

# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

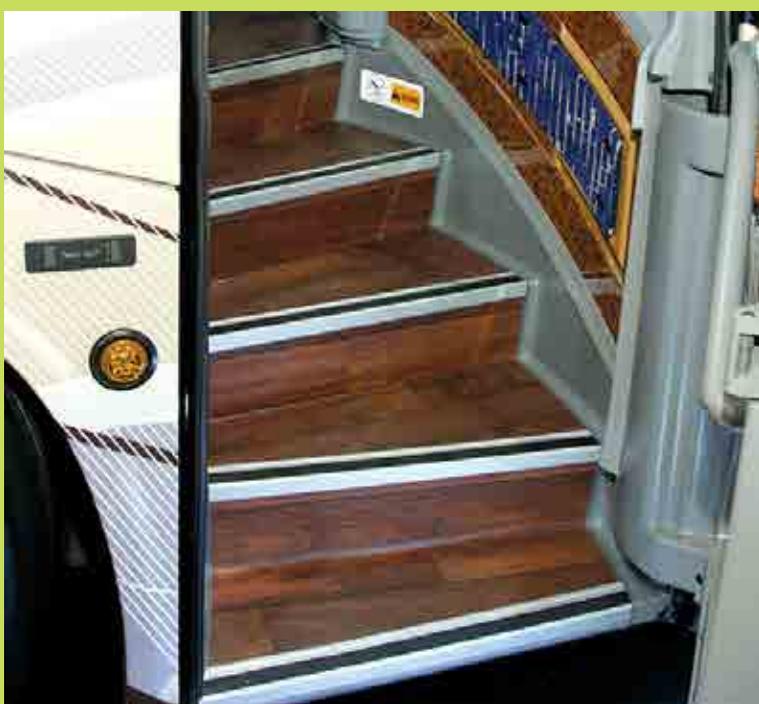
UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION

## New at MOTORCOACH EXPO 2015



### Looming Large

Van Hool has revamped its double-deck coach for 2015, including giving it a new designation, the TDX. ABC Companies and Van Hool unveiled the restyled model at UMA Motorcoach Expo. The trend toward faux wood flooring in new coaches, right, extended to every manufacturer this year. Inside are nine pages of descriptions and photos of the wide array of buses, products and services at Expo.



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

## FTA rejects N.J. Transit appeal of charter-rule fine; further abuses suspected

WASHINGTON — The Federal Transit Administration has denied an appeal by New Jersey Transit of a \$10,000 fine for allowing its largest contractor, Academy Bus, to use taxpayer-paid-for buses in private charter service.

Since the case was first decided last year, East Coast operators have sent *Bus & Motorcoach News* additional reports and photographs of likely charter trips being provided by Academy in coaches that bear the markings of New Jersey Transit.

Some accuse Academy of frequently and flagrantly violating the charter service rule with New Jersey Transit turning a blind eye to the practice.

According to the federal service charter rule, public transit

agencies receiving taxpayer funds to buy and maintain buses are not permitted to operate — or allow the buses to be operated — in competition with private operators.

The latest ruling rejects the transit authority's argument that its penalty should have been based on a single violation of the federal charter service rule rather than a pattern of violations.

The fine, initially issued in late May last year, was imposed on the transit agency for allowing Academy Bus to use federally subsidized buses to provide shuttle service at the Barclay's Golf Tournament in Jersey City in 2013. (See July 1, 2014, and Oct. 15, 2013, issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

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## NHTSA reconsidering seatbelt exemption for existing coaches

ARLINGTON, Va. — The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is rethinking its decision to exempt motorcoach operators from adding seatbelts to their existing buses, the new head of the agency told the *Detroit News* last month.

Five years ago, when the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration proposed its rule that would mandate seatbelts for new motorcoaches, it said it might revisit the issue of retrofitting seatbelts on buses that were already on the road.

Now it has done just that.

Mark Rosekind, who became NHTSA administrator in late December after being nominated by President Obama and confirmed by the Senate, also said the agency is studying the possibility of mandating safety belts on school buses.

"It's absolutely appropriate for us to look at every possible way we could make things safer," Rosekind said.

"It's very clear there's a safety issue, and then there's an economic one — and that's the discussion everyone has."

Late next year all new motorcoaches rolling off assembly lines and onto U.S. roadways must have seatbelts.

That requirement, finalized in November 2013, exempts existing motorcoaches, as well as school buses, most public transit buses and airport shuttle buses.

Motorcoach manufacturers supplying the U.S. market routinely began making seatbelts available on their new coaches in 2009. They became standard on most — but

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# ABC Companies' Featured Pre-Owned Equipment

## Coach Repower Upgrades



### 2007 Van Hool C2045 Repower

- Remanufactured Detroit Series 60 with 1 Year Warranty
  - Remanufactured Allison B500 with 2 Year Warranty
  - Serviced per ABC Sale Ready Select List
  - Aluminum Wheels
  - New White Paint
- \$279,000**



### 2005 Van Hool C2045 Repowers

- Remanufactured Detroit Series 60 with 1 Year Warranty
  - Remanufactured Allison B500 with 2 Year Warranty
  - 55 Passengers
  - Lift Equipped
- \$245,000**

#### Additional Van Hool C2045 Repower units available:

(All units have rebuilt Detroit Series 60 engines with 1 year warranty, serviced per ABC Sale Ready Select List and include new white paint and aluminum wheels.)

| VIN   | Year/Model            | Eng/Trans         | Price     |
|-------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| 47062 | 2006 VH C2045 Repower | Detroit / Allison | \$265,000 |
| 47477 | 2007 VH C2045 Repower | Detroit / Allison | \$274,000 |

## Pre-Owned Equipment



### 2009 Prevost H3-45's

VIN 11449, 11450

- 56 Passenger
  - Detroit / Allison
- \$285,000**

#### Additional pre-owned units available:

| VIN   | Year/Model          |
|-------|---------------------|
| 45175 | 2001 Van Hool C2045 |
| 45181 | 2001 Van Hool C2045 |
| 64543 | 2008 MCI J4500      |
| 64756 | 2008 MCI J4500      |
| 10005 | 2011 Setra S417     |
| 10006 | 2011 Setra S417     |

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# Operators urged to fight feds' insurance proposal

NEW ORLEANS — Motorcoach operators should rally against the proposed doubling or quintupling of the minimum amount of insurance they are required to carry on their coaches because of the havoc it would wreak on the entire industry, especially small operators.

That was the overwhelming consensus of operators surveyed at UMA Motorcoach Expo in New Orleans, with many operators using words like “devastating” and “scary” to describe the potential impact of the push by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to require minimum coverage of as high as \$25 million by sometime this year.

If the proposal becomes law, operators can expect to see a 60 percent increase on the insurance premiums they pay.

That means an average of more than \$10,000 annually per bus, according to insurance industry experts.

Critics of the proposed increase contend that small operators, especially, would be hard pressed to absorb the added expense.

Sophia Parchment is one of those small operators who says her business would be endangered. She founded Brownin Transportation in New York City nine years ago and now operates a fleet of six motorcoaches.

“A lot of small carriers like myself, we’re probably going to go out of business,” she said, adding that the proposal is likely to benefit larger companies.

“You have the bigger companies, who can already bid less for a job than we can,” she said. “What’s going to happen is they’re going to stay in business, and we’re going to go out of business.”

Alan Thrasher of Thrasher Brothers Trailways in Birmingham, Ala., said the economics of the motorcoach industry cannot support the increased cost operators would pay in premiums if the proposal is enacted.

He said he currently pays upwards of \$250,000 a year for liability insurance. That equates to more than 16 percent of his company’s annual gross revenue.

“If someone more than doubles that, I hate to say it, but whoever thinks we have that kind of profit margin is delusional. I keep telling people, we’re just mom-and-pop operations.”

He said an insurance premium hike of 60 percent represents “all the profit I’ll make in one year, if I have a good year.

“It will take away any incentive to stay in this business,” he continued. “Not only financially will I lose the ability to stay in this



**Committed Carriers.** Last month’s series of record-setting snow storms in the Northeast and New England resulted in widespread cancellations of passenger transportation services. However, bus companies throughout the region did everything they could to get travelers in and out of greater Boston. C&J Bus Lines of Portsmouth, N.H., was one of them. When it was safe, C&J transported travelers from the Portsmouth Transportation Center to Boston South Station, shown above, and Logan Airport.

business but, frankly as a human being, I’ll lose my will to continue to fight this struggle.”

Harry Stout of Stout’s Transportation in Trenton, N.J., is one of the small percentage of operators who already carry liability

above the \$5 million minimum.

He carries \$10 million in coverage because his company contracts with schools that require it.

