team to resolve.

Among the most frequent are special requests from passengers, either to deviate from the planned route or to visit an attraction not on the itinerary. Those usually are turned down because such ventures could make the group late for a scheduled event or result in the driver facing hours-of-service issues.

Equipment breakdowns, traffic conditions, bad weather and surprise roadside bus inspections are other issues that must be dealt with



Laurie Lincoln



Steve Brown



Martin Martinez Jr.

as quickly as possible.

Lincoln said tour operators like to be the first to know when there is a problem, and they recommend drivers call them immediately with any problems, even before discussing it with the tour group.

“We want to know so we can call the group ourselves before the group calls us,” she said.

### The tipping issue

Tipping is a common problem as well, especially on multiple-day tours when more than one driver is used. If the tip is not included as part of the upfront payment to the tour company, then the drivers should reach an agreement before the tour on how the money should be divided.

“It should be divided based on how much each driver drove on the

trip,” Martinez said.

The panelists stressed, too, that the three principals must respect each others’ businesses, especially when a bus company that runs a tour business on the side has been hired by a tour company.

Problems can develop, they said, when the operator or driver try to promote their own company’s tour operation in hopes of getting the customer to call them the next time they go on a tour.

Brown said if his company is running its own tour then the customers belong to him, but if the carrier is working a tour booked by another company, then the customers belong to them and no sales pitches are acceptable.

“Headhunting for business, that’s just not right,” agreed Martinez.

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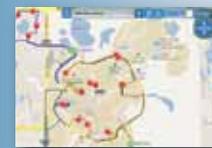


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# Stepped-up inspections are target of operator ire

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Motorcoach operators who aren't happy with the surge in federal and state bus inspections that began last year just might have to get used to it.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration says the inspections will continue, although it has agreed to review the concerns of operators and possibly make some procedural adjustments.

"I am listening to what you are saying here, but we are being very aggressive and we are urging the states to be very aggressive as well." Loretta G. Bitner, chief of the federal agency's passenger carrier safety division, told operators at a meeting of state associations at this year's UMA Motorcoach Expo here.

She said the inspections will remain a priority of the agency as it continues to mount programs designed to improve safety in the industry and get unsafe drivers and operators off the road.

"We are trying to get as many good inspections as we can," she said.

Some operators attending the meeting reported their buses had been subject to multiple inspections within days or weeks of each other, with inspectors putting new stickers on top of ones that were just days or weeks old.

The aggressive inspection regimen is just one of several issues operators face across the country, including continuing squabbles with transit agencies, the use of high-speed traffic lanes and toll roads.

The inspections, though, caused the most stir among operators attending the State Association Sum-



Bob O'Brien of Time Lines in Oklahoma City comments on third-party inspections at the State Association Summit conducted at Expo. Listening, from far left, were California-based industry consultant Jim Seal; Tom Giddens of Pacific Coachways Trailways in Garden City, Calif.; James Harris of Cardinal Coach in Warsaw, N.C., and, at right, Warren Newton of Newton Bus Service in Gloucester, Va.

mit, including the soaring number of inspections motorcoach drivers are encountering across the country.

"I'm in Portland and I could not leave the city without having to stop at a weigh station for an inspection," said Joe Gillis of Northwest Navigator in Portland, Ore.

Godfrey LeBron of Paradise Travel in Hicksville, N.Y., said the state of New York has stepped up its inspections as well and he urged out-of-state drivers, who visit the state to be prepared for them.

"New York is doing bus inspections as they have never done in the past," he warned. "Make sure you have all of your i's dotted and your t's crossed."

## The roadside issue

Others expressed concerns that

too many inspections are being conducted on the roadside, which they maintain creates a multitude of safety and timing issues.

"They seem to have an increased appetite for roadside inspections," contended Gladys Gillis of Starline Luxury Coaches in Seattle.

The operators suggested that regulators get off the highways and interstates and take their work to other locations, particularly tour-and-charter destinations where inspections can be done more safely and where they would be less likely to interfere with driver hours-of-service requirements and passenger time schedules.

Operators worry about passengers missing events or even flights because their coach is caught at a

roadside stop.

Others complained there appears to be little uniformity among inspectors, with some citing operators for certain violations and others ignoring the same problem.

"The inspectors are being too arbitrary," said Tom Cook of Silver City Charter and Tours in Silverdale, Wash.

He said recently an inspector let off one driver who did not have his five-day log with him, while a driver directly behind him was put out of service because he was missing two days of his log.

Bitner said they would review the complaints of operators to see if changes in training or other procedures might be needed.

"We will be looking at these matters, but on balance those in-

spectations that go right are the vast majority," she asserted.

## Many other issues

Meantime, individual states are facing other issues that could spread across the country.

In California, operators are seeing new problems with large school districts wanting to do charters because of school funding cutbacks, while in Rhode Island operators managed to turn back an effort by lawmakers to begin charging a sales tax on charter services.

Several states are looking into either prohibiting motorcoaches from using the high-speed traffic lanes now used by transit buses or requiring operators to purchase stickers to use them.

"Public transit buses don't have to pay for them," noted Jimmy Cantrell of Daniel's Charters in Lula, Ga.

Other operators warned, too, that there is increased talk in some cash-strapped states about establishing tolls on some existing major highways and bridges.

In Philadelphia, the parking authority planned to enforce broad administrative regulations on the motorcoach industry but backed down after operators showed them how regulated the industry already is by numerous state and federal government agencies.

"We educated them," said Elaine Farrell of the Pennsylvania Bus Association.

Also, Virginia operators are pushing legislation that would prevent convicted sex offenders from obtaining commercial licenses to drive motorcoaches.

# What's the top priority at Disney Co.? Employees, not customers

LONG BEACH, Calif. — The top priority at The Walt Disney Co., and its key to repeat business and higher profits, is the employee — and not the customer, says Bruce Kimbrell of the Disney Institute.

The company's business model "turns business inside out," says Kimbrell.

It starts with providing a quality experience for employees, followed by one for customers and, finally, with assuring quality business practices that benefits shareholders.

That may sound counter-intuitive, but it's hard to argue with Disney's success.

Consistently ranked among *Bloomberg BusinessWeek* magazine's Top 10 most recognizable

brands, Disney produces hit movies like "Pirates of the Caribbean," "Toy Story" and "WALL-E," and popular TV shows like "Lost," "Desperate Housewives" and "Modern Family."

The Disneyland theme park in Anaheim, Calif., employs 22,000 workers and is the largest on-site employer in California. Hiring each Disneyland employee costs nearly \$6,000 in training and other expenses, Kimbrell says, who was a featured speaker at UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month.

"We teach that the guest is not No. 1; the employee is No. 1," he said. "We teach also that repeat business, while that's important, is not the goal. But it is the reward if you get (other things) right."

Disneyland depends heavily on repeat business.

While such theme parks as Magic Mountain, Sea World and Knott's Berry Farm attract about 3 million to 3.5 million visitors annually, Disneyland drew 23 million visitors last year, he says. Eight of 10 people who visit Disney are repeat customers, drawn mainly from the Los Angeles region's 23 million residents.

The top three reasons guests cite for return visits are cleanliness, friendly and engaging "cast members," and safety, he says.

Another key Disney practice is attention to detail.

"It's better to change 100 things 1 percent, rather than change one thing 100 percent," says Kimbrell, a

31-year Disney employee and author of "Walt Disney and You," a training program based on founder Walt Disney's ideals and principles.

One big change might be adding a new attraction, like Pirates of the Caribbean or Soarin' over California, which costs between \$300 million and \$400 million and requires 10 or more years to develop and build.

"We can't wow you to that degree every time you come to see us," he says. "What we do want to do is give you a whole bunch of little reasons along your stay to cause you to stop, pause, and go, 'ah.'"

Those "ah" moments add up to a big wow, he says.

He cites an example from a visit he made to a Disney park

with his family. His sons left their Mickey Mouse toys in their Disney hotel room when they went out for the day.

"We got home that night and our Pal Mickey was sitting on the bed with the remote in his hand, watching the Disney Channel," he recalls. "The boys walked in the room and they could not believe what they're seeing. How did Mickey do that?"

"Just so you know, Mickey didn't do that himself. It was a (Disney hotel) housekeeper who did a phenomenal job making the magic."



Bruce Kimbrell

# Six-step sales process can generate results

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Bus and motorcoach operators can boost revenues by having their sales staff adopt a step-by-step process based on the premise that “he who asks the most questions, wins,” says Arlington, Texas-based operator Autumn Dipert Brown.

But knowing which questions to ask — and how to ask them — isn’t always easy.

So, Brown, chief operating officer of Dan Dipert Coaches and Tours, advises using a six-step method to help salespeople ask the right questions and communicate more effectively.

That way, they can move beyond “order taking” and start selling, she says.

Here are the steps, along with a few of her coaching tips:

• **Greet and create rapport:** The salesperson identifies her company, her first name, and obtains the caller’s name and phone number while showing enthusiasm and establishing rapport.

“Remember to smile. Put a mirror in front of your desk so when you are on the phone, you can see yourself. The caller can hear you smile.”

• **Qualify:** The salesperson determines the client’s needs and preferences by asking open-ended questions to start a dialog and more direct questions to get details — all the time listening intently.

“The more questions you ask of the customer, the more information you are going to be able to glean and the better able you’ll be to convince them your company is the best company to fulfill their needs.”

• **Recommend and cross-sell:** The salesperson sells to the client’s needs and preferences while pointing out features and benefits using colorful descriptions and suggesting appropriate, logical services.

“We want to ask specific questions that may relate to their group like: (For a Boy Scout group you might ask) ‘How do you intend to entertain the boys on their way? Would you like us to consider adding Wi-Fi to your charter?’”

• **Ask for a commitment:** The salesperson asks for a deposit or payment in full while addressing the client’s concerns and initiating a date and time for a callback.

“When you book a flight on an airline, they didn’t just say: ‘We’ll send you an itinerary and when you decide to pay, you can.’ They asked you to pay for it right that minute. Why should we be any different?”

• **Close the sale:** The salesperson summarizes the transaction, states the next steps in the process, asks for leads, and thanks the client.

“Don’t forget to say ‘thank you,

we really appreciate your business.’ People like to hear thanks.”

• **Follow up:** The salesperson contacts the client after the trip, and calls again about three months later to ask about future travel plans.

“That customer you already have is the easiest customer to get

back. So don’t let them shop again; get them right back into your store.”

Brown says her method can yield big results. In an informal poll, her peer group reported producing an average of 8 to 11 quotes a day and a closing ratio on them of about 30 percent. She estimates that

by closing a single additional sale per day, that ratio could increase to up to 45 percent.

“If we treated (each call) like a true sale, then every one of us would probably increase our sales 10 percent,” she said. “That’s just fabulous.”

Brown was a presenter last month during the education sessions at UMA Motorcoach Expo here.



Autumn Dipert Brown

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—Daniel Bratcher, V.P. Daisy Charters and Shuttles

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Fernando Martinez of Prevost Car, left, and Gail and Bill Allen of Amador Stage Lines/Amador Trailways have an animated discussion at Expo's Welcome Reception.



California Highway Patrol Officers Jerald Teesdale, left, and Jason Lamborne conducted a complete Level 1 vehicle inspection on the Motorcoach Expo show floor. As they inspected they used a public address system to

talk about what they were looking for and checking. The activity drew a crowd of interested onlookers and note takers, many of who had never seen a Level 1 inspection.



NTA Chairman Jim Riddekopp Jr., left, of Earth Bound Tours in Paailo, Hawaii, and NTA President Lisa Simon toast next year's co-located UMA Motorcoach Expo and NTA Convention with UMA Board Member Michael Neustadt of Coach Tours in Brookfield, Conn.