Stout says the proposed higher insurance

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 ►

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# THE DOCKET

## Energy Department lowers diesel-price forecast for 2015

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Energy has lowered its 2015 forecast for U.S. retail diesel fuel prices by 2 cents to \$2.83 a gallon but boosted its crude-oil price forecast slightly.

Diesel will remain in the \$2.70s from March through August before rising, the USDOE Energy Information Administration said in its monthly energy outlook.

The motorcoach industry's main fuel, which averaged \$3.83

per gallon nationwide last year, will average \$3.23 in 2016, the EIA said, lowering its previous forecast by 2 cents a gallon.

Gasoline averaged \$2.12 a gallon in January, the lowest for a month since April 2009, EIA reported.

Gasoline, which averaged \$3.36 a gallon nationwide last year, will average \$2.33 this year and \$2.73 in 2016, virtually unchanged from the last forecast.

Diesel fuel prices rose in Feb-

ruary for the first time since November — and just the third monthly increase since June — edging up to \$3.83 a gallon.

Gasoline jumped by more than 12 cents a gallon to \$2.19, the biggest increase in a year and a half, USDOE said in its regular price survey.

As for the feedstock of diesel fuel and gasoline, the USDOE expects crude oil will average just over \$55 a barrel this year, up slightly from the last forecast of a

projected price of \$54.58 a barrel.

“The amount of oil inventories held in industrialized countries is expected to be the highest on record at the end of this year because of global oil production growing at a stronger pace than fuel demand,” EIA Administrator Adam Sieminski said.

“The high oil inventories will be a key contributor to low petroleum prices,” he said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Citibank issued a short-term price forecast for crude

oil that stunned many.

The banking giant cut its price forecasts, saying West Texas Intermediate crude oil could go as low as the \$20-per-barrel range before recovering to reach a new equilibrium.

The oil market should bottom between the end of the first quarter and beginning of the second quarter this year, the bank said.

“It’s impossible to call a bottom point, which could, as a result

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## Medical certificate/CDL merger (finally) goes into effect

WASHINGTON — The six-year effort by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to have states merge their commercial driver's licenses with driver medical cards has been completed.

The FMCSA regulation that mandated linking the driver's medical examination with holding an active commercial driver's license for use in interstate commerce quietly went into full effect just over a month ago.

Under the rule, CDL holders that have identified themselves as

“non-excepted interstate” drivers are no longer required to carry a copy of their medical examiner's certificate (fed med card) while on duty.

However, as the compliance experts at J.J. Keller & Associates note, a CDL holder is required to carry a copy of the fed med card for 15 days following the date of a medical exam to give his or her state licensing office time to enter the information onto the driving record.

A state licensing office has 10 days to enter the information into

the CDL database after it receives the documentation from the driver.

That leaves the driver with just a five-day cushion to provide the state with the necessary medical certification paperwork since law enforcement would expect to access the information from the driving record after 15 days following a medical exam.

The rule also provides that as of Jan. 30, 2015, all motor carriers must have a copy of a motor vehicle record (MVR) in the driver's qualification (DQ) file showing

the medical status for non-excepted, interstate CDL drivers employed by the company.

Additional time that was granted a year ago to employers only applied to those files of drivers in states that did not meet the federal deadline of Jan. 30, 2014, to display the medical status on the driving record. (See Feb. 1, 2014, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

FMCSA now expects all states to have the CDL holder's medical status available to employers via the MVR.

For new physical exams, the employer would temporarily use a copy of a medical examiner's certificate as proof of medical certification in the driver's qualification file.

Keller notes, though, that companies may only use the form up to 15 days following the exam — until it is able to obtain an MVR displaying the necessary information.

By July 8, 2015, the standards also will apply to commercial learner's permit holders.

The recordkeeping requirements for non-CDL drivers engaged in interstate commerce were not affected by the rule. The non-CDL driver must continue to carry his or her medical examiner's certificate, and the employer is expected to retain a copy of the medical examiner's certificate in the DQ file for three years.

### Basics of the rule

The medical card/CDL merger rule was published Dec. 1, 2008. It mandated states to begin placing each interstate driver's medical qualification status into the national commercial driver's license database. In practical terms, that meant:

- An interstate commercial motor vehicle driver who is required to hold a CDL has to provide each of his/her medical certificates (wallet cards) and any applicable variances/exemptions to the state that issued the CDL.

The expiration date of the certificate is then placed in the CDL database for tracking by the state. The driver must submit subsequent medical re-certifications to

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# FMCSA committee to tackle driver-training requirements

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has formed a 26-member advisory committee that will make recommendations for updating classroom and behind-the-wheel training requirements for professional bus and truck drivers.

Members of the Entry-Level Driver Training Advisory Committee represent a cross-section of motor carrier interests, including training organizations, the intercity bus and trucking industries, law enforcement, labor unions and safety advocates.

United Motorcoach Associa-

tion Vice President Ken Presley is one of three members representing the motorcoach industry. The others are Clyde Hart, the American Bus Association's recently retired vice president of government affairs, and Al Smith, director of safety and security for Greyhound Lines.

The committee also includes nine representatives of the trucking industry, four safety advocates and three labor representatives.

The FMCSA established the committee after trying on its own for years — without success — to come up with driver training re-

quirements that were acceptable to the disparate elements of the ground transportation industry.

The committee will consider minimum training requirements, including length of classroom instruction and behind-the-wheel experience; accreditation versus certification of commercial driver's license training programs and schools; curricula for passenger, property and hazardous materials carriers; instructor qualifications, and other areas.

"With more people and freight crossing our country than ever before, this committee's work will be

critical to ensuring that commercial drivers are fully capable of operating their vehicles safely," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx.

The committee's task is to negotiate issues that will be addressed in a proposed training rule that the FMCSA intends to issue by next fall. A final rule is expected in 2016.

The FMCSA is under a congressional mandate, contained in the federal highway and public transportation law adopted in 2012, and commonly known as MAP-21, to establish minimum

training requirements for individuals seeking to obtain an intrastate or interstate commercial driver's license and become a professional truck or bus operator.

"Ensuring roadway safety starts with the driver," said FMCSA Acting Administrator Scott Darling. "Finalizing new training requirements for truck and bus operators is one of my top priorities and we have tapped a group of uniquely qualified stakeholders to help us work through the details and meet this goal."

The first meeting of the advisory committee was late last month.

## Seatbelts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

not all — new models in 2010.

By 2011, most new coaches being sold in the U.S. were ordered and equipped with seatbelts.

When the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration released its proposed seatbelt rule in 2010, it said it was "not proposing — at this time — that used buses be required to be retrofitted with the lap/shoulder belt system.

"The service life of a motorcoach can be 20 years or longer," observed the agency. "We estimate that the cost of retrofitting can vary substantially. We estimate it could cost between \$6,000-\$34,000 per vehicle to retrofit the vehicle with lap belts and with sufficient structure to meet today's proposal," the

agency said.

Then, it added: "We also estimate it could cost \$40,000 per vehicle to retrofit it with lap/shoulder belts and reinforced structure so as to meet (Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard) No. 210 to support the loads during a crash."

At the time the seatbelt rule was released, the safety agency estimated that the number of motorcoaches in service nationally was 29,325.

Using that number, the agency performed a little math and figured it would cost U.S. motorcoach operators between \$176 million and \$997 million to retrofit their buses with two-point seatbelts.

To retrofit the existing fleet with lap/shoulder belts the agency estimated the cost at \$1.17 billion.

Here's how it arrived at the

'In other words, retrofitting isn't practical for thousands of coaches and hundreds of motorcoach operators.'

numbers: For the \$176 million figure, the agency took the low-end estimate for retrofitting a coach with lap belts, \$6,000, and multiplied it by 29,325. For the \$997 million number, it took the high-end estimate of \$34,000 per bus and multiplied by 29,325.

The billion-dollar-plus number was arrived at by multiplying \$40,000 times the 29,325 buses in the existing fleet.

The cost estimates made by the

agency did not include the increased fuel costs that would be incurred by operators because seatbelts had been added, increasing the weight of motorcoaches.

The weight increase would vary, depending upon the needed structural changes, and the age of motorcoaches that would be retrofitted.

The National Highway Traffic Administration added one element of reality to its rulemaking when it noted that "retrofitting used motorcoaches may not be structurally viable for many motorcoaches and may not be economically feasible for many motorcoach for-hire operators, many of which are small businesses."

In other words, retrofitting isn't practical for thousands of coaches and hundreds of motor-

coach operators.

All of that was five years ago, and the cost of retrofitting certainly has not gone down, but the number of coaches that would need to be retrofitted has. Perhaps 20 percent or more of the current U.S. motorcoach fleet may have seatbelts as a result of the buying of the past half-dozen years.