Ghislian Leduc of Leduc Bus Lines in Rockland, Ont., explains a point during the annual Maintenance Interchange.



Bronwyn Wilson, the new president of the International Motor Coach Group, attending her first Motorcoach Expo, gets pointers from Callen Hotard of Calco Travel in Geismar, La.



Randy Allwood of Annett Bus Lines in Sebring, Fla., searches for defects during the Maintenance Inter-

change Maintenance Competition. Allwood found most, but not all. He finished second in the contest.



UMA Board Member Joan Libby, center, hooks up with industry stalwart Paul Keeshin and his wife, Bonnie, during the Welcome Reception. Keeshin operated Keeshin Charter Service, one of Illinois' largest coach companies, until 1998, when he sold to Coach USA.

# The importance of e-marketing just grows 'n grows



Eric Elliott

LONG BEACH, Calif. — The fear of negative publicity may be most business owners' biggest obstacle to marketing on Facebook or Twitter, but it's actually an opportunity in disguise because social media allows for immediate action, says e-marketing expert Eric Elliott of BusRates.com.

"That's your moment to shine. Respond quickly. Offer a solution," he says. "The user might take the comment down, or say, 'You've been great.' And guess what? They're a long-term customer."

The good news about e-marketing opportunities doesn't end there, says Elliott.

Last year, 95 percent of consumers reported starting their product searches online, and 65 percent cited it as the most important factor in their buying process, an increase of 50 percent over the previous year, Elliott reported.

Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, and conventional marketing tools, like brochures and bus signage, are similar and different, he says. They both focus on a target market and aim to create awareness and drive leads.

But social media is not "big media," and is less formal and less "sales-y," he says.

The informal nature of social media makes it an ideal means for companies to forge relationships with customers, Elliott contends.

"Think about it: If your customer follows you on Twitter or Facebook, and they're posting about X, Y and Z, the next time a person asks for a quote from you, you can say, 'Is this for an upcoming trip?' or 'I saw you posted this, how's it going?' You can have more of a relationship than this other company who's bidding on that same trip," he says.

One caveat Elliott offers is to beware of user-fatigue.

"The thing is you're always indirectly selling yourself but not by saying 'here's a special' or 'look at our shiny bus' It's by saying, 'this is who we are,'" he says.

"Some people say it's the one-in-four rule. For every four Facebook posts or tweets that you do, (only) one should be a direct sales message."

Eric Elliott's E-Marketing Primer:

Facebook. Statistic: More than 800 million active users, who each create an average of 90 pieces of content a month.

Tips: "The easy part is finding someone to manage your company's Facebook account. Every office will have one person who will be willing to manage it," Elliott says.

Twitter. Statistic: More than 200 million users; about 50 million tweets are sent every day.

Tip: "For those who are only on Facebook, I highly recommend you hop over to Twitter. You're going to

find an even more instant stream of communication that you can use to describe your own products and services, learn about other products and services and, most importantly, learn about your clientele," Elliott says.

YouTube. Statistic: More than two billion videos are viewed every day.

Tips: You don't need professional quality video. People want to

see who you are. Don't be afraid to use your own phone cam. Try posting a video walking tour of a new coach that zooms in on amenities such as leather seats.

QR codes. Statistic: Most frequent users are in the 35- to 44-age range, and about 90 percent scan codes to obtain additional product information.

Tips: The codes are easy to create and can be obtained from a multitude of websites for free. Print them on your invoices and receipts.

Broadcast e-mails. Statistic: People who buy products and services through e-mail spend nearly 140 percent more than those who do not.

Tips: Limit the number of e-mails sent to customers to keep them en-

gaged but not overwhelmed; send broadcast e-mails on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and take steps such as using a template or hiring a professional service to ensure your e-mails have an appealing layout.

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## So, you want to be more profitable. Begin right here...

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Forget about the big ideas and focus on the little things to increase your bottom line.

That's advice from David Brown of Holiday Companies, who credits small ideas with helping to raise the company's profit margin from 3 percent in 1998 to a projected 21 percent this year.

"When I look at the evolution of our company, and of the whole industry for the past 30 years, I cannot pinpoint any single big idea that has made anyone rich," Brown says.

"The changes we have seen — video, satellite, electronic logs, WiFi and so on — haven't really made anyone much money."

He pointed instead to the hundreds of small changes his North Carolina-based operation has implemented, such as e-newsletters, employee security badges, keyless yard gates, driver bunk rooms, on-

board hand sanitizer dispensers, mirrors in sales offices, using catalog request data as sales leads, and on and on.

"The real point is that all of these changes, taken together, have put us on a path where we excel every year," he says. "The secret is a willingness to embrace and effect change."

Brown spoke last month during the education sessions at UMA Motorcoach Expo here.

His embrace of incremental change started when he hired a business consulting firm more than a decade ago and came away from the experience with the realization he needed to make changes to shift from "working to create a comfortable company, to building a successful, goal-oriented, driven, highly profitable company."

Over time, he adopted four new management practices: creating supervisory roles and responsibilities

to empower and engage all levels of employees; instituting a schedule of meetings for management, supervisory and other employees; setting budget targets and assessing them on a monthly basis, and seeking new ideas and implementing at least three every month.

Small or large, Brown shared five of his own ideas about running a successful company:

1. Get the "family" out of "family business."

"At Holiday, my whole family, even my extended family out to my great aunts and uncles and cousins...have and are working for the company, and that is a great asset.

"However, no one gets special privileges because they are family. Every family member who works for the company gets the same salary as any non-family member in the same role," he says.

2. Embrace change.

"Create a spirit of change that permeates your entire company. There are better ways to do everything. You just need to find them, and implement them."

3. Get the right tools for the job.

"Whether it is education, like UMA's Bus and Motorcoach Academy, consultants, support groups, whatever it takes to get you ready to succeed. If you are committed and prepared to make a difference, these things pay for themselves rapidly," he says.

4. Recognize your own value.

"No one will ever pay more than you ask," he says. "If you want to work for free, volunteer at the Salvation Army. They could use the help."

But, "if you want to make money, run your business well; price for significant profit, manage your expenses and treat your employees like the professionals

they are."

5. Make every decision a business decision.

"There are hundreds of ways to hold yourself back from success.

Resist. Never make emotional decisions, always step back and analyze the business effect of your next move," he says.

"At every EXPO, you and I are routinely asked how many buses we have, as some measure of our success. I would rather spend time talking to a five-bus operator making a 20 percent net than to a 50-bus operator making a 3 percent net.

"That five-bus operator is sitting on a ton of great ideas that I want to take home and copy to improve my business."



David Brown

## Technology may be great, but the driver is still No. 1

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Despite the boom in new safety technologies, including stability control systems, driver monitoring cameras and electronic logging devices, there's still no substitute for a conscientious professional behind the wheel.

That was one of the few clear-cut conclusions from a UMA Motorcoach Expo driver panel on "Technology, Behavior, Training and Owner Responsibility."

The panel was comprised of three veteran drivers with a combined total of 50 years' experience and an operator with a record of embracing new technology.

Collectively, the drivers reported their coaches are equipped with a wide array of technology, including Teletrac, DriveCam, GPS monitoring and navigation systems, fire-suppression systems, tire-pressure monitoring systems, and back-up cameras.

Opinions varied widely on the merits of nearly all of them, even the near-ubiquitous GPS navigation system.

"For me, I've found any navigation system nowadays makes you lazy. It's taken away the skill from the coach operator," said James Edwards of Royal Coach Tours in San Jose, a professional driver for 17 years.

Michael Beaton of H&L Charter in Cucamonga, Calif., said he hasn't opened a road atlas in a long time. Rather than making him lazy, he said GPS had enabled him to



The driver panel consisted of, from left, Gary Bauer, James Edward, Joanne Forbes and Michael Beaton

offer broader services to his clients, such as offering suggestions of nearby restaurants when asked, he says.

It also alerts him to freeway traffic congestion so he can re-route en route when necessary.

Joanne Forbes of Cavalier Coach Trailways in Boston, objects to GPS units on safety grounds.

"I find that it's a distraction," she said. "If you're paying attention to the GPS, you don't see cars coming up on the left or on the right or cutting in front of you," says Forbes, a 23-year veteran of coach driving.

Operator Gary Bauer, owner of Bauer's Intelligent Transportation in San Francisco, says the benefits of GPS, driver monitoring systems and other integrated technologies accrue to his drivers, who earn bonuses based on their savings in gas, body damage and other coach repairs.

"At the end of the day, how do

'For me, I've found any navigation system nowadays makes you lazy.'

you track mileage? Was the accident their fault or somebody else's fault? It's all technology that makes it happen. When they get (cash bonuses), that's what it's all about. These people embrace the technology," he says.

And so it went, with panelists voicing varying opinions and reporting different practices relating to technology. Such diversity was welcomed since the goal of the discussion was to help operators consider a range of ideas.

"I think a lot of times we do things at the management level and don't always incorporate everybody's viewpoint," said moderator Matt Daecher of Daecher Consulting Group in Camp

Hill, Pa.

Here's a sampling of panelists thoughts on other topics:

On safety technology such as fire-suppression and tire-monitoring systems:

James Edward: "I do feel that with the majority of the new technologies today that there's a false sense of security. Period...I want to get in my coach, check out my coach with a proper pre-trip, go down the road the old-school way. If a coach operator is checking his gauges, checking his mirror, he doesn't need all these gadgets."

Michael Beaton: "At the end of the day, we have rules and regulations that we have to follow. This also taps into whoever is your company safety supervisor.

"Whether there is a smart tire on there or not to tell you that your tire is 98 degrees, it's still your job as a driver to go out there every day and check your tires. The law says you have to do it. If you don't know that, whoever is your safety

supervisor or your boss has to step in and make sure you get training."

On what motivates drivers to do a great job:

Joanne Forbes: "It's always, always been about pride to me; that I take pride in what I do and I have to be proud of what I do...If you have an incentive program, great. They're going to go out here and work their butt off and meet that quota and get the incentive.

"If you don't have an incentive, are they going to go out there and work their butt off? But if you get up in the morning and you're proud of what you're doing, you're going to out and do the same job each and every day."

Edward: "First has got to be pay...Second is your equipment and who you work for."

Beaton: "I'm not making the biggest bucks...I think a lot of it has to do with who you want to work for...and your commitment to your job."

## Attending transit meetings: Being a pest is a good thing

LONG BEACH, Calif. — A sure way for private motorcoach operators to increase their chances of getting work from their local public transit agency is to become a pest.

That's right, a pest.

A panel of operators who have done it successfully stressed that point during a UMA Motorcoach Expo education session on community involvement, suggesting operators need to become a permanent face at transit board meetings and speak up often when the floor is open for comments.

"You can just sit in the room with them," said Alan Thrasher of Thrasher Brothers Trailways in Birmingham, Ala. "They get very edgy when you're there because they don't like it when the public comes to their (meetings and) hearings."

He said when issues arise that involve transportation work that private carriers might be able to do, operators should raise their hand, speak up and let the board know your company is ready, willing and able.

Eventually, he said, the transit community will get to know individual operators and their companies, and it could lead to new revenue streams.

"You really can beat City Hall," he said.

Brian Scott of Escot Bus Lines in Largo, Fla., said his first experience with public transit officials was about six years ago when he went to a board meeting to complain about a bus issue.

"It was kind of a rocky start," he said.

Over the years, though, he has not only gotten numerous jobs for his company from the transit agency, but the board put him on two of its committees and several times asked him to serve on the board.

"I had to back away from that one, though, because of a possible conflict of interest," he said.

Scott said it's important for operators to get involved with their transit agency as soon as possible so they are in on the beginning when something that might lead to work begins to develop.

"Once a transit agency puts up its flag, they are not going to give it up, so you have to get in at the planning stages," he said.

Jimmy Cantrell of Daniel's Charters in Lula, Ga., said offering a free service in the community can be another way to expand business, not only with transit agen-



Alan Thrasher

Brian Scott

'Community involvement requires patience because it can take a great deal of time before it leads to new businesses.'

cies, but other government offices as well.

"You have to ask yourself how it will benefit you, though," he said.

Cantrell said he once was asked by the wife of the Alabama governor to provide transportation for a women's group and after he agreed, it gave him a direct line to the governor when ever he needed to talk with him.

In addition, he said for the past four years he has been providing transportation for new teachers who have joined the area school district.

"The first thing they do is get on your coach, and I've gotten a lot of business from that," he said.

The panelists suggested, too, that donating money to political causes is another good way to turn community involvement into business and influence.

"It can be some of the best advertising you can do," suggested Cantrell.

Thrasher cautioned, however, that conversation — along with the money — can greatly enhance the benefits, noting that operators need to meet face-to-face with the candidates they are helping finance.

"You have to get engaged with them so they know who you are," he said. "They'll take your money but if you don't engage them in good conversation they won't know you."

Panel members stressed, too, that community involvement requires patience because it can take a great deal of time — several years in some cases — before it leads to new businesses.

"The best time to get involved in your community was five years ago and the next best time is today," said Scott.

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# Motorcoach Marketing Council makes a Smart Move

LONG BEACH, Calif. — A bus and motorcoach promotional campaign that has been endorsed by trade groups, bus manufacturers and media organizations around the world is being adopted by the Motorcoach Marketing Council.

The council, the grassroots organization established four years ago to promote motorcoach travel in North America, announced at UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month that it has joined “Smart Move.”

Smart Move was developed just over two years ago by the Geneva-based International Road Transport Union, which has bus and coach members in 70 countries, and Busworld, the global organization that develops meetings for bus and coach builders and operators worldwide.

It’s a long-range Smart Move campaign aimed at promoting bus and coach travel wherever tour-and-charter buses operate. It has been endorsed by 86 industry, association and media partners, including the United Motorcoach and American Bus associations and the Global Passenger Network.

Smart Move focuses much of its effort on decision makers, hoping to raise their awareness of the

safety, environmental benefits, affordability, user-friendliness and efficiency of buses and coaches.

“It’s a natural fit for the council to join Smart Move and contribute to this global industry effort,” said Council Chairman Brian Annett of Annett Bus Lines in Sebring, Fla.

“We share the same long-term goals — to improve public perception of the motorcoach and fill more seats,” Annett added.

By partnering with Smart Move, the Motorcoach Council will be adopting the same campaign messages, themes and graphics that are being used globally to communicate the advantages of motorcoach travel, noted Victor Parra, president and chief executive of UMA, and a director of the Motorcoach Marketing Council.

Executive Director Heather Horton said the partnership will allow the Motorcoach Marketing Council to disseminate and share Smart Move campaign and marketing materials, fact sheets, videos and best practices with motorcoach operators and campaign supporters.

It also will strengthen the council’s outreach to politicians, media and the general public, she noted.

To learn more about the Motorcoach Council’s new campaign,



Motorcoach Marketing Council Chairman Brian Annett appeared at Expo’s Leadership Luncheon to announce the council’s adoption of a promotional campaign

that’s widely used in Europe and elsewhere to promote motorcoach travel. The campaign’s “Smart Move” logo is below.

“Bus & Coach. The Smart Move,” go to [www.GoMotorcoach.org](http://www.GoMotorcoach.org).

For additional information about the international Smart Move program, go to: [www.busandcoach.travel](http://www.busandcoach.travel).

The council also maintains an industry facing website at [www.MotorcoachCouncil.org](http://www.MotorcoachCouncil.org).



## Young Guns brainstorm future

**Top right:** Young Guns’ leaders Ray Land, left, and Ryan Cupp, right, team up to lead discussion.

**Bottom right:** Gene Wright Jr., right, captures thoughts and ideas during the group’s Expo session.

**Below:** Mike Costa, center right, conducts a give-and-take meeting during the planning process.



# UMA gets new chairman, vice chairman, board members

LONG BEACH, Calif. — For the second time in two years, the son of a founder of the United Motorcoach Association has become the group's chairman.

Bill Allen of Amador Stage Lines/Amador Trailways in Sacramento, Calif., son of UMA founding director Alex Allen, became the association's chairman at the conclusion of UMA Motorcoach Expo 2012 here last month.

Bill Allen succeeded Tom Ready of Ready Bus Lines in La Crescent, Minn., who served the past two years as UMA chairman. Ready is the son of UMA founding director Joe Ready.

Alex Allen and Joe Ready were members of a small group of operators who founded UMA 41 years ago. At its founding, the organization was known as United Bus Owners of America.

At a board organizational meeting on the final day of Motorcoach Expo 2012, Tom Ready passed a gavel to Bill Allen, symbolizing Allen's succession to chairman under the group's bylaws. Allen had been vice chairman for the past two years.

Brian Annett of Annett Bus Lines in Sebring, Fla., who had been UMA treasurer and is a board



Bill Allen



Brian Annett



Callen Hotard



Dan Shoup



Jeff Polzien

member, was elected vice chairman by fellow directors. Annett will become chairman in two years.

Elected to succeed Annett as treasurer was Gladys Gillis of Starline Luxury Coaches in Seattle.

And re-elected secretary was Marcia Milton of First Priority Trailways in District Heights, Md.

The terms of treasurer and secretary are one year.

The UMA board also has three new members.

Callen Hotard of Calco Travel in Geismar, La., was elected to a three-year term as director from UMA Region One, which consists largely of states west of the Mississippi River.

The UMA board appointed Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City to fill the unexpired term of the late Larry Benjamin of Northfield (Minn.) Lines, who died in November. Polzien is a former UMA treasurer and long-time board member. Like Hotard, Polzien also will help represent Region One.

Well-known operator Dan Shoup of Cardinal Buses in Middlebury, Ind., also was appointed to fill an unexpired term on the UMA board. He replaced Dave Bolen, who resigned last year after selling his company, and he will help represent UMA Region Two, the Midwest and Southeast.

The terms of Shoup and Pol-

zien will expire in 2014.

Six UMA directors returned to the board by virtue of being re-elected or by acclimation from running unopposed in balloting conducted this past fall.

Brian Annett and Ralph Young have new three-year terms from Region Two.

Godfrey LeBron and Joan Libby have new three-year terms from Region Three, the East.

Larry Hundt of Great Canadian Trailways in Ontario, who represents Canada on the UMA board, also has a new three-year term.

Ready was re-elected to a three-year term from Region One.

And Tim Wayland, chief finan-

cial officer of ABC Companies, was re-elected to a three-year term as coach-builder representative on the board.

Autumn Dipert Brown left the board and was honored at the UMA Leadership Luncheon at Expo 2012.

The company Allen heads was established in 1852 as a stagecoach line, carrying passengers from paddle-wheel steamboats in Sacramento to the communities in the gold country of Northern California.

Today it is one of the largest private bus companies in Northern California, with operations in northern Nevada, including Lake Tahoe and Reno, and in metro San Francisco.



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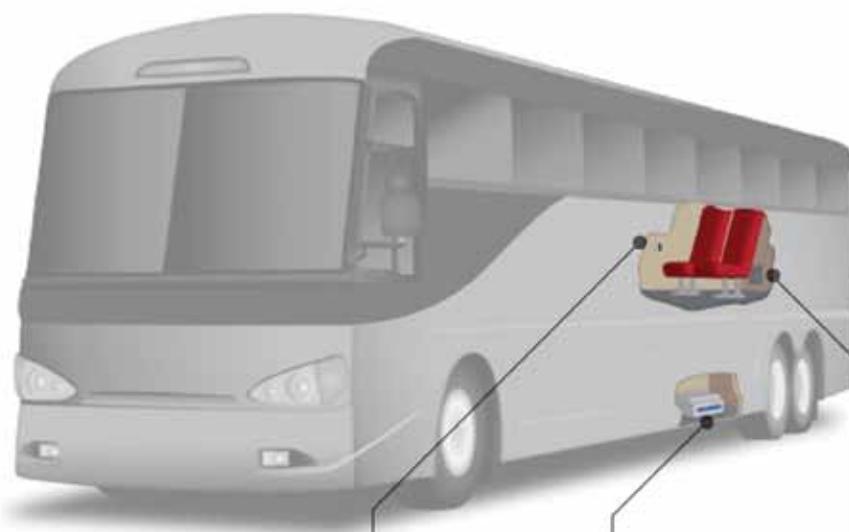
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Anne Ferro Deborah Hersman

## Safety officials

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

is, it is up to the driver to use it.”

She said there are challenges that could tax the goal of reaching a zero fatality year, suggesting that barriers to entering the industry are extremely low and penalties issued to violators by federal regulators do not appear to be much of a deterrent.

“And, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration does not have enough staff,” she noted.

Still, she expressed confidence in operators being able to get the job done and meeting the zero goal.

Hersman was followed at the podium by FMCSA Administrator Anne Ferro, who delivered some good news to operators who have been frustrated by some aspects of the agency’s Compliance Safety Accountability Program.

She said operators soon will be able to challenge accidents that were not the fault of their drivers. Currently, all accidents are listed in the CSA system with no mention of who was responsible.

Ferro told operators that last year’s high number of fatalities resulting from motorcoach crashes has made regulators more aggressive than in the past.

“It was a real wakeup call for us to up the ante,” she said.

She warned operators that the agency will continue its broad campaign to force bad drivers off the highways and bad operators out of the industry.

That means more strike force inspections and compliance reviews and much closer scrutiny of company safety records and scores.

“We will use every tool available to shut down bad carriers,” she said.

Ferro said her agency also continues studying hours-of-service regulations for drivers, and is working on certifying physicians who give medical examinations to drivers, reviving a court-blocked mandate for the use of electronic onboard recorders, and opening up company safety records to the public so consumers can make a more informed choice when hiring a carrier.

# Excitement builds for revamped Expo next year

ORLANDO, Fla. — The success of last month’s UMA Motorcoach Expo in Long Beach, Calif., is expected to bolster the co-locating next year of UMA’s annual exposition with the convention of the National Tour Association here.

Key aspects and signature events of both associations’ trade shows will be little changed from the way they have been conducted for years, while other activities will be retooled, revamped, revised and revved up.

For example, the UMA Expo trade show floor — with its 150+ exhibitors and endless tire-kicking opportunities — will be exactly the same — except, of course, for the latest products and services.

In fact, next year’s Motorcoach Expo will occupy the same convention center space utilized in 2009 when Expo was last in Orlando.

At the same time, what will be different will be the networking events, luncheons, banquets, and solution sessions.

For NTA members, their tried-and-true, one-on-one business appointment sessions with tour buyers and sellers, and important networking sessions with destinations, hotels, restaurants and attractions will take place unabated and unaltered.

While the final layout of the co-located conventions hasn’t yet been completed, one thing seems fairly certain: there will be separate and distinct floors for both organizations’ trade show activities.

However, the show areas may be separated by what the convention industry calls “air walls” or similar dividers that will partition the space but allow unfettered interchange between them.

Also noticeably different will be the increased number of people attending both shows, which is a key reason for co-locating the events — more people, more vendors, more business.

The expanded attendance also will mean a broader array of education programs.

Finally, the two events will have modified names: UMA Motorcoach Expo at Travel Exchange, and NTA Convention at Travel Exchange.

“Travel Exchange” will become the buzz words for the two shows occurring under one roof.