Still, there remain enough used coaches without seatbelts that a retrofit mandate would certainly force hundreds of small operators out of business. Also, it easily would be one of the most expensive vehicle retrofits in history.

Questions have been raised in the past about whether the NHTSA has the legal authority to require such retrofitting, an issue that likely will surface again as the agency reconsiders the mandate.

## Diesel prices

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

of oversupply and the economics of storage, fall well below \$40 a barrel for West Texas Intermediate, perhaps as low as the \$20 range for a while," the bank said in a note to clients.

The recovery is most likely to take a W-shape, the bank said, with a cut of shale output triggering a price response that in turn results in a U.S. supply increase, creating another price dip with eventual recovery to a new equilibrium level.

## U.S. oil output to slow

Citibank said shale producers may end up cutting rigs by about 50 percent.

These cutbacks could slow U.S. production growth to 800,000 barrels per day in this year for crude and natural gas liquids and 450,000 barrels per day in 2016, Citi said.

Faced with falling prices, shale producers might drill wells in the second quarter of 2015 and not complete them, waiting to bring them online when prices recover.

"Given the lagged supply response, storage is needed to bridge

'West Texas Intermediate crude oil could go as low as the \$20-per-barrel range before recovering'

the gap until the supply-demand overhang shrinks and reverses," said Citi analysts.

A lack of storage may be a major obstacle in the second quarter, and could cause a "production crunch," the analysts added.

The lack of storage could cause a steeper contango in the market, which could further incentivize U.S. producers to drill wells and leaving them uncompleted, creating a kind of in-ground storage play.

The bank lowered its 2015 average Brent price forecast to \$54 per barrel from \$63 and trimmed its 2016 price outlook by a dollar to \$69 per barrel.

## Below DOE forecast

Citi also cut its 2015 West Texas Intermediate price forecast to \$46 per barrel from \$55 per bar-

rel earlier; while lowering its 2016 outlook to \$61 per barrel from \$62.

The bank said it expected non-OPEC supply to decline by 200,000 barrels per day by 2016 partly due to U.S. shale curtailment.

"In this new 'shale era,' U.S. shale looks like it could outperform expectations in the future, while global non-OPEC, non-shale supply could underperform as decline rates increase," the analysts said, adding that long-term, this allows more room for U.S. shale to grow.

## CDL/med card

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

maintain an active CDL for interstate commerce.

- The state has to make sure the driver is medically qualified before issuing or renewing the CDL, and will have to add the driver's medical qualification status to the driver's driving record.

- Employers have to obtain

each applicant's driving record to verify that he/she is medically qualified.

- Because drivers' medical qualification status is now supposed to be instantly accessible to enforcement officers, drivers no longer need to carry their medical cards with them in their bus or truck.

## A note of caution

Some experts are cautioning

drivers it might be smart to continue carrying their medical exam information as states and the enforcement community become more familiar with the integrated system.

There should not be an abundance of hiccups, however, because for the past two years all interstate drivers who hold a CDL, and who must also have a medical card, have been required to pro-

vide their medical cards to their state driver licensing agencies.

Noncompliance with the rule's provisions means a driver will lose his or her commercial driving privileges.

The driver's license will be downgraded to a non-CDL class, so the driver can't operate vehicles that require a CDL until full CDL privileges have been reestablished.

In many cases, the process for having CDL driving privileges restored can be very time-consuming and costly for a driver.

Bus company owners and managers are responsible for making sure all their drivers are fully qualified to operate the vehicles they are assigned to drive. Operators are not to dispatch a driver on its roster whose license has been downgraded.



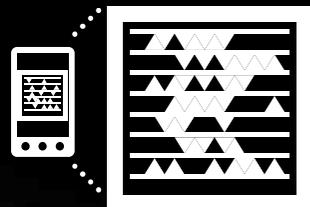
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# Misclassifying drivers costs Calif. trucker plenty

SAN DIEGO — California courts continue to crack down on trucking companies that classify drivers as independent contractors instead of employees, with the latest ruling resulting in a San Diego-based carrier having to pay \$2 million in back pay to seven drivers.

The Superior Court of San Diego County upheld a state labor commission ruling that Pacer Cartage had skirted labor law requirements and wrongly withheld certain deductions from the drivers' paychecks.

The drivers were awarded \$2.026 million for what the court deemed wage theft, with individual awards ranging from \$85,633 to \$387,936. The drivers also each received \$9,000 in wait-time pay.

The ruling comes five months after the U.S. Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled that 2,300 drivers working for FedEx Ground in California from 2000 to 2007 were misclassified as independent contractors. (See Oct. 1, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The court said the drivers actu-

ally were employees covered by workplace protection statutes.

The growing number of such rulings should serve as a warning to motorcoach operators who use independent contractors as drivers.

Ken Presley, vice president of the United Motorcoach Association, said that a certain percentage of motorcoach companies still use independent contractors as drivers. But he said there is no way of knowing how many coach operators classify their drivers as independent contractors, or if those

companies are running afoul of labor laws.

He said nearly all operators used to classify drivers as independent contractors, but today most companies hire drivers as employees.

That means they withhold taxes from driver paychecks, pay unemployment insurance, and issue W-2 forms for tax purposes.

In both the FedEx and San Diego cases, the main factor contributing to the rulings was the amount of control the companies

exerted over their drivers. If drivers do not have the right to control how they do their jobs, they should be classified as employees, the courts ruled.

In the San Diego case, Pacer had been leasing trucks and deducting the cost from the drivers' paychecks. The drivers were required to get insurance through Pacer and remain on call. The trucks were not registered to the drivers and they were restricted from using them for non-company business.

## Insurance

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

minimum is "a good thing and a bad thing."

The additional coverage provides additional protection, he said, but it also offers plaintiff attorneys a potentially higher starting point when they file claims.

"The more we carry, the more they're going to come after us for," he said. "We only have \$10 million, not \$25 million, and the cost is high for the extra \$5 million. It's a lot of money. It's very hard to re-

couple that extra cost.

"Do I want to cover myself? Sure, but I can only afford so much."

### Irreparably damage?

Ken Presley of the United Motorcoach Association and a former bus industry insurance executive, said such a drastic change in the federal requirements has the potential to irreparably damage the motorcoach industry.

"The real reason most people ride buses is because of the economy it brings," he said, noting that that applies to senior citizens on tours, chil-

dren on school trips, and entertainers in million-dollar coaches.

"When you raise those limits, you destroy that economy," he said. "Some people will go out of business, and fewer carriers also means a higher premium. Ultimately, it's the mass amount of customers who will be penalized for a few plaintiff attorneys to benefit from the higher limits."

Gladys Gillis of Starline Luxury Coaches in Seattle, Wash., agreed. "I would encourage all operators to see this as a real threat," she said.

### Being heard

She urged them to voice their concerns about the proposal in meetings with members of Congress and staffers during UMA Capitol Hill Days, which takes place March 17-18. (See February 2015 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Thrasher, who was among the 60 owners and senior executives at the UMA Capitol Hill Days fly-in last year, said he intended to make his case again this year and invited others to speak out, too.

"It makes an impact when they

see hundreds of us from the bus industry showing up on their doorstep, saying, 'Look, you can't just make half the bus industry go away by raising insurance rates for no real scientific reason, just an arbitrary 60 percent jump in rates,'" he said.

"Society cannot live without our industry. The next time we have a wild storm and you need the buses and half of us don't exist, have a nice time sleeping at the airport. We're not coming to get you."

See "Opinion" article on Page 10.

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# Operator Viewpoint: Regulators want to rock your world

By Rick Thielen  
Thielen Coaches

It appears the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (has proposed increasing the minimum amount of auto liability insurance motorcoach operators must carry) because the financial responsibility level has not been raised in nearly 30 years, and current levels have not kept up with medical costs and settlements.

The \$5 million (minimum) for passenger carriers has been sufficient for the past 30 years because it was such an astronomical increase — 500 percent — in 1985.

An increase anywhere near that in today's business climate would be devastating to any small operator, and would cause a huge consolidation in the industry.

Large operators insured by captive insurance and pools also would see huge increases.

In addition to possibly proposing huge increases in liability limits, the FMCSA also is considering adding an "inflation factor" to those limits, not based on the Consumer Price Index but on the medical inflation index. That is more than double or triple the CPI index.

A medical inflation index of even 5 percent per annum would cause the limits to double again in only 14 years.

Now, I hate to be a tad cynical, but I certainly cannot believe the legal profession would have a hand in this.

Higher insurance limits mean deeper pockets to be sued. That same cynicism, particularly in the trucking industry, could also carry over to a competition issue.