“We built momentum with (the Long Beach UMA Expo) for next year,” said UMA board member Larry Hundt of Great Canadian Trailways in Kitchener, Ontario, and chairman of the UMA committee that stages Expo.

He said co-locating the shows



Vendor sign-up for UMA Motorcoach Expo 2013 at Travel Exchange got off to a strong start on the final day of Expo 2012. Mike Muldoon, right, of Naylor/

CMG, a convention management company, assisted Duane Geiger, center, and Cem Yazmanoglu, left, of Temsa pick their space.

is a phenomenal idea that’s going to take the organizations to levels never before achieved.

The best indicator of the interest in UMA Motorcoach Expo at Travel Exchange was evident when exhibitors signed-up for the event.

Suppliers and vendors increased their show-floor commitments for next year by 21 percent from a year ago and 53 percent from two years ago.

In all, exhibitors signed up for 43,800 square feet of space on the initial day of space selection, versus 35,000 square feet on the first day of commitments a year ago.

“There are a lot of possibilities,” said Michael Neustadt of Coach Tours in Brookfield, Conn., a UMA board member and chairman of the UMA taskforce that’s working with NTA to coordinate the two shows next year.

“We just have to figure out how to maximize the opportunities.”

Tom Ready of Ready Bus Line in La Crescent, Minn., and the immediate past chairman of UMA, said the association had taken Expo to its limits, and the co-located show will take things to a new level.

Victor Parra, UMA president and chief executive, echoed Hundt’s contention there’s a great deal of momentum going into 2013, following the Long Beach Expo.

“There’s tremendous excitement with UMA and NTA combining our conventions under the umbrella of Travel Exchange, and all the feedback we’ve received so far has been overwhelmingly positive,” he said. “Motorcoach operators see the obvious benefits of bringing in the world’s leading

tour operators and their suppliers to our motorcoach venue.”

He called it a “natural marriage” and emphasized that both associations will benefit greatly by including all aspects of the group travel business process under one roof.

“Like one member told me, this will be a must-attend convention,” he said.

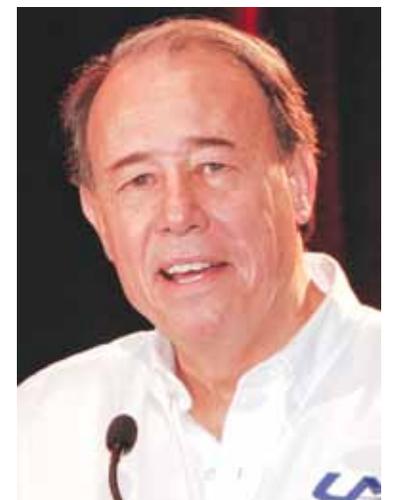
NTA, which has begun promoting the combined show to its members, said the event will bring together itinerary designers and tour product developers, equipment manufacturers and operators, and destinations, hotels, restaurants and attractions.

Its members, the tour association said, will still have their one-on-one business meetings, full slate of industry-focused education sessions and fun networking opportunities with industry movers and shakers.

Additionally, there will be access to a trade show floor of more potential partners and industry resources, as well as more networking and partnering opportunities.

Mark Hoffmann of Sports Leisure Vacations in Sacramento, Calif., and next year’s NTA chairman, said combing of the shows is being done to expand the business opportunities for both NTA and UMA members, and he’s confident it will be highly successful. He said he became convinced of the opportunities after attending his very first Expo in Long Beach.

NTA members “need to come to Orlando and be a part of the UMA-NTA Travel Exchange,” he said. “It’s going to present opportunities that...



Victor Parra

you never knew existed.”

Ken Presley, vice president and chief operating officer of UMA, said members of his organization will find new opportunities at the joint show as well.

“UMA’s co-location with NTA in Orlando next year will provide all the bells and whistles motorcoach operators have come to expect from UMA Motorcoach Expo, plus the unprecedented opportunity for charter bus companies to market their company to the leading tour operators in the country, formally and informally,” he emphasized.

He said for 30 years, operators have attended the UMA shows ready to learn, inform, network and purchase. But next year, he stressed, sell has been added and charter bus operators will have the opportunity to learn, inform, network, purchase and sell their company’s charter services in one place.

“The opportunity is simply unprecedented,” he said.

# Driver cell calls almost cost Greyhound \$500 million

HOUSTON — If motorcoach operators haven't found a good enough reason to make sure their drivers aren't using hand-held cell phones while behind the wheel, they should take a close look at a recent state court case here.

A 12-person jury awarded nearly \$17.7 million to two women who were injured when the Greyhound they were riding in ran off the road and flipped over while the driver apparently was using his cell phone.

The award, which was more than triple what the victims sought, included \$5.97 million in compensatory damages to Janie Reeves and \$2.12 million to Ashley Reedy, plus an additional \$4.8 million to each of them in punitive damages.

The bottom-line message: Juries have zero tolerance for motorcoach drivers talking on a hand-held cell phone while behind the wheel.

While the total amount of the award was staggering, the jury tried — and came within a single vote of succeeding — to push the total punitive damages to a whopping \$500 million. The only thing that prevented the huge award was one juror who refused to go along

with the other 11 panel members.

"It's just the latest indication of how juries react to drivers and the use of cell phones," suggested Randy O'Neill, vice president of Lancer Insurance Co., a leading provider of insurance to the motorcoach industry. "It's a problem and it's getting worse as the proliferation of cell phones continues."

He said it is becoming extremely important that drivers strictly avoid anything — eating, drinking, talking on a cell phone or using any type of electronic device — that might distract them from driving.

"If a driver must use the phone, it certainly must be hands-free and it must be used only in an emergency," he said, adding that for any other use the driver should first pull off the road and park in a safe location.

Additionally, he said it also is important for operators to include in their company policies a strict ban on employees using hand-held cell phones while driving, and to make certain everyone in the company not only understands it but follows the rule as well.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration made driver

distraction a target of its safety programs last year and early this year banned drivers from using hand-held telephones while driving.

Drivers violating the rule can be fined \$2,750 and operators who allow their drivers to use a hand-held cell phone while driving can be penalized as much as \$11,000.

Lancer also has been warning the motorcoach industry that the rise in juror anger over drivers using cell phones while at the wheel can have financially devastating consequences and operators need to heed the message.

"We've frequently described how cell phone usage generates anger that will drive up verdicts, perhaps substantially," said Paul Berne, Lancer senior vice president for claims. "With 11 of the 12 jurors on this case prepared to award \$500 million in punitive damages, we can now frame just how much anger can be generated."

He said the message will be emphasized in an advisory that will be sent to all of the company's policyholders.

The accident that triggered the threat of the \$500 million award

occurred on a wintry night in 2007, on Interstate 40, a short distance inside the Texas border with Oklahoma. While the highway in Oklahoma was concrete and retained some heat that prevented it from freezing over, the pavement in Texas was asphalt and was covered with about a three-inch sheet of ice.

Greyhound maintained during the three-week trial that the accident was unavoidable because of the poor weather conditions and the condition of the road, pointing out that within a four-mile radius of the accident there were 186 vehicle crashes in Texas and just four in Oklahoma.

Attorneys for the two accident victims, however, hammered away at the driver's use of the cell phone, revealing that a check of his cell phone records showed he made or received 17 calls during the three hours leading up to the accident, including one just before or during the crash.

They initially were tipped off about the driver being on his cell phone by a passenger who was seated at the front of the bus. At least one other witness also reported seeing the driver talking on

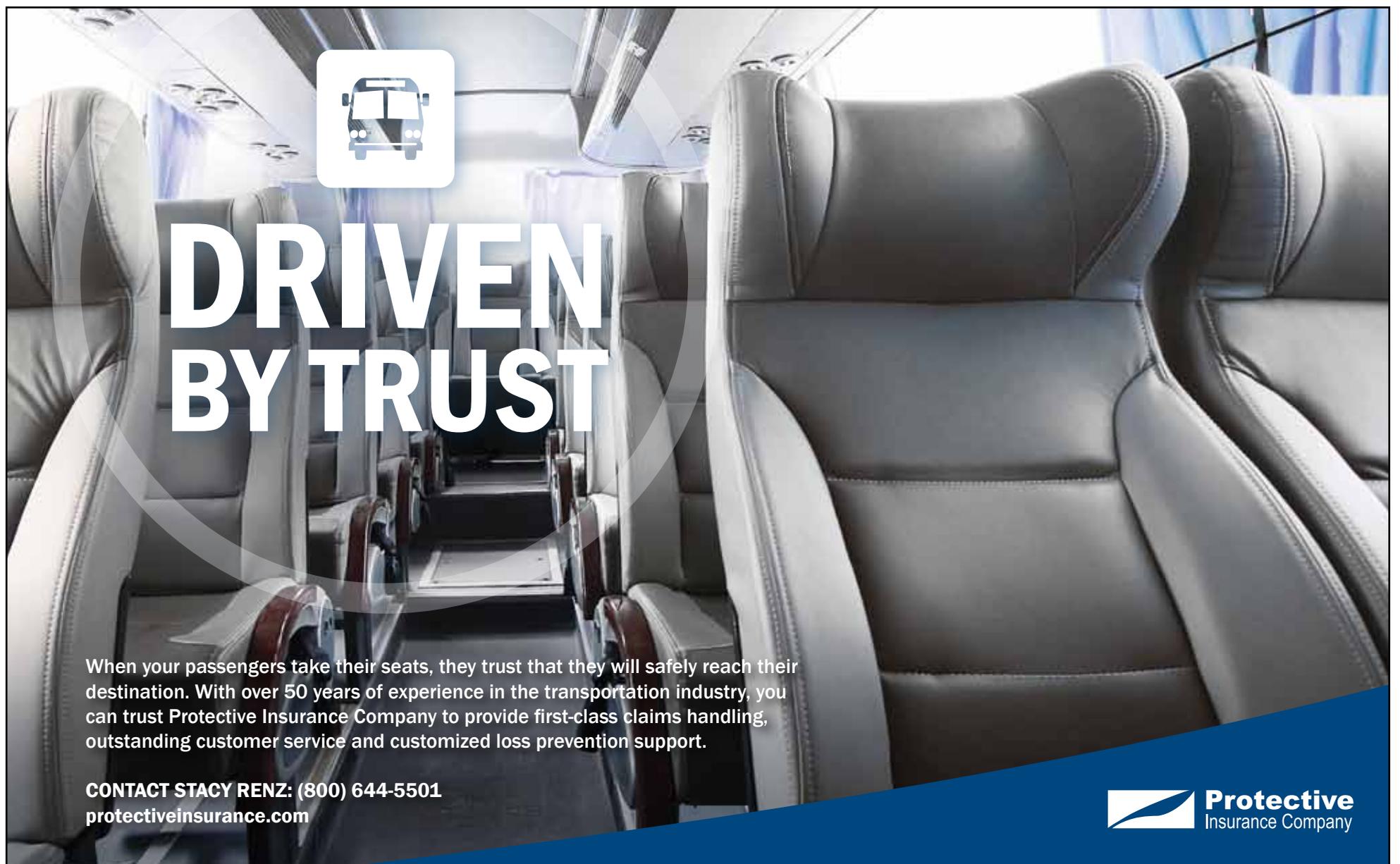
the phone.

The attorneys also faulted the driver for not following a company policy that required him to put chains on the tires of the bus after being warned by other bus drivers that the roads in Texas were ice covered.

In addition they contended that Greyhound was negligent in hiring the driver, Rashad Nichols, because it violated a company rule that does not allow the hiring of a driver who has had more than two serious moving violations within a three-year period. Nichols reportedly had three speeding tickets eight months before the accident.

The jury, which reached the \$17.7 million verdict after deliberating a full day on the compensatory damages and another day on the punitive damages, found Greyhound 80 percent responsible for the accident and the driver 20 percent at fault.