When the American Trucking Associations and the Trucking Alliance are in favor of a regulation,

too often it has an ulterior motive, like increasing the costs of smaller company competition. The same is true for electronic logging devices, speed limiters, hours of service, and the like. So, why not increase the insurance costs of the competition while we're at it?

## Likely result

Huge increases in insurance levels would certainly cause many small motorcoach operators to abandon ship. After all, this industry is neither "high profit," nor enjoys a high return on investment. Nor do operators lavish in huge salaries.

While larger operators usually congregate in metropolitan areas, many small operators are located in outstate areas and smaller communities. These operators are providing jobs and economic benefit to their communities, and they are providing transportation services to their schools, churches, youth groups and businesses in an area not well served by larger transportation operators.

In the airline industry, this is called "flyover land." If these companies go out of business, the affected communities will suffer from lack of transportation op-

tions; many times, the bus is the last remaining option.

Some 4 percent of operators already carry \$10 million insurance limits, either to protect extensive assets or because they are required to have increased limits by particular schools or clients. If a five-fold increase is imposed by the FMCSA, as in 1985, they may also see their insurance limits skyrocket.

There is always a certain amount of attrition in this industry. Bus companies come and bus companies go.

Sometimes they are shut down or simply are not financially viable. They may fail due to poor management, poor service, being under-capitalized, or maybe just bad luck, but using insurance as the last "nail in the coffin" from FMCSA doesn't seem quite right.

The bottom line is every operator, large or small has a "dog in this fight."

\* \* \*

Here is something more to think about. Back in 1988, the USEPA mandated that all underground fuel tanks had to be either upgraded or replaced within the next 10 years. The upgrade had to be completed by December 1998.

Our little community of 5,000

population at the time, had nearly 30 service stations that pumped gasoline, did minor vehicle repair work and sold a few supplies. These nearly 30 stations gave owners and employees jobs and provided services to the local folks in the area.

With the new mandate to update, replace or shutdown, most of these service station owners decided to simply close their doors.

Today, this same community has four outlets that sell gasoline (three C-stores and one grocery store).

At our bus company, we dug up a perfectly good underground fuel tank, disposed of it, and replaced it with a similar tank with a computerized leak monitor at a personal cost of \$34,000. The old tank was not leaking, so there was nothing gained here.

## Less to regulate

The end result was that the EPA had a much smaller number of fuel tanks to monitor, and vastly smaller numbers of tank operators to regulate, making the regulators' lives much simpler.

It was probably good that some of these tanks were 'leakers' and should have been replaced or up-

graded anyway. But the EPA did it with one sweep of a very wide brush.

Is it possible that the FMCSA is trying to do the same with the bus operators?

Raise the insurance limits high enough so the smaller carriers drop out of the market, leaving only the larger carriers to have to regulate. And, of course, their attitude is that the larger carriers are safer anyway.

Think how much simpler the lives of regulators would be with a smaller industry to regulate, fewer companies to audit and, of course, safer bus companies.

I wrote earlier about the new audit process, based on the Safety Management Cycle, and how it has changed the audit process.

I visited recently with Jeff Polzein of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City. Federal auditors spent nearly a month in his place of business trying to find items that Red Carpet was doing wrong. At the end of the audit, they found only a handful of "minor items" that needed to be addressed.

Certainly nothing that would justify spending a month in a place of business while that business is trying to carry on normal course of activities.

Big Brother is here, knocking on our doors, force-feeding us an endless supply of regulations that have no end in sight and ever ready with that "Big Hammer" to keep us "little folks" in line.

*Rick Thielen is president of Thielen Coaches in Redwood Falls, Minn. He is a board member of the Minnesota Charter Bus Operators Association and editor of its newsletter, News-Views & Blogs. This article was excerpted from the newsletter.*

## Consumer confidence slides as gas prices rise

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Consumer confidence fell last month as gas prices started to rise from a six-year low and damped Americans' optimism about the overall economy.

The Thomson Reuters/University of Michigan sentiment index decreased to 93.6 from a January reading of 98.1 that was the highest since the start of 2004.

A Bloomberg survey of economists forecast no change in the

index.

As gasoline prices rose last month, the consumer survey showed more Americans were less upbeat about the labor market after hearing of widespread layoffs in the oil patch. Consumers also said they were less enthusiastic about making big purchases.

Surveys of consumer sentiment are of significance to the motorcoach industry because 70 percent

of the economy is driven by consumer spending and confidence is a key factor in travel decisions.

The Michigan sentiment survey's index of expectations for six months from now decreased to 87.5 from 91 in January. The gauge of current conditions, which measures Americans' views of their personal finances, fell to 103.1 in February from 109.3 a month earlier when it was the highest since January 2007.

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# Food for thought: Striking the right maintenance balance

By Dave Millhouser

“Don’t think...just work,” said my buddy in response to my question.

We were rebuilding the Detroit 8V71 engine in the bus I was assigned to drive for the summer. It wasn’t using oil or smoking much but seemed weak and there was a lull in the schedule, so we jerked it out of the Eagle and commenced a rebuild.

There were two identical looking parts, and I’d asked Oakie if it mattered which side of the block I bolted them to. His response wasn’t exactly what I’d hoped for, so I asked if we should look at the repair manual.

“Books make me nervous,” he replied, “just bolt it together.”

Hours later we fired-up that jewel and headed out on Interstate 25 for a test drive. I drove, Oakie listened for noises, and Leroy rode in the rear peering down at the engine through the open floor hatches, looking for leaks.

It was running like a scalded dog when the oil pressure began to droop.

I yelled something to that

effect and Leroy shouted from the back of the bus: “It CAN’T be dropping...we’re pumping oil out of the valve covers.”

Seconds later the engine seized and we coasted silently to the shoulder, wondering what had happened.

A couple of lessons learned.

First, reading the manual is a GOOD thing. It did matter which side those do-dads were bolted to. They controlled the oil pressure and reversing them had pumped huge volumes of oil where it wasn’t needed, starving the bearings and sleeves, which then taught us a lesson.

The second thing we learned is that we needed to consider the delicate balance between “preventative maintenance” and “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

We had diligently rebuilt and ruined an engine that likely would have run well for a couple of more years.

As long as we’re operating complex vehicles in the real world, there will always be a balance between fixing things before they break and repairing (or patching) them afterwards.

Ideally we’d replace every part before it could wear out, but that isn’t realistic. Does anyone know the life cycle of every part? On the other hand, running a coach till it croaks is expensive, dangerous and tends to tick off customers.

When a reading light fails just before a day charter, it’s pretty easy to delay the repair. But if an A/C compressor is knocking, will it survive one more trip without baking a busload of seniors?

If I knew how to strike a perfect balance, I’d let you in on it. The only sure thing is that it’s worth thinking about and planning. Give thought to what sort of repairs need to be done and which can wait.

When motorcoaches began using multiple air-cooled alternators, the vendor suggested replacing bearings at very short intervals, perhaps covering its business behind. The industry figured that out, and many carriers happily stretch the interval with few problems.

On the other hand, smart operators didn’t (and don’t) stretch it too far, or dispatch a coach with a dodgy alternator on a multi-day trip.

It’s always cheaper to replace a part before it fails, but the balance is how FAR before? Giving thought, in advance, to how you’ll handle the balance is likely to pay off.

GBB (Great Big Busline) used to replace 8V71 engines when they burned a quart of oil every 100 miles. Experience taught GBB that, at that point, an engine was on borrowed time. GBB also replaced transmissions if the backup lights didn’t immediately illuminate when reverse was selected (lowered internal fluid pressure wasn’t enough to trigger the light switch).

The folks at GBB arrived at these, and many other maintenance benchmarks, by analyzing their records.

You don’t need to do it their way, but give it some thought and strike a balance between preventative maintenance and perverted maintenance. It’s perverse to do repairs that aren’t needed, or to neglect those that impact safety or reliability.

The frequently-heard phrase “What would Jesus do?” is a useful theological concept, but I’d respectfully suggest that when making decisions about which repairs can be postponed, think about asking

this question: “What would my lawyer do?”

You’re looking at a balance between experience, manufacturer recommendations and common sense, and it’s best to get as much of that balance struck before an incident.

A customer wanted to replace his used bus with a new coach, and my boss had me appraise the trade-in. It was pretty bad, but the clincher came when a peek at the tag axle indicated something wasn’t right. There were no brakes.

We’re not talking about worn shoes and drums, there were NO brakes. Apparently the brake had cammed over and the customer REALLY needed the bus for a charter, so he removed the spiders, drums and brake shoes.

That’s perverted maintenance, and I’d bet his lawyer did not approve.

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



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# ACC Climate Control joins the Spheros Group

CANTON, Mich. — ACC Climate Control, best known in the bus industry as a supplier of A/C systems for cutaway and school buses, has been acquired by the Spheros Group, a global manufacturer of bus HVAC systems.

Elkhart, Ind.-based ACC Climate Control will continue full business operations with its existing production plants and a workforce of 140 employees.

The acquisition strengthens Germany-based Spheros Group's presence in North America.

Spheros was formed 10 years ago when an investment group purchased the bus business unit of Webasto AG. Since then the company has been independent, operating under the name Spheros GmbH and the Spheros brand.

Webasto heating products have been rebranded Spheros, and it's

likely ACC Climate Control products also will pick up the name.

In 2008, Spheros moved its head office to Gilching, near Munich, Germany. The company established Spheros North America a year later in Canton.

"In ACC Climate Control we have found a partner that is a perfect match as far as our core bus business, philosophy and customer orientation are concerned," said

Heiko Baufeld, CEO of Spheros North America.

"As a market leader, Spheros-ACC will be the ideal partner for customers of HVAC systems in buses and special-purpose vehicles in North America."

Casey Cummings, CEO of ACC, said that as part of an international group, the company stands to profit from the processes of an established OEM partner, global en-

gineering and international buying. "It will also be able to offer its customers heaters and roof hatches for their buses," he said.

ACC Climate Control was founded 67 years ago in Livonia, Mich., as Truck and Coach Heater Manufacturing. It moved its headquarters to Elkhart in 2006, where it also has a fabrication division. Service and installation facilities are in Byron, Georgia, and High Point, N.C.

## NJ Transit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The ruling last year was not the first time New Jersey Transit had come under FTA administrative action for charter service rule transgressions.

"Based on the prior case the decision specifically finds that there was a 'pattern of violations' committed by NJ Transit," stated last month's decision, which was signed by FTA Acting Administrator Therese W. McMillan.

New Jersey Transit also had questioned the amount of the fine in its appeal filed last June.

### Deceit 'n deviousness

The transit agency argued that the fine should have been based on a lower calculation of Academy's revenue from the golf tournament and a reduction in the number of buses dedicated daily to the shuttles.

New Jersey Transit argued that Academy used 23 buses to service the golf tournament rather than the total of 31 listed in the original allegations.

McMillan also rejected that challenge.

"It is disingenuous to suggest that the use of a specific bus should be counted only once for an event, regardless of the number of days a specific bus might have been engaged in unauthorized charter service...when a bus is engaged in charter service for a multiple-day event, a bus is consequently unavailable to carry out public transportation on multiple service days.

"I am consequently not persuaded there is a sound reason or logic in NJ Transit's argument to support a change in the method of calculation regarding the number or percentage of buses engaged in charter service," McMillan wrote.

In conclusion, the latest document states, "I hereby deny the issues raised by NJ Transit in this appeal and I affirm the chief counsel's findings relating to violations of FTA's charter service rule by NJ Transit and the assessment of a \$10,000 penalty against NJ Transit."



This New Jersey Transit commuter coach, operated by Academy Bus, was spotted at Arundel Mills, the largest outlet shopping complex in Maryland. The mall's Hanover, Md., location puts it nearly 200 miles from Academy's home base in Hoboken, N.J., and far from any N.J. Transit commuter routes.

While New Jersey strongly protested the fine, in reality the \$10,000 levy is peanuts compared to the amount of money represented by 31 buses being used day after day to provide shuttle service for a major PGA golf tournament.

Private operators that should have legally provided the charter service lost out on potentially 16 or 17 times that much revenue. A \$50,000 fine clearly would have been more appropriate.

William J. Smith, New Jersey Transit senior public information officer, said the agency had no comment on the FTA decision.

He also would not directly address reports that Academy has continued to use New Jersey Transit buses to provide charter service.

"Regarding the allegations concerning Academy," he said, "we are looking into those concerns but we cannot comment further at this time."

### UMA files complaint

The issue surfaced publically in 2013 when the United Motorcoach Association filed a complaint against New Jersey Transit on behalf of one of its members, Service Bus Co. of Yonkers, N.Y.

The complaint alleged that numerous buses owned by New Jersey Transit and operated by Academy

Bus were observed providing three days of continuous shuttle service from spectator parking areas to the Barclays Golf Tournament. The PGA Tour event was played at Liberty National Golf Club.

Academy, based in Hoboken, N.J., operates scores of commuter coaches for New Jersey Transit, the fourth-largest transit bus system in the U.S. Only New York, Los Angeles and Chicago have larger transit bus systems. The statewide transit authority operates 2,027 buses, according to its website.

Academy is the third-largest private motorcoach operator in North America — behind only FirstGroup-Greyhound and Coach USA/Coach Canada/megabus — and the largest family-owned coach company.

The New Jersey Transit appeal of the ruling revealed that Academy was paid \$165,512.50 to provide the Barclay's shuttles but said Academy's operating expenses should have been deducted to reduce the economic benefit basis used to calculate the fine.

"I do not find this argument convincing," McMillan wrote.

The UMA complaint asserted that Academy was subject to the charter service regulation as a sub-recipient of FTA funds and was required to notify registered charter companies upon receiving a re-



A New Jersey Transit coach operated by Academy Bus waits next to the Empire City Casino near Yonkers, N.Y. Reports indicate the NJ Transit buses are frequently spotted at the casino. The New Jersey Transit markings are clearly visible on the side of the coach.

quest to provide charter service at the golf tournament, thereby allowing other companies to bid on the shuttle contract.

### Failure of oversight

UMA further contended that, under the federal charter regulation, New Jersey Transit was responsible for Academy's actions.

The FTA agreed that the transit agency was responsible for the actions of Academy Bus.

"FTA's charter service requirements are intended to protect private operators, such as Service Bus Company, that do not stand to benefit from the use of federally-subsidized vehicles. Academy's use of FTA-funded vehicles for charter service, in this instance, provided it with an unfair competitive advantage over the private operators that the rule is intended to protect."

When the FTA issued its initial ruling in the case last year, it noted it had earlier ordered New Jersey Transit to come up with a plan for monitoring its contractors.

The FTA ruling on the Academy complaint pointed out that New Jersey Transit had yet to file the ordered oversight plan resulting from the earlier case involving the Atlantic City Jitney Associa-

tion, adding that its "repeated failure" to enforce charter regulations demonstrated a "pattern of violations."

The latest decision explains in more detail the responsibilities of a public transit agency that receives federal subsidies.

"Under FTA's master agreement, a direct recipient is responsible for extending federal laws and requirements to third party participants and a recipient is further liable for non-compliant activities committed by a third-party recipient," the decision reads.

### Continuing pattern?

Photographs continue to surface of New Jersey Transit coaches, operated by Academy Bus, dropping off passengers on charter trips to a casino in Yonkers, N.Y., and a shopping mall in Hanover, Md., which is 196 miles from Hoboken.

One of the pictured buses is identified with USDOT-style lettering stating it is "Leased to New Jersey Transit Corporation" and "Leased From NJT2002 A Statutory Trust."

Another coach's lettering states, "Oper. Academy Lines LLC" and "Owned by N.J. Transit Corporation."

# Industry green certification program continues expansion

BURLINGTON, Vt. — Since the University of Vermont launched its Certification for Sustainable Transportation and eRating certification programs two years ago, more than 50 coach companies have signed up.

“We are working with over 50 companies across the country that have offices or headquarters in 26 states,” said David Kestenbaum, University of Vermont Extension sustainable transportation director and coordinator of the programs.

The Certification for Sustainable Transportation program awards eRating certification to motorcoach drivers who learn techniques to improve fuel economy, like limiting aggressive accelerations and idling.

Not only do the driving techniques save fuel but they also reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve vehicle energy efficiency, reducing fuel costs.

There also is an eRating “vehicle certification” for company buses. It uses an index that measures things like the use of low-emissions engines and exhaust-treatment technology and calculates greenhouse gas emissions per passenger mile.

The driver certifications take a couple of hours to complete online; the cost is modest.

“To work with us for a year, a company pays \$29, and it is just basically to cover our operating costs, and with that \$29 they have access to two driver certification programs and a vehicle certification,” said Kestenbaum.

## The large ‘n small of it

The largest enrollee in the programs is Coach USA/megabus.com, which has put all 3,000 of its drivers through the eRating program.

The company executive vice president is a fan.

“I think the fact that every one of our drivers has been through it and will continue to reinforce it with the material we get from the University of Vermont, I think it has been a win-win for both organizations,” said Don Carmichael of Coach USA/megabus.

But the program is not just for industry giants.

Prairie Coach Trailways of Dell Rapids, S.D., also participates. Dell Rapids, in the southeast corner of the state, has a population that is only slightly larger than the number of drivers employed by Coach USA/megabus.