The total damages awarded by the jury were well above the \$3 million requested by Reeves, who suffered a fractured pelvis, ruptured spleen, several broken ribs and a collapsed lung, and the \$2.35 million sought by Reedy, who incurred a herniated disc.



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## Darren Berg gets 18-year sentence

SEATTLE — Darren Berg, who four and five years ago was a motorcoach industry star, receiving awards and setting growth records, was sentenced to 18 years in prison last month.

Berg defrauded hundreds of investors of more than \$100 million through investment funds he operated for nearly a decade.

Upwards of \$45 million to \$48 million of the \$350 million investors gave Berg over the years was pumped into his motorcoach company, MTR Western, that between 2003 and 2009 grew from four coaches to be the industry's 12th largest operation, with a fleet of nearly 170 coaches.

Along the way Berg became the initial winner of the industry's Green Highway Award in 2008 and the *BusRide* Motorcoach Industry Achievement Award in 2007, and was elected to the board of the American Bus Association.

Additionally, Berg funneled millions to himself to maintain an extraordinarily lavish lifestyle that included luxury yachts, private jets, expensive cars, multiple homes, and remodeling his \$12 million waterfront Mercer Island mansion into a showpiece.

But in court last month Berg was both contrite and defensive when he received his sentence from U.S. District Judge Richard A. Jones, who recited details from

statements from individuals who had been victimized by Berg.

"I'm not sure how you live with yourself, with the damage that you caused," Jones told Berg.

The judge noted that the lead defendant in a \$90 million Ponzi scheme, previously considered Washington state's largest fraud, received a 20-year sentence. But he said the slightly shorter term for Berg was appropriate since he had cooperated with prosecutors and bankruptcy trustees unraveling his scheme.

Berg, 49, addressed the courtroom audience of former investors and family members in a five-minute monologue, occasionally smiling and occasionally choking up as he acknowledged "the horrific mess that I've made."

"Not only do I owe you \$100 million, or \$120 million, a staggering sum, not only do I owe you an apology, I've also felt I owe you an explanation," he said.

He then ran through spreadsheets and a chart that challenged the government's version of when his Meridian Mortgage investment funds, created to purchase seller-



Darren Berg

financed real estate contracts, turned into a Ponzi scheme that simply paid investors with new investors' money.

"Did I run a 10-year Ponzi scheme and defraud you for 10 years, or did I run a legitimate business and then defraud you?" he asked, declaring that it was the latter.

Prosecutors say Berg's investment funds operated fraudulently as early as 2002, its financial problems compounded by unauthorized withdrawals to fund his lavish lifestyle and the tens of millions sunk into creating MTR Western, a company that was sold in bankruptcy court and continues to operate under new ownership with a fleet of 95 vehicles.

Berg insisted in his courtroom statement that his investment funds became a Ponzi scheme in 2008, although his attorneys have acknowledged the improper withdrawals came earlier.

One of two former investors who spoke in court, Richard Padrick, said he was robbed of the retirement money he'd saved over more 50 years working in the Navy and as a civil engineer.

"Every financial choice I make every day for the rest of my life is affected," he said, urging Judge Jones to impose a 50-year sentence. "Mr. Berg has given me a life sentence."

## Nat'l Interstate reports early 2011 results

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Corp. anticipates reporting 2011 after-tax earnings from operations that are 11 to 13 percent higher than those of 2010, thanks in large measure to a strong fourth quarter.

On a per-share basis, National Interstate expects to report net after-tax earnings from operations of \$1.76 to \$1.79, compared to \$1.58

per share in 2010.

National Interstate's net after-tax earnings from operations include underwriting income and net investment income.

At the same time, National Interstate's (bottom-line) net income per share for 2011 is expected to be between \$1.79 to \$1.85, down from 2010 net income per share of \$2.03, which was boosted by a one-time

gain from its purchase of Vanliner Insurance Co. of 38 cents per share.

Gross premiums written by National Interstate increased 20 percent during 2011, compared to 2010, reflecting the favorable impact of growth in existing businesses as well as the Vanliner acquisition in 2010, the company said.

National Interstate will report final 2011 numbers later this month.

## UMA backs bill

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

unnecessary, duplicative, costly, and bordering on extortion.

More importantly, such a rating system would incentivize operators to improve their operations and safety performance.

It also would eliminate the current amorphous federal rating system of satisfactory, unsatisfactory and conditional.

Under the proposed bill, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration would be required to adopt regulations that create a system that rates the safety performance of motorcoach companies

using specific criteria and assigns a letter grade based on the results of annual inspections.

Companies would be required to display their letter grades "prominently" in every motorcoach they operate and in all announcements, advertisements and points of sale.

Anyone selling tickets for motorcoach services also would have to display the ratings for the companies they use or market.

"While safety records for operators of motorcoaches can be researched online through the FMCSA website, the information is not easily accessible for passengers who seek to purchase tickets,"

Schumer noted.

Under his bill, any operator that has not received sufficient inspections or been subject to a compliance review during the most recent 12-month period would display a "No Safety Data" rating in lieu of a letter grade rating.

Schumer's bill has been assigned to the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

The proposed legislation would only apply to private motorcoach operators that receive compensation for their services and not to public transit agencies or school buses, including so-called school activity buses.

## Rollie Bast dies at age 91, founder of Riteway Bus

GERMANTOWN, Wis. — Roland W. 'Rollie' Bast, founder of Riteway Bus Service of Richfield, Wis., died last month. He was 91.

Mr. Bast, whose life interests ranged from farming, to draft horses, to auctioneering, to square dance calling, founded Riteway Bus 55 years ago.

Like the variety in Mr. Bast's life, Riteway is a diverse passenger transportation company that includes school buses, airport shuttles, motorcoaches, sedans and limousines. It is widely recognized for its "green"-transportation innovations and initiatives.

Late last year the company changed its name to GO Riteway Transportation Group.

A life-long farmer, Mr. Bast raised and showed draft horses. In 1951, he graduated from auctioneering school, beginning another life-long career.

He also was a 4-H leader and volunteered as a square dance caller. He had perfect attendance at Germantown Rotary Club for 40 years, and volunteered at the Germantown Fire Department for 50 years, starting in 1948, serving as

president from 1959-1984.

Additionally, he served on the Germantown Mutual Insurance Co. board from 1975-2011; the Farmers & Merchants Bank/Associated Bank-Jackson board from 1972-1988, and the Washington County Fair Park Board 1999-2010.

He was named Germantown Citizen of the Year in 1999, Jackson-area Business Association Man of the Year in 2000, and inducted into the Menomonee Falls High School Wall of Recognition in 2006.

Mr. Bast was dedicated to his family and community, and was known for his joyful outlook and infectious laugh.

He is survived by his wife of nearly 70 years, Pearl; his son, Ronald, who heads GO Riteway, and a daughter Rochelle Moore.

A memorial in Mr. Bast's name has been established with the Germantown Historical Society, N128 W18780 Holy Hill Road, P.O. Box 31, Germantown, WI 53022.

The historical society operates the Bast Bell Museum and Fire Hall, which houses 5,000 bells.

## Thomas Cheeseman dies at 68, worked at DATTCO, Trailways

NEW BRITAIN, Conn. — Thomas A. Cheeseman, a former administrator for Trailways, Greyhound Lines and DATTCO Inc., died here last month. He was 68.

Mr. Cheeseman was born in Newport News, Va., and served eight years in the Air Force.

After his military service he settled in East Hartford, Conn., and worked for aircraft engine maker Pratt & Whitney.

He left Pratt & Whitney and worked at Trailways, Greyhound and DATTCO before beginning a long tenure as an operations man-

ager and community partnerships coordinator for Middletown (Conn.) Area Transit.

In all, he spent 40 years in transportation. He was a long-time member of the Connecticut Bus Association and Community Transportation Association of America.

Survivors include his wife, Linda; his mother, and two daughters.

A memorial in Mr. Cheeseman's name has been established with the Middletown Assoc. of Retarded Citizens, 124 Washington St., Middletown, CT 06457.

## Joanne Smith Christian honored

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — ABC Companies of Faribault, Minn., and its owners, the Cornell family, have made a donation to the Bus & Motorcoach Academy Clarence Cornell School of Business in the memory of Joanne Smith Christian of Royal Coach Tours in San Jose, Calif.

Mrs. Christian, who co-founded what became Royal Coach Tours, died in August at the age of 74.

In 1960, she and her then husband took her winnings from a

keno ticket and purchased a school bus to transport workers to a defense plant. Within a couple of years the company transitioned into a charter operation, eventually becoming Royal Coach Tours, one of northern California's largest operators.

Clarence "Clancy" Cornell founded ABC Companies.

Bus & Motorcoach Academy is operated by the United Motorcoach Association.

The legislation uses the definition of motorcoach already established in federal law, specifically

the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) that was adopted in 1998.

## Coach America names Laura Hendricks CEO, Meany departs

DALLAS — Coach America Holdings Inc., which filed for U.S. Bankruptcy Court protection and reorganization at the first of the year, has ousted its top executive and moved a senior vice president into his position.

Laura Hendricks has taken over as chief executive, replacing George Maney, who served in that position and as company president for more than three years.

Coach America said Chairman Mike Haley will serve as interim president, possibly until after the bankruptcy issues are settled.

Coach America, one of the largest charter and tour businesses in the country, filed for Chapter 11

reorganization in January after failing to restructure \$400 million in debt.

The management shakeup is not expected to have any impact on the court proceedings and will not change the company's dual exit strategy of either a financial reorganization or the sale of its assets. The court already has approved a procedure in which the assets could be sold at auction.

The departure of Maney was not announced by the company and his name was not mentioned in a press release reporting Hendricks' promotion.

However, company sources said his leaving was a decision

mutually agreed to by the board and Maney, and was facilitated by a desire by the board to re-energize the business.

Coach America declined to provide details on the change other than to confirm that Maney had left the company.

Maney was named president and chief executive in November, 2008, after serving two years as its vice president and chief financial officer. Before joining Coach America, he



Laura Hendricks

was vice president of operations at Independent Stationers.

Hendricks has been the company's senior vice president for business development, overseeing strategic planning, sales and marketing.

"Laura Hendricks is a proven executive both within our company and the industry, and is the right person to lead Coach America through the financial reorganization process and into our next phase of growth," said Haley.

He said her combined skill set in operations, finance and management will serve the company well.

"As a senior leader, Laura has helped develop and deliver on

Coach America's growth in prior years, and with an improved capital structure we are confident that our full potential will be realized under her leadership," he added.

Hendricks said the company for too long has been troubled by its heavy debt load, and the Chapter 11 filing was the best place to address the issue.

"But it is equally important we accelerate business momentum," she added. "My immediate focus will be to work closely with our employees and customers on winning new business, strengthening the relationships we currently enjoy and ensuring we maximize our considerable potential."

Meantime, Coach America reiterated it is working with its senior lending group on the terms of a possible reorganization plan that would recapitalize the company and position it to be competitive in the industry.

Additionally, it said it continues to work under bankruptcy court proceedings that allow it to try to attract an investment buyer and partner that could help assure the continuation of the company as a stronger, more competitive business.

## Tom JeBran, John Meier are chosen top ABA officers

WASHINGTON — Directors of the American Bus Association have elected Tom JeBran of Trans-Bridge Lines in Bethlehem, Pa., chairman of the ABA.

John Meier of Badger Coaches Inc. in Madison, Wis., was chosen vice chairman. Both Meier and JeBran are presidents of family-run businesses.

Their elections to three-year

terms occurred at the ABA board's most-recent meeting in Grapevine, Texas. JeBran succeeds outgoing ABA Chairman Jim Jalbert.