Kestenbaum likens the eRating program to the Energy Star rating system for new appliances. It’s a way for companies to promote their energy efficiency, he says.

## The marketing factor

Research by Kestenbaum and others has shown that many consumers do not equate bus travel with green travel. So, being certified through the University of Vermont program is a way to drive that point home, he says.

“We have heard anecdotally from companies that these labels,

and their participation in the program, are helping them land contracts, especially with universities or sports teams or large corporate clients,” said Kestenbaum.

“So we give companies the tools to articulate their green services.”

One such company is Northeast Charter & Tour/Northeast

Trailways of Lewiston, Maine.

“We let customers know, especially when we are doing a pitch to a new customer, some of the incentives we have, and guidelines and policies we have so they realize we are not just an everyday company,” said Scott Riccio, owner of Northeast Trailways.

Kestenbaum says the goal is to

expand the programs to operators in all 50 states.

For more information, email [team@erating.org](mailto:team@erating.org).



David Kestenbaum

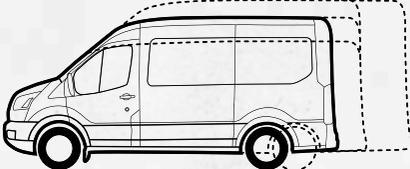
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# New at MOTORCOACH EXPO 2015

## Brighter outlook is reflected among industry suppliers

NEW ORLEANS — It was hard to miss by anyone who walked the aisles and hallways at UMA Motorcoach Expo here.

In direct conversations and in snippets of overhead chatting, the talk often centered on the improving economy and increased travel demands.

More than one conversation mentioned trip requests exceeding driver availability.

And there even was a story about one coach company owner who canceled his trip to Expo to drive a charter himself.

Three decades in, UMA Motorcoach Expo remains the indus-

try's largest forum for the technology and services available to the bus and motorcoach industry.

This year there were nearly three-dozen, first-time exhibitors and those who had skipped the show for a spell. Many of these companies doubtless were back as a result of being heartened by improving business prospects.

Here's a random sampling of products, services and technologies on display at UMA Expo 2015:

### No-spill oil change

A small brass-threaded plug for draining oil — that is not a new

product — nonetheless made its first appearance on the Expo show floor with the ambitious goal of finding its way onto every commercial bus and motorcoach in North America.

"We are in a lot of industries but the motorcoach market is untapped for us," said Bob Cassie, sales manager for No Spill Systems, which is based in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He works out of the company's U.S. branch in Pembina, N.D.

The No Spill System is a nifty, patented drain plug fitted with a stainless-steel spring-loaded valve. On the road, the valve is protected by a brass cap that can be removed

using fingers.

In the shop, the cap can be removed to permit the attachment of a drainer that can be screwed into place by hand. The valve is compressed to release oil only after the threaded drainer fitting has sealed the connection.

"There is no spillage, no mess on the floor, no environmental impact," Cassie said. "It saves time and money and makes it safer to do hot oil changes. If you can drain that oil when it is hot, you are removing all the sludge and contaminants from the pan."

The company sold 72,000 of its drain plugs last year and has

sold more than a million in 27 years, he said. "We have over 1,500 applications for the heavy-duty engines from Cummins, Cat, Detroit and Volvo. We don't do only engine oil — we also do transmissions, radiators and hydraulic reservoirs. We also do passenger vehicles."

One drainer can be used to tap all plugs within a series, the company says. Its materials and manufacturing are sourced in Canada and the U.S.

For distribution in the U.S., No Spill is partnering with Mohawk Manufacturing and Supply Co. of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 ►



**BYD**, which lays claim to having the world's first long-range, 40-foot electric coach, made its initial appearance at UMA Expo. Keith Budd of Frontier Bus Lines Ltd. in Red Deer, Alberta, middle and bottom photos, was among those who took a test drive. The BYD is powered by four, in-wheel traction motors that utilize the company's proprietary iron-phosphate batteries. BYD says the coach has a range of 190 miles on a single charge. After 12 years of use, the battery capacity is projected to remain above 80 percent, says BYD. A 45-foot model is on the way, according to the Los Angeles-based distributor of the Chinese-originated coach.



**Grech Motors** brought its GM40-model upscale cutaway to Motorcoach Expo. Riding on a Freightliner chassis, the Grech has frameless coach windows, electric plug entry door, rear luggage

storage, premium audio system, roof-mounted HVAC, Altro wood-look flooring, LED interior and exterior lighting, retractable seatbelts, and a large front-viewing window. It is powered by Cummins.



**Thomas Built Buses** says Transit-Liner C2 is a versatile cutaway that can be customized to meet a customer's specific needs with such features as coach-style seating, overhead parcel racks, video

system and tinted windows. The Freightliner chassis is available in wheelbases ranging from 158 to 279 inches. Options include air-ride suspension, heated driver's seat and engine exhaust brake.

# ABC uses Expo to tout new coach...coming in the fall

NEW ORLEANS — The exhibit floor at UMA Motorcoach Expo is all about showing off the latest and greatest products and services.

That wasn't quite the case at the ABC Companies-Van Hool stand at UMA Expo 2015 here.

The big news from ABC was the Van Hool coach that won't show up in the market for another eight or nine months.

ABC unveiled the coach, using a 12 foot-by-45 foot banner; provided details, using information-packed spec sheets, and talked up the Van Hool CX35 model that's expected to be in the market by October or November.

Seldom has a new coach received the advanced billing being heaped on the CX35, which is slated for a full product rollout early next year.

Through product publicity, advertising and salesmanship, ABC and Van Hool are taking early and direct aim at the Temsa TS-35, which has become the dominate 35-foot model in the North American motorcoach market.

The Van Hool CX35 will essentially be a CX45 with 10 feet and the tag axle removed. It will be equipped with as many standard features as its 45-foot counterpart and share parts galore.

"We made the CX35 as much like the CX45 as we could," said one ABC executive.

From axles to windows to tail lights to doors to bumpers to the A/C unit to brakes, the CX35 and CX45 are "basically the same bus," said Louis Hotard, ABC's longtime director of technical services.

The sameness extends to floor height, entrance, step-well, parcel racks, restroom, windshields and amenities. The noteworthy differences are engine and tire size, both of which are smaller.

All the commonality adds up to industry-leading parts interchangeability, claims ABC, reducing costs for operators.

"We are extremely excited to round out our product line by offering a smaller, more fuel-efficient solution that still delivers the performance and reliability of the larger Van Hool CX coach," said ABC Companies President and Chief Operating Officer Tim Wayland.

As for here and now, as opposed to a coach that's coming in the fall, ABC provided these highlights at its Expo stand:

- It debuted the Van Hool TDX double-deck coach, which succeeds the TD925 double-decker that ABC and Van Hool introduced a half-dozen years ago.

- It made official that the up-scale M2 series of cutaway buses

produced by its subsidiary, Ameritrans, have replaced the M1235 midsize cutaways that were exclusively manufactured for ABC by General Coach America. The 3035RE, a coach-look, body-on-chassis rear-engine bus, also produced by GCA for ABC, has disappeared along with the M1235.

- Announced two executive and

sales team management changes.

Roman Cornell has been promoted to executive vice president, eastern region and specialty vehicles. He previously held the title of senior vice president.

Jay Oakman has been promoted to vice president of the ABC Commercial Group, with overall responsibility for the new-coach process,

including scheduling, pre-delivery inspection, Van Hool relationship management and CustomerCare.

Oakman most recently served as director of key accounts and has worked as an account manager since joining the company in 2003.

Cornell has supported ABC sales efforts since 1992 in a variety of management roles. Along with

continued sales and operations responsibilities for the Northeast and Southeast, Cornell also has oversight for the ABC Specialty Vehicles division, consisting of New Flyer, Alexander Dennis and Ameritrans equipment brands.

The redesign of the Van Hool TD925 double-decker, and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 ►

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'ABC's first venture into bus manufacturing also is moving forward... The first two buses have come off the assembly with 15 more in production.'

## ABC/Van Hool

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

rebranding as the TDX, includes new front and rear caps and an enhanced driver compartment.

The upgrade also expanded the use of LED lighting and three-point passenger seatbelts.

With seating for up to 81 passengers, the revamped TDX integrates a variety of enhanced features, passenger amenities and styling, said Jay Oakman.

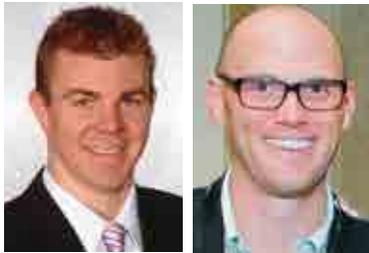
"We believe the evolution of the TDX series will continue to drive market demand for high-capacity transport solutions that take up to 81 cars off the road and reduce the carbon footprint," added Oakman.

ABC also used UMA Expo as a forum to provide an update on the partnership agreements it announced a year ago at Motorcoach Expo 2014 in Los Angeles.

For example, ABC is marketing two models of transit buses produced by New Flyer, the MiDi® and Xcelsior®.

The MiDi is a midsize, low-floor, clean diesel bus that has applications for use in community, airport, university and hotel shuttle services. It's available in 30- and 35-foot lengths.

The New Flyer Xcelsior is a heavy-duty, low-floor bus designed for use in rigorous duty cycles. It's available in 35-, 40- and 60-foot lengths, and offered with



Roman Cornell

Jay Oakman

clean diesel, compressed natural gas, and diesel electric hybrid propulsion systems.

Cornell said ABC is finding customers for the transit-like buses among airports, universities, contract service providers, and others.

ABC also has signed up dealers, including DATTCO in the Northeast and Creative Bus in the South and Southwest, for its specialty vehicle offerings.

ABC's first venture into bus manufacturing also is moving forward, said Cornell. The company is producing Alexander-Dennis double-deck buses at its complex in Nappanee, Ind.

The first two buses have come off the assembly with 15 more in production, said Cornell.

And, like others, Cornell wanted to get in a good word about the CX35.

"This new product is designed to drive major benefits to an operator's bottom line," he said. "Because it is purpose-built for smaller groups, the CX35 (will enable) greater fleet flexibility and fuel savings."



ABC hung a 12-foot banner showing a representation of the Van Hool CX35 that will be available later this year. The banner was draped alongside a CX45, the progenitor of the CX35. The CX45 and CX35 share the same design, engineering and a plethora of parts. ABC operated two large stands at Expo. The company's new Specialty Vehicles division had its own display of cutaway buses — produced by ABC's Ameritrans subsidiary, and a pair of low-floor transit buses it sells for New Flyer. The Ameritrans M2 Vista, at right, is being marketed as a premium midsize touring cutaway. The black Ameritrans E285 cutaway, at right, was equipped with an "executive shuttle interior package" that included high-back recliner seats, DVD, 32- and 22-inch flat-screen TVs. It also was equipped with a back-up camera.



CHTC (USA) of Chino, Calif., introduced the HT45 at UMA Expo. The Chinese coach is equipped with a Cummins ISX and Allison B500. Among the standard features are Fainsa leather seats, ISRI adjustable driver seat, enclosed parcel racks, ZF air suspension, WABCO ECAS system, electronic stability control, wheelchair lift, central electric door locking system, tire pressure monitoring system, halogen cornering lights and premium sound system. For additional background on the coach, see Dec. 1, 2013, Bus & Motorcoach News.



The Enviro400, a 36-foot, double-deck, open-top tourist buses was back at Motorcoach Expo. The Alexander-Dennis product uses a Cummins ISL engine coupled to a Voith four-speed automatic transmission. A typical configuration of the

bus has 46 upper-deck, fixed seats and 9 fixed lower-deck seats. The bus also comes equipped with a CCTV monitoring system with an upstairs camera and another that functions as a back-up camera.

# MCI focus: Reliability, vendor quality, product upgrades

NEW ORLEANS — Motor Coach Industries, the largest coach manufacturer in North America, is expanding its focus on reliability by introducing a variety of quality control and training initiatives.

MCI executives discussed the initiatives during UMA Motorcoach Expo here, while rolling out upgraded features on its most popular coach models.

“We continue to get better and better with the reliability of our motorcoaches,” said Rick Heller, CEO of MCI. “We want to be absolutely the best partner with our customers.”

One of the company’s new approaches to upgrading coach reliability is the creation of a team of quality engineers who spend 100 percent of their time working with MCI vendors.

“This team focuses on how we align our company with world-class suppliers, and it also looks at how those suppliers run their quality control systems,” said Brent Maitland, vice president of marketing and product planning at MCI. “We want to get out ahead and make sure these companies are integrating their products with our designs.”

Maitland said MCI currently has four engineers on staff who are working with suppliers on quality issues and is planning to grow the team to nine.

MCI also is beefing up its technical support team, recently hiring Steve Batho, a former Daimler Buses North America executive, as vice president of technical support, a new position at the company.

“That team is organizing right now and putting processes in place that will allow it to respond to customer issues faster,” said Maitland.

## Expanded Cummins service

MCI also is working on achieving a higher level of authorization to work on Cummins engines, the brand it uses most in its coaches.

Because engine reliability is a major issue with operators, MCI says it wants to increase its capability of performing more complex diagnostics and repairs on the engines so customers don’t have to take their coaches to a Cummins dealer.

“That will allow us to handle more issues at our shops for faster issue resolution,” Maitland said. “Anytime we can handle these things up front it is good for our customers.”

A new perk MCI has begun offering customers is free online training for technicians, which also is being used by the company’s own technicians.

The learning management system, which MCI started three

months ago as a pilot program, provides individual online training that allows users to learn at their own pace and track their progress.

Maitland said the system already is being used by 33 operators to train 270 technicians and is being rolled out to other operators.

## Coach upgrades

Although MCI didn’t unveil any new coaches at this year’s Expo, it did showcase new features on existing models.

MCI exhibited its popular J4500, which it described as having the “smoothest ride, tightest

turning radius and lowest total cost of operation.” MCI also showed off a two-door Setra TopClass S 417 luxury coach.

The J4500 is now equipped with ZF axles with independent front- and tag-axle suspensions, allowing for the tighter turning ra-

dius, and smoother Bendix brakes with optional Wingman, a radar-based adaptive cruise control and collision mitigation system.

The coach on display on the Expo show floor also included an REI entertainment system with

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ►

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The J4500s that **MCI** brought to UMA Expo were equipped with ZF independent front- and tag-axle suspensions, which produce a more comfortable ride and allow a tighter turning radius. The new J models also have smoother Bendix brakes. The display coach, at upper left, also featured an REI entertainment system with high-definition video monitors and a new parcel rack that gives an extra inch of headroom. The two-door Setra S 417 model showcased by MCI at Expo, above, included a TopSky roof, rear window, lounge seating area in the rear, and new leather Voyage Ambassador seating, at right.



## MCI focus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

high-definition video monitors and a new common-model parcel rack that gives the J4500 an extra inch of headroom.

According to Maitland, the latest J4500 represents a quantum leap forward in coach reliability and uptime. The coach also features a new Denso alternator that's headed for a million failure-free miles in field service.

The two-door Setra S 417 model showcased at Expo included such options as a TopSky roof, rear window, a lounge area in the

rear, and new leather Voyage Ambassador seating.

Second doors have long been popular in the brand's native Europe, where groups are accustomed to the easy boarding pattern that the option provides.

"U.S. and Canadian operators that host inbound European tours have expressed interest in having two-door coaches," said Maitland.

"It allows their guests to board in the manner that they're used to. Add in the club corner (lounge area), and you've got a coach that offers the kind of thoughtfulness and luxury that can really set an operator apart in a crowded market."

## Experts: Planning for crashes helps avoid 'em

NEW ORLEANS — Motorcoach operators who want to avoid or reduce the impact of increasingly costly lawsuits and more insurance claims should plan ahead and train their drivers on how to handle incidents and accidents.

That was the advice of two insurance experts who spoke at Motorcoach Expo here about managing the gamut of accidents, from catastrophic crashes to rear-end collisions, sideswipe incidents, and passenger fall cases.

The first step may be convincing drivers to accept the idea that bad things happen — even to the best of them.

"Some of your best drivers have the worst crashes," Bob Crescenzo, safety director of Lancer Insurance Co., told operators.

"Why? Because they drive the most miles," he said, adding that those drivers need to receive the same training as all others.

But it's not always easy persuading drivers that preparing for accidents and thinking about insurance claims is important to them, said

Paul Berne, Lancer's claims director.

"One of the things I'm asked by operators is, 'how do I get drivers to recognize that they have skin in the game, that they're at risk?'" he said.

He advised operators to let drivers know that "if they're involved in a catastrophic incident, it's a life-changer.

"When you talk to drivers who have been involved in these catastrophic cases, as we have, most of them have a very difficult time going back to driving," he said.

Crescenzo said operators might consider posing questions at driver training sessions about how they would feel if they hit a pedestrian, and about the circumstances that might lead to such an incident.

"I want you to get people thinking about how upsetting that is from a human perspective, what someone would feel like if that happened," he said.

Drivers involved in such accidents often say, "I never saw that, I didn't see that person," he said. "From a claims management per-

spective, that's a problem.