"I have been around the motorcoach industry my whole life, when my father and other family members ran Trans-Bridge Lines," said JeBran, who noted he was honored to have been selected ABA chairman.

"It's critical we at the ABA continue to show our federal, state and local decision makers the important role buses play in the national transportation network," he said.

"We will continue to press forward, working with our diverse membership to promote motorcoaches, tourism and group travel."

Jalbert, who heads C&J Lines in Portsmouth, N.H., remains an



Tom JeBran



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# THE DOCKET

## Highways bills are years and worlds apart

WASHINGTON — Both houses of Congress began floor work last month on separate — and vastly different — highway and public transportation reauthorization bills that would provide highway spending of more than \$50 billion annually.

The Senate's \$109 billion bill is a two-year bipartisan proposal.

The House is considering a five-year, \$260-billion measure that is the focus of intense partisan wrangling because of controversial provisions.

For example, the bill would cut off fuel-tax revenue for public transit, would expand oil drilling offshore and in Alaska, would require approval of the Keystone XL oil pipeline from Canada to Gulf Coast refineries, and would reduce retirement benefits for federal workers to help pay for transportation.

The United Motorcoach Association weighed-in within days of the House bill being formally introduced, saying the measure would provide stability to federal surface transportation programs, create and sustain millions of jobs, and stretch valuable dollars.

In a letter to House Transportation Committee Chairman John Mica, R-Fla., UMA President and CEO Victor Parra expressed UMA's "strong support" for the House measure and said the association was looking forward to working for its passage.

In his letter, Parra noted the bill would increase "the role the private sector plays in public transit" and would assure "opportunities for private-sector bus and motorcoach companies to participate in public transit," reducing the financial burden on federal, state and local taxpayers. It also could create more opportunities for bus and motorcoach industry entrepreneurs, Parra added.

The House bill contains an abundance of provisions pertinent to the bus and motorcoach industry. Among other things it would mandate:

- Improved safety oversight of bus operators, including better on-going monitoring to weed out bad apples.
- That "roadside inspections" of buses be performed at a station, terminal, border crossing, maintenance facility, destination, or other location where a bus operator may make a planned stop, except in the case of an imminent or obvious safety hazard.
- That any seatbelt or other oc-

cupant protection system rules be based on sound scientific research and testing.

- That any rules requiring seatbelts or other structural safety changes to existing motorcoaches be phased in over 6- and 12-year periods.

- Research and testing for roof strength, window glazing, fire prevention and mitigation, and emergency evacuation design.

- That states not be allowed to require crash avoidance and occupant protection systems before federal rules are adopted.

- That safety reviews for new entrant passenger carriers be conducted within the first 90 days after the owner or operator begins operations.

- More aggressive efforts to block and get rid of so-called reincarnated carriers.

- Training requirements for commercial motor vehicle operators.

- Establishment of an electronic clearinghouse to improve compliance and safety with drug and alcohol regulations. Employers would have access to the clearinghouse.

- Eliminating the exemption granted to King County Metro Transit from federal charter service regulations.

On several issues important to the motorcoach industry, the House and Senate bills are largely compatible.

For example, both bills provide direction on the future of

electronic onboard recording. While the Senate bill would mandate EOBRs, the House bill says the U.S. Department of Transportation may issue an EOBR rule only after it solves an array of technological problems, such as how law enforcement officers would access information recorded by the devices.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is currently working on an EOBR rule. (See accompanying story.)

### There are similarities

Both bills contain similar, substantive structural reforms that experts say would go a long way toward improving the federal highway program.

They eliminate earmarks, consolidate or eliminate overlapping programs at the U.S. Department of Transportation, give states more control over money and take steps to expedite the delivery of highway projects. They also contain provisions designed to improve federal and state performance.

The Senate bill would make leasing of existing highways, bridges or tunnels to private investors that impose tolls less attractive by changing the rules that provide hefty tax breaks.

As it is, investors can take depreciation tax write-offs in the first 15 years of leases that may last as long as 99 years. Under the amendment, those tax benefits

would be stretched over 45 years.

The nation's transportation system currently is being funded by the eighth temporary extension since the previous multi-year reauthorization bill expired in 2009. The latest extension expires at the end of this month.

If each chamber approves a reauthorization bill, the measures would go to a conference committee, the process under which the House and Senate iron out differences in the bills.

### Passage unlikely

Many transportation advocates contend that the very substantial structural difference between the two bills — for example, two years versus five years — and the controversial House provisions — such as those on oil drilling and transit funding — could prevent passage of a reauthorization plan this year.

For example, New York's Democratic congressional representatives said the proposed change in transit funding would "massacre our mass transit system."

The House bill would repeal a provision in the Surface Transportation Assistance Act signed by President Reagan that began directing a portion of diesel and gasoline taxes to public transit.

Today, public transit receives 2.86 cents from the 24.4-cent federal diesel tax and the same amount from the 18.4-cent gasoline levy. Under the House bill, transit would have to obtain \$40 billion over five years from the general fund.

More than 110 amendments have been proposed for the Senate bill, while the House must deal with upwards of 250 amendments — a Herculean task. Anyone with more than a passing interest in the legislation will need to monitor the action closely.

The Senate bill has an overall funding shortfall estimated at \$12 billion, but the Finance Committee, the last committee to weigh in on the bill, voted last month to accept a group of offsets presented by Chairman Max Baucus, D-Mont., that add up to more than \$10 billion.

The offsets include taking some money from the leaking underground fuel tank program and an end to tax credits for paper and forestry businesses that produce what they call an alternative fuel known as "black liquor."

## FMCSA delays 'recorder' rule, will seek input

WASHINGTON — It appears federal safety regulators will not be issuing rules this year that require nearly all over-the-road buses and trucks to have electronic onboard recorders.

A Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration spokeswoman confirmed that a mandate in 2012 is not likely.

The agency probably will not even issue a supplemental — or second — proposed rule until "late 2012 or early 2013."

The rulemaking process for electronic onboard recorders originally included a 2010 final rule for roughly 5,000 carriers with serious hours-of-service compliance violations, and a separate proposed rule issued in January 2011 for virtually all interstate bus and truck operators.

The remedial EOBR final rule (that is, the first one) was originally set to take effect in June of this year but it was struck down in August by a U.S. Court of Appeals, which said the FMCSA had failed to assure the devices would not be used to harass drivers.

As a result, the agency in November dropped the remedial rule, and has sought to revise its proposed EOBR rule for all interstate drivers.

FMCSA now says it will, in effect, consolidate the two rules into a universal mandate for nearly all interstate carriers with new language intended to address the courts' driver harassment concerns.

Speaking at a session of the Transportation Research Board, FMCSA Administrator Anne Ferro said her agency plans to schedule "listening sessions" to gather input for the proposed mandate.

"We have an opportunity in the months ahead to do a series of listening sessions to learn more from drivers and carriers and others what is meant by 'harassment,'" Ferro told TRB attendees.

The agency will incorporate technological recommendations from the Motor Carrier Safety Advisory Board and other information it has gathered throughout the previous rulemakings, she said.

"We will work very aggressively to continue to advance an electronic onboard recorder rule that makes sense," Ferro said.

## Bill would give incentives for 'alt fuel' school buses

PITTSBURGH, Pa. — Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., has unveiled federal legislation that would provide incentives for the purchase of alternative-fueled school buses and transit vehicles.

The legislation would:

- Establish a rebate of 30 percent, up to \$15,000, for the purchase of natural gas school and transit buses.

The bill specifically includes private contractors but limits transit buses to publicly owned vehicles only.

The alternative fuels in the bill include natural gas, LPG, hydrogen and fuel cells, but not electric or hybrid.

- Extend the alternative fuel tax credit of 50 cents a gallon for

the retail sale of natural gas fuel for everyone who uses it to power vehicles through 2016.

- Extend a tax credit for installing commercial natural gas refueling infrastructure through 2016, totaling 30 percent of the system, up to \$30,000.

Casey said he was introducing the Natural Gas Energy and Alternative Rewards (NGEAR) Act to speed the transition to natural gas-fueled vehicles. He said it would reduce costs for businesses and municipalities in the short run and lead to long-term cost savings.

At this point, it's not clear what Casey's plans are for the bill but it seems logical to assume he wants to attach it to federal highway and/or energy legislation.

# Court OKs costly IFTA audit of Pennsylvania trucker

BLUE BELL, Pa. — The Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court has upheld an audit conducted by the state of a trucking company under the International Fuel Tax Agreement.

The trucker's fundamental problem in the audit was poor record-keeping. Some of its receipts were missing or inadequate, and there were many missing trip reports.

The state had denied credit — as IFTA requires — for any tax that might have been paid on fuel for which the receipts were missing or bad.

Because of the poor and missing records, the state reduced to 4 miles per gallon the mileage of vehicles that had been reported at over 7 mpg, and it assessed at 4 mpg the mileage of vehicles for which it deemed the records insufficient.

The assessment was for tax due on more than 1 million gallons of fuel, meaning the miles-per-gallon cut was a big deal.

The trucker argued that the state should have applied best-information-available audit techniques, including an examination of the carrier's reports following the audited period, when its record-keeping improved.

The court was sympathetic but noted that IFTA, as well as state law, required detailed records be kept.

## State lawmakers meeting, agendas are rather skimpy

Forty-five state legislatures have begun their 2012 regular sessions, and the last one to meet this year, Louisiana, begins its session March 12.

Four states don't meet this year: Montana, Nevada, North Dakota and Texas.

A number of sessions this year are restricted to budget or other financial matters, and a few are already winding down.

Because 2012 is a general election year, and because redistricting is preoccupying many legislators, some legislatures may not get a lot accomplished this year.

However, operators should remain vigilant for legislative mischief.

Meanwhile, the Tax Foundation has issued its Tax Climate Index, an annual update of the "business tax climate" in all states.

The index attempts to gauge the extent to which a state's tax system is favorable or unfavorable to entities doing business there.

The index often is denigrated by those who see a close correlation between the high ranking of a state in the index and the low rates of its business taxes, and argue that higher taxes mean better state services.

Political leanings aside, the five highest ranking states this year — Wyoming, South Dakota, Nevada, Alaska and Florida — all do not have a corporate income tax.

And, the five lowest ranking — New Jersey, New York, California, Vermont and Rhode Island — all impose one.

Illinois deserves special mention this year for having dropped 12 steps in the ranking (to 28th) because of last year's tax increases.

Bob Pitcher of the American Trucking Associations said that it wasn't possible from the court's opinion to determine with

certainty if the state took undue advantage of the carrier.

Pitcher added, however, that the case

does show how the failure to keep good records puts a carrier at a terrific disadvantage during an IFTA audit.

The word cloud features the following terms: great rates, remarkable claims, Way beyond 9 to 5, committed, Approachable, partner, PROTECT PASSENGERS protection, ALWAYS THERE WITH A NEW IDEA, risk management, Responsive, CONVICTION, 24/7/365, TRANSPARENT, Prompt claims service, CRITICAL TO MY OPERATION, Provides peace of mind, Passenger transportation, EXTRAORDINARY SERVICE, UNDERWRITING EXPERTISE, prompt claims, reSensive, claims, Succeeding together, Strength, Great rates, LIMO, School bus, WORKAHOLIC, Protects my vehicles and my business, KEEPS ME INFORMED, innovation, alternative risk transfer, COMMITTED TO PROTECTING THE BUSINESS I BUILT, Helps me focus on growing my business, MOTORCOACH, PARATRANSIT, Succeeding together, limo, specialty companies, nasdaq, Charter and tour, CAPTIVE, Fleet, ENTREPRENEUR, Loss control, understands my vision for the future, committed, Competitive cost structures, SUCCEEDING TOGETHER, Transparency, motorcoach, PARTNER, Helps me focus on growing my business, remarkable claims, RISK MANAGEMENT, Underwriting expertise, 24/7/365, tech-savvy, extraordinary service, Clarity, INTEGRITY, high energy, Competitive cost structures, Committed to protecting the business I built, forward vision, Fleet, WAY BEYOND 9 TO 5, STRENGTH, responsive, Approachable, PROTECTS MY VEHICLES AND MY BUSINESS, alternative risk transfer, tough jobs, Prompt claims service, UNDERSTANDS MY VISION FOR THE FUTURE, INNOVATION, SPECIALTY COMPANIES, protect passengers

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## Researchers developing 'fatigue management' program

For more than a decade, researchers operating under the aegis of the federal governments of the U.S. and Canada have been working to develop an all-encompassing program aimed at reducing driver fatigue.

The results of their efforts in the form of a comprehensive training program that involves not only drivers but also dispatchers, driver management personnel, fatigue countermeasures, sleep-disorder screening and treatment, and new technologies could be released in the next year or so, says one of the nation's leading large vehicle safety researchers.

"The main thing we are doing is developing a training program," said Dr. Ronald Knipling, principal with Safety for the Long Haul, a transportation research, consulting and training company based in Arlington, Va.

"It's something that will be

available to you probably a year from now, but it may slip to 15 months."

The North American Fatigue Management Program will be available to motor carriers in the United States and Canada as both a Power-Point presentation, and as an online computer-based training program, Knipling said.

"Carriers need to adopt a more comprehensive proactive approach, centered around drivers, involving education, medical screening for obstructive sleep apnea and other sleep disorders, and trying to be more alertness friendly in scheduling and dispatching," says Knipling.

The overarching goal of the research taking place under Knipling's guidance is to develop, implement, evaluate and finalize a comprehensive, integrated fatigue-management program for motor carriers.

Key program components will

include commercial driver training and education on sleep need and fatigue countermeasures; training for dispatchers and driver management personnel on improved scheduling which takes into account individual sleep need; sleep disorder screening and treatment, and fatigue management technologies.

The research project is jointly sponsored by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and Transport Canada, and has been in the works for more than 10 years.

Fatigue is a major problem among commercial drivers, with 31 percent of fatal crashes involving fatigue, said Knipling, author of what many consider to be the definitive textbook on over-the-road truck safety and accident prevention, *Safety for the Long Haul*.

Just over a year ago, Knipling became the first American awarded the Order of Merit from the Interna-

tional Road Transport Union, the Geneva, Switzerland-based international organization representing highway users.

Knipling says that while hours-of-service rules address fatigue to a certain degree, much more needs to be done.

"Hours-of-service compliance is legally required, and it's a good thing, but it's very insufficient as fatigue management," he said. "If you're violating your hours of service, chances are you have a fatigue problem."

"If you're obeying your hours of service, you can still have a big fatigue problem. . . . There are many factors in fatigue that are not addressed by hours of service," he said.

At least one federal agency is already on the record as advocating that the North American Fatigue Management Program become mandatory for motor carriers.

Deborah Hersman, chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, submitted written testimony to a Senate subcommittee last year, saying it had made a recommendation to the FMCSA "to require all motor carriers, including motorcoach operators, to adopt a fatigue management program" based on the North American Fatigue Management Program.

Hersman delivered her testimony at a hearing on motorcoach safety held by a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

In addition to more than 30 years experience in traffic safety with emphasis on driver human factors and motor carrier safety, Knipling also is a former senior research scientist and senior transportation fellow at Virginia Tech Transportation Institute and former research division chief at the FMCSA.

## Suits begin over truckers' hours-of-service rule

WASHINGTON — The American Trucking Associations has sued to overturn the new hours-of-service rule for truck drivers.

The ATA asked the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia to set aside the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration rule as arbitrary and capricious.

"We regret that FMCSA and the Obama administration have put ATA and its member companies in a position to take this legal action," said ATA President and CEO Bill Graves in a statement.

"The rules that have been in place since 2004 have contributed to unprecedented improvement in highway safety. The law is clear about what steps FMCSA must

undertake to change the rules and we cannot allow this rulemaking, which was fueled by changed assumptions and analyses that do not meet the required legal standards, to remain unchallenged."

ATA said the agency overstated the safety benefits of the new rule, and that the costs outweigh the claimed benefits.

"We need this issue to be resolved in a credible manner, taking into account the undisputed crash reduction since 2004, so we can focus limited government and industry resources on safety initiatives that will have a far greater impact on highway safety," Graves said.

Although the revised rule that was announced early this year pre-

serves the 11-hour limit on driving time, in general its changes tighten the current rule for truckers, which went into effect eight years ago.

The new rule tightens the 34-hour restart provision by limiting its use to one time a week and requiring at least two periods of rest between 1 and 5 a.m.

The agency said the once-a-week restriction allows drivers to work long hours (81 hours) in one week but requires them to compensate with extra time off the following week.

"The purpose of the rule change is to limit work to no more than 70 hours a week on average," the agency said. "Working long daily and weekly hours on a con-

tinuing basis is associated with chronic fatigue, a high risk of crashes, and a number of serious chronic health conditions."

The only positive ATA sees in the rule is the agency's decision to push the effective date out 18 months for most of the rule, to July 1, 2013.

Truck safety advocacy groups and the Teamsters union have yet to say if they will renew their own legal action against the new rule, although they have indicated strongly they will.

It was their suit against the rule that pushed the FMCSA to rewrite the rule. The key issue for the Teamsters and safety groups is the 11-hour daily driving limit.

## More truckers testing hair to check for drugs

PACIFIC, Wash. — Gordon Trucking, the nation's 64th largest trucker, has begun drug screening all applicants via hair samples.

Gordon joins a growing list of truckers performing hair testing to supplement the minimum US-DOT-mandated urine testing requirements.

"Research has shown most accidents occur within the first 90-120 days of employment," said Scott Manthey, vice president of safety and compliance for Gordon Trucking.

"Once a driver makes it through that initial period the risk of an accident drops dramatically. We feel that a urine test, combined with the longer timeframe of a hair test, offers one of the best possible screening tools."

Initial use of the testing detected 10 positive candidates — out of 170 — who would have otherwise been hired.

"Beyond the candidates who have tested positive," said Manthey, "we also routinely have candidates dismiss themselves from orientation classes once they confirm a hair test will be conducted."

Gordon Trucking has more than 2,500 employees and 1,900 trucks,

## ATA: 'Hours obsession' results in lost opportunities

ARLINGTON, Va. — The American Trucking Associations has accused administrators at the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, as well as safety advocates, of obsessing over hours-to-service rules in addressing driver fatigue issues and ignoring other solutions and safety issues.

The obsession has prevented progress on a number of more pressing safety concerns, says ATA President and CEO Bill Graves.

"Report after report, from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's own *Large Truck Crash Causation Study*, to the most recent annual report on truck and bus safety facts, shows fatigue is not a leading cause of crashes," said Graves.

"By putting an incredibly resource-intensive focus on this

(hours-of-service) rule, FMCSA and these advocacy groups have foregone progress on areas ranging from speed, to safety technologies, to driver training that would have a much larger impact on highway safety," Graves asserted.

According to the ATA, quoting the *Large Truck Crash Causation Study* and other federal data sources, three quarters of all fatal and serious truck crashes involve at least one other vehicle, typically a passenger car.

In a majority of cases, accident investigations assign the critical reason for the crash to the passenger vehicle, but when it is assigned to the truck, nine times out of 10, the issues lie with the actions of the driver.

"Put most simply, these crashes are caused by unsafe driver behav-

iors such as speeding, driving too fast for conditions, or distracted and inattentive driving, or unfortunate mistakes related to unfamiliarity with his or her surroundings or driving conditions," Graves said.

"We have long advocated that FMCSA do more to address aggressive and unsafe driving and for the increased use of advanced safety technologies, but to date those pleas have been largely overlooked."

The USDOT preoccupation with determining the size and stickiness of the hours-of-service band-aid to address complex fatigue issues to cater to small, organized labor-backed and perhaps well-intentioned "safety" advocates, has done little to address the vast majority of car-truck crashes, said Graves.

# Providing drivers with tools, motivation to be healthy

By Dave Millhouser

It was an embarrassing moment.

I asked my coach why I was no longer starting, and he replied: "You've eaten your way out of the lineup."

He was right, I'd gained 30 pounds in the three years I'd been playing for him, and had gone from "slow" to "glacial."

Lest you wonder, there was no happy ending. And the rest of this piece will be the "guy in a glass house throwing stones."

There is a physical component to most endeavors and driving a motorcoach is no exception.

Part of the ongoing discussion regarding "hours of service" is the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration concern with sleep apnea, a condition often exacerbated by obesity.

They are considering using a body mass index (BMI) of 35 as a threshold for determining if a driver is susceptible to sleep apnea. The underlying assumption is that no amount of "off duty" time allows for adequate rest if a person

is not sleeping well.

In my view, most bus accidents are caused by aggressive/inattentive driving and . . . fatigue. Every time there is a high-visibility incident, politicians call for "more inspections" despite the fact very few accidents are caused by mechanical defects.

In real life, the major benefit of a roadside inspection is the opportunity to examine a driver's log. That may tell you if they've been off duty but not if they've rested.

Drivers are not that different from athletes. But, when things go badly, it may be lives that are lost rather than a game.

They need to be reminded that "off-duty" time needs to be spent resting, and their overall health has serious safety implications. Athletes take care of themselves to perform better, and they have less at stake.

Sleep apnea, diabetes, heart disease and a number of other health problems can often be managed by healthy habits. Healthy drivers are more alert and handle stress better. Unconscious or asleep drivers hit things.

The athletic metaphor (or is it simile?) works in the next step, too. Like a coach, management has responsibility for the outcome.

'Fatigue can be cumulative and just because a trip is "legal" doesn't mean it's wise.'

An accident risks your customers' lives and your business, so you have standing to make policy in areas where an employee's health and behavior affects job performance.

It's in the company's interest to provide drivers with the resources and motivation to take care of themselves. Passing the USDOT physical is a minimal qualification, not the goal. In our litigious society, it has to be done carefully, but discussing health issues with drivers is part of management's responsibility.

The seasonal nature of our

business makes it difficult but it's important to avoid over-scheduling drivers during peak periods. Give them breaks. Fatigue can be cumulative and just because a trip is "legal" doesn't mean it's wise.

Many athletes have incentives to show up for pre-season practice at a certain weight and in condition. They work out on their own, off-season, to meet those goals.

I'm not suggesting we have bus drivers run laps, but we should be thinking about offering incentives to folks who lose weight, attend health clubs, participate in sports.

Maybe you'll get to the point where you can include 10 pushups and some wind sprints as part of pre-trip inspections.

Like athletes, drivers have individual responsibility. When they have off-duty hours, they ought to use the time wisely, sleep, get a bit of exercise, eat with a measure of wisdom.

There's a lot at stake here for both drivers and their passengers, and part of being a professional is being healthy. Performance is influenced by what they do when

they're not driving — same as an athlete.

Regulators are looking anew at hours of service, and other parameters that could drastically alter the way we operate. No set of rules can overcome weak judgment on the part of companies and individuals.

We, as an industry, will have far more influence with the folks designing regulations if we demonstrate aggressiveness in dealing with fatigue and health issues.

Bear in mind, this is being written by a guy whose body mass index isn't that different than his IQ. (Meaning, of course, I'm both fat AND dumb).

But I am smart enough to know this isn't easy in a business like ours. Still, we need to make the effort.

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



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# Appeal: Let's make buses safer with seatbelts

Buckle up!

That safety slogan so often cited by traffic safety experts doesn't apply to the biggest passenger vehicles on the road.

There's no federal or Montana law that requires buses to have passenger seatbelts. No seatbelt law for the big yellow school buses, no law for the motorcoaches that carry travelers, including student athletes, between distant Montana cities. Both types of buses usually are safe, but when crashes occur, the results can be tragic.

Last month, Robert Lange, 56, and Fatimah Amatullah, 60, died after being ejected and pinned under a motorcoach en route to Missoula from Billings.

Everyone who stayed inside the bus was injured, but survived the crash.

Passenger accounts of the rollover indicate that people were injured as they were tossed about inside the bus and thrown against each other.

## Basketball bus wreck

Last weekend, the Billings West High School girls' basketball team bus ran off Interstate 94 on a late night return trip from Miles City. Fortunately, no one was killed, but there was serious injury. Having seatbelts available and buckled may well have prevented any injury.

In Billings, buses that transport School District 2 special education students are equipped with lap belts, but regular buses are not, according to Ron Messman, First Student location manager in Billings. First Student runs 85 school buses for SD2 plus one motorcoach.

Drivers of both motorcoaches and school buses are required by law to wear lap and shoulder belts,

which are considered safer than lap belts only. Being belted in provides the best opportunity for the driver to maintain control of the bus in the event of a crash.

safety restraint available," Kohn said.

Seven contractors attended the district's pre-bid conference and Kohn expects to see competitive

Transportation has long had a practice of requiring seatbelts on buses that it purchases for community transit systems.

Helena trustees have decided that their students deserve seatbelt protection next fall. Other Montana districts should follow their example.

## Huntley tragedy

On April 21, 2008, Sarah Fark, 7, was killed when she was thrown from a Huntley school bus that collided with a pickup truck. Eight other children who remained in the bus were injured, but survived. One child on the bus escaped injury. Only the bus driver was wearing a seat belt.

That tragedy surely made many Montanans ask: Why don't school buses have seatbelts?

Sadly, nearly four years later, most school buses still don't. A proposal to require seatbelts on new school buses died in committee during the 2009 legislature.

According to a report in the *Helena Independent Record*, between 2004 and 2008, 100 school bus occupants were injured in 340 Montana school bus crashes. Little Sarah was the sole fatality.

Considering that tens of thousands of students are transported millions of miles each year in Montana, bus crashes are rare. Nevertheless, preventing one death and 100 injuries is worth the money to improve the safety of Montana's children.

Both school buses and motorcoaches should have lap and shoulder belts for their passengers' protection.

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'Calculating the costs of bus seatbelts literally puts a price on lives.'

## Calculating costs

There are so few deaths in school bus crashes that the money it would take to have seatbelts for students is better spent on other things, according to status quo advocates.

The biggest obstacle to school bus seatbelts has been cost. Seatbelts lower the passenger capacity of school buses — only two belts per seat. That raises costs if the school has been putting three kids in a seat because more buses would be needed.

Calculating the costs of bus seatbelts literally puts a price on lives.

The Helena school board last month decided that student safety is worth the money. The Helena district is calling for bids this month on a new bus contract, including three-point restraints (lap and shoulder belts) on all buses.

"School buses are really safe, one of the safest modes of transportation," Tom Kohn, Helena school transportation manager, told *The Billings Gazette*. The safety features of big yellow buses include interior padding that helps reduce injuries in front and rear crashes when students are thrown from their seats. However, in a rollover, the compartmentalization isn't as protective.

"We felt it is in the best interest of our students to go with the best

prices when bids are opened later this month. The seatbelt requirement may increase costs a bit, he said, but the Helena district already buses most students two per seat. State law allows schools to put three students in a seat.

## Slow rule change

In remarks to the Bus Safety Council last June, Daniel Smith of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration noted that six motorcoach crashes in the first six months of 2011 had caused 25 occupant deaths and numerous injuries.

The first "high-priority action item" in the NHTSA safety plan is the installation of seatbelts on all new motorcoaches. Of the 97 occupant deaths in bus rollovers between 1999 and 2008, 76 were passengers ejected from the motorcoaches.

Although NHSTA started proposing seatbelts for all new motorcoaches in August 2010, the rule isn't yet final. Once it is finalized (probably later this year), the industry will have three more years to comply, according to Linda Tran, NHTSA spokeswoman.

Safety must be improved faster than that.

Fortunately, some motorcoach operators, including Greyhound, are already ordering new buses equipped with seatbelts. In Montana, the state Department of

## Calendar

### FEBRUARY 2012

**26-29 Trailways 2012 Annual Stockholders Meeting and Conference**, Bonita Springs, Fla. Info: [www.trailways.com](http://www.trailways.com).

### MARCH 2012

**5-6 Bus Association of New York Lobby Day**, Albany, N.Y. Info: [www.BANYbus.org](http://www.BANYbus.org).

**21 Maryland Motorcoach Association Group Leader Marketplace**, Ellicott City, Md. Info: [www.marylandmotorcoach.org](http://www.marylandmotorcoach.org).

**29-30 Tourism Cares for Pensacola (Fla.)**, Pensacola Lighthouse and Bayou Texar, Pensacola. Info: [www.TourismCares.org/Volunteer](http://www.TourismCares.org/Volunteer).

### APRIL 2012

**1-4 Ontario Transportation Expo**, Toronto, Can. Info: Go to [www.ote.ca](http://www.ote.ca).

**24-26 United Motorcoach Association Washington Fly-In 2012**, Washington, D.C. Info: Email [kpresley@uma.org](mailto:kpresley@uma.org).

### JUNE 2012

**11-12 United Motorcoach Association Summer Board Meeting 2012**, Reno, Nev. Info: [www.newenglandbus.org](http://www.newenglandbus.org).

**21-24 New England Bus Association Annual Meeting**, The Resort and Conference Center, Hyannis, Mass. Info: [www.newenglandbus.org](http://www.newenglandbus.org).

### JULY 2012

**6-8 Inaugural Meeting of Southeastern Coalition, hosted by Florida Motorcoach Assoc.**, Royal Plaza in the Walt Disney World Resort, Orlando. Info: [mmmlinda@embarqmail.com](mailto:mmmlinda@embarqmail.com).

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# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

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# A different take on the 'crumbling' U.S. infrastructure

You read or hear it practically every day: America's infrastructure is in bad shape.

The only debate seems to be over how bad.

But is our infrastructure "increasingly third-world" — per Slate's Jacob Weisberg — or a "national disgrace" and "global embarrassment" — as Barry Ritholtz suggested in a column for *The Washington Post*?

Also writing in *The Washington Post*, journalist Charles Lane notes that data seems to support the gloomy conventional wisdom.

In the World Economic Forum's latest *Global Competitiveness Report*, the United States' infrastructure ranked 23rd, behind that of Malaysia and Barbados. Barbados!?

The American Society of Civil Engineers gives America's system a "D," as President Obama often notes in support of his jobs bill, which calls for \$50 billion for transportation infrastructure and \$10 billion to capitalize a national infrastructure bank.

## Crumble, crumble?

So, how come, asks Lane, could he and his family travel thousands of miles on both the East and West

coasts last summer without actually seeing any crumbling roads or airports?

On the whole, he writes, the highways and byways were clean, safe and did not remind him of the Third World countries in which he had lived or worked. Should he believe the pundits or his own eyes? he wondered.

For all its shortcomings, U.S. infrastructure is still among the most advanced in the world — if not the most advanced, Lane asserts. He bases this not on selective personal experience but on the same data alarmists cite.

## The challenge

The contiguous United States (that is, excluding Alaska and Hawaii) cover 3.1 million square miles, including deserts, mountain ranges, rivers and two oceanic coastlines. In a world of vast dictatorships (China), tiny democracies (Switzerland) and everything in between, from Malta to Mexico, the challenge of building and maintaining first-rate roads, bridges, railroads, airports and seaports in a country like the United States is extraordinary — and so is the degree to which the United States succeeds, says Lane.

When you compare America's World Economic Forum rankings with those of the 19 other largest countries, it stands second only to Canada, which is lightly populated — and whose infrastructure is linked with the U.S.

Among the 20 most-populous countries, the United States ranks behind France and Germany, in that order. This would seem to confirm the case for U.S. inferiority in the developed world.

But France and Germany, in addition to being substantially smaller than the United States, are part of the European Union, a borderless single market from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.

Sure enough, when you average out the scores of all 27 E.U. nations, the United States beats them by a clear margin, notes Lane.

The World Economic Forum produced its rankings based on a survey in which business executives were asked to rate their respective countries' infrastructure on an ascending scale of 1 to 7.

## A 'national disgrace'?

Barbados's 5.8 average score means that paradise's executives are a smidgen happier with their infra-

structure than are their American counterparts, who gave the United States an average score of 5.7. This is a "national disgrace?" asks Lane.

Barbados has one commercial airport; the United States has more than 500.

The World Economic Forum asked executives to rate "railroad infrastructure," without distinguishing between freight (which excels in the United States) and passenger (which does not).

Perhaps the survey's subjectivity accounts for odd results such as Guatemala outranking Italy. Or, that the U.S. score plunged below 6.0 for the first time in 2008 — proof of a sudden drop in the actual quality of our roads and bridges, or merely an indicator of the general despondency that hit U.S. businesses along with the Great Recession? again asks Lane.

And while that D from the American Society of Civil Engineers is undoubtedly sincere, says Lane, the organization has a vested interest in greater infrastructure spending, which means more work for engineers. The engineers' lobby has given America's infrastructure a D in every one of its report cards going back to 1998, except for 2001, when

the mark was D-plus.

## Upgrade IS needed

Top-notch though it is, the U.S. infrastructure could use an upgrade; by their very nature, roads, bridges and the rest require constant maintenance. The effort could boost both current employment and the economy's capacity to grow in the future, Lane observes.

But it's not just a matter of turning on the money tap and letting it flow. Though roads, rails and levees represent huge, upfront capital expenditures, the long-term benefits are often difficult to calculate objectively. The whole business is fraught with uncertainty, trade-offs and pork-barrel politics.

Nor are the economics of public works simple. After its economic bubble burst, Japan tried to restart growth with more than \$6 trillion in infrastructure spending between 1991 and 2008. It ended up with little to show for it but a swollen national debt and lots of bridges to nowhere.

The United States probably needs more infrastructure spending. It also needs a serious debate about how much cash to invest and how to invest it. Alarmism promotes the former, not the latter, writes Lane.

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## Rules proposed to restrict autos' message systems

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation wants to make all roads safer by severely restricting or blocking auto drivers' ability to text while the vehicle is moving.

The department also wants to eliminate drivers' ability to browse the Internet, look at their Facebook accounts, key an address into a navigation system, input a phone number, or see more than 30 characters of any incoming message unless the car is stopped and out of gear.

The proposals are contained in the department's first-ever, broad-brush guidelines aimed at curtailing distracted driving.

They would eliminate the ability to do a lot of so-called infotainment functions while the car is in motion.

When an auto is moving, messages and other infotainment tasks would be limited to two-second glances and one-hand operation. Voice-command systems are encouraged as an alternative.

Many new cars now limit these tasks or try to accomplish them with voice commands.

But David Strickland, administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, says there are many others that do not limit tasks in the car.

"There are some automakers that have no strategy at all" in terms of infotainment safety, he said. The agency believes distracted driving claimed 3,000 lives in 2010.

Now, the U.S. Transportation Department, which oversees NHTSA, is proposing that cars be limited when it comes to features that distract drivers.

Strickland was careful to say NHTSA isn't against technology, GPS in particular. He says GPS helps safety by eliminating the need for drivers to fumble around to try to look at maps, which was even more distracting.

NHTSA has plans for hearings around the country on its proposal.

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