"Even if someone is crossing against the light, with headsets, completely distracted and your vehicle hits that pedestrian, is that still a claim? Yes. Can that impact your company? Yes. Can it impact your driver? Yes."

In addition to encouraging drivers to think and talk about accidents as a way to avoid them, operators might consider taking operational steps to minimize driver distractions. For example, they might assign drivers whenever possible to the vehicle they're most familiar with and comfortable in.

Here are some of other recommendations from the insurance experts:

**Prepare a media response plan for handling a crash.**

"There are certain things that we recommend that are never mentioned, things like the driver's medical records....If your response to (reporters) are statements like 'We're investigating the incident, we're working with authorities,' a form of 'no comment at this time,' we believe that you're better off," Berne said.

**Engage the media well ahead of an accident or incident.**

"The time to get media coverage is every day that you do something well — if you have a customer who is pleased that you've helped the community, you've assisted an organization, you've provided a vehicle," Crescenzo said.

That way, when a news reporter uses Google as a research tool to research the bus company after a crash, "they see 25 stories about how well you operate every day and how good you are in the community.... The more positive information there is in the media about your company, the harder it is to say you're terrible because you have one serious crash," he said.

**Require drivers to document and report all passenger fall incidents.**

Even if the passenger reports that he or she has not been injured, the driver should report the incident and the operator should contact the insurance carrier.

**Impress upon drivers that they're in the hospitality business.** When drivers and other employees are always courteous and respectful to



Bob Crescenzo

Paul Berne

customers, there are fewer complaints and more good will when something bad happens, according to Crescenzo.

**Set driver-hiring standards and stick to them.**

"If you deviate from them, you have to have a reason. You should add additional training, vehicle training, ride-along training," Crescenzo said.

**Train drivers to avoid rear-end collisions.**

"Is there any way for a plaintiff's attorney to demonstrate negligence on your part if someone crashes into your rear? Yes. And what would cause someone to crash into your rear? Following distance," Crescenzo said.

He added that following distance is not the only means of avoiding such accidents.

"It's about alerting people to watch the road, using signals, slowing down in consideration of weather," he said.



Showcased at the **Prevost/Volvo** stand at Expo was the first X3-45 Commuter Coach, above, to roll off the new Prevost production line in Plattsburgh, N.Y. Boldly printed on the side was a message: "The Choice is Yours," positioning the X3-45 as a new alternative in the commuter market. The H3-45 Prevost on the Expo floor, above left, featured Amaya A2-Ten VIP Caprone-leather seats. The Volvo 9700, right, was wrapped with vivid graphics representing the 2014-15 Volvo Ocean Race.



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**CAIO Steps Up.** CAIO Induscar and its U.S. dealer network, Alliance Bus Group, unveiled two new models at UMA Expo, the S3645, above, and the S3436, top right. Both are more sophisticated coaches than CAIO previously has had in the North American market. They are equipped with Amaya A2Ten leather seating, REI Elite entertainment sys-

tems, full LED lighting, rear viewing window, fresh-flush bathrooms, Terabus faux wood flooring, and Allison transmissions. The S3645 has a Detroit engine, while the S3436 has a Cummins. The 36-foot S3436 seats 38. The first S3645 was purchased by ACR Coaches of Starkville, Miss. At right is a CAIO G3600, its first entry into the U.S. market.



## Marketing seen as vital to overall company success

If motorcoach operators want to stand out and attract customers, they have to differentiate themselves from the crowded field of competitors.

To accomplish that, operators need to develop a marketing plan and establish a marketing budget, Callen Hotard, CEO of Hotard Coaches in New Orleans, told Expo attendees during an educational session titled "Choosing the Right Marketing Mix."

"It is vital to the overall success of your company to have a marketing and advertising budget and to keep track of it," said Hotard.

According to Hotard, the marketing budget of the average motorcoach operation is about 2 percent of company revenue. And that percentage only takes into account operators that have a marketing budget.

"A lot of tour companies look at our business as a commodity," Hotard said. "It is very important to differentiate ourselves, and we aren't doing that. If we can't show we are different, it is understandable that customers will look at other operators."

He said there are various amenities operators could add and



Callen Hotard

Julie Chalmers

market, such as more legroom on coaches, unique tour packages, friendly and knowledgeable employees, and quality equipment and amenities.

One way to stand out would be to employ sales people who are ex-

perts in specific areas your company serves, instead of having all of the sales force try to know every area. For example, a company could have an expert on Orlando who focuses only on helping people plan trips to the Florida city.

Julie Chalmers, director of sales and marketing at Hotard, said coach companies could investigate moving into different specialties. But the key is to determine whether such a move is financially feasible.

For example, Chalmers said that when movie and TV production picked up in New Orleans, Hotard looked into focusing on that industry. But it turned out to be such a small market that the company decided it wasn't worth spending money to develop.

One new area that did work out for the company involved people traveling to New Orleans from surrounding areas and states to board cruise ships.

One of the complaints people had was that driving to New Orleans and parking was a major hassle. So, Hotard, which has operations in Mississippi and in Baton Rouge, La., starting letting people

there park their cars at the company's lots and bused them to the cruise ships.

"You have to determine where the most potential is and what message you want to put out," Chalmers said. "Is it brand awareness, name recognition, new services? Do you want to target a specific market, such as casinos or weddings?"

She suggested that companies use all forms of media in their marketing, including TV, social media, direct mail, press releases, radio, event sponsorships and trade shows.

She noted that radio stations and some TV stations are often open to doing trade – basically offering free or reduced-cost advertising in return for receiving something from the company, such as a discounted tour.

Hotard said operators who refuse to stress their differences can't complain when customers just call around to several companies searching for the best price.

"We're going to be a commodity if we don't differentiate ourselves," he said.

### Green Award

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

#### eRating award program

A new aspect — a monthly award — has been added to the eRating program.

Called the eRating.org Driver of the Month Award, it was created to recognize and acknowledge drivers who have gone above and beyond the call of duty in using and promoting eco-friendly driving and idle-free practices.

The award is being sponsored by Motor Coach Industries.

The initial winner, Tim Turcotte of Northeast Trailways, was announced at UMA Motorcoach Expo.

Turcotte received the eRating training and applies its techniques on a daily basis in his driving. He qualifies for his company's idle-free incentive programs every month, and spreads the word about

eco-friendly driving practices and helps train other drivers.

Winners receive an award certificate, a gift from the Certification for Sustainable Transportation program, and are highlighted online through social media outlets.

"This program acts to both reward and acknowledge drivers for their hard work, raise awareness of their efforts and provide incentive for other drivers to take the initiative towards eco-friendly driving," said Kestenbaum.

#### Nominating drivers

Nominations are being accepted for the award. Applicants can nominate themselves or be nominated by others.

A nomination can be submitted in written form or in the form of a video (a short video taken on a smartphone) and should contain the following information:

- Name of the individual
- Where they work/drive
- Contact information
- Why they deserve the award
- Personal reason for behavioral changes/embracing the pledges related to eco-friendly driving

Applicants are not required to be signed up for Certification for Sustainable Transportation programs or to have completed the eRating driver training program to apply.

A training module is available for drivers at [www.eRating.org](http://www.eRating.org).

"Drivers have a huge impact on the success of a trip," noted Brent Maitland, MCI vice president of marketing and product planning.

"When it comes to saving fuel, studies indicate that more than 30 percent of fuel economy is influenced by driving techniques."

Nominations are to be sent via email to [team@eRating.org](mailto:team@eRating.org). For info, go to at [www.eRating.org](http://www.eRating.org).

## Calendar

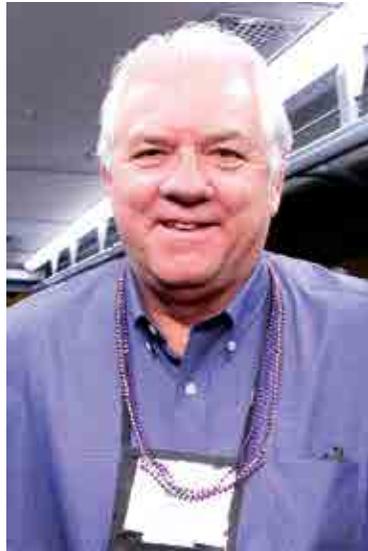
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**17-18 California Bus Association Maintenance Seminar**, ABC Companies, Costa Mesa, Calif. Info: [www.cbabus.com](http://www.cbabus.com).

**20-22 Heartland Travel Showcase**, Hyatt Regency,

Chicago. Info: [www.heartland-travelshowcase.com](http://www.heartland-travelshowcase.com).

**23-24 Motorcoach Association of South Carolina and North Carolina Motorcoach Association Joint Coach Rodeo**, Michelin Laurens Proving Grounds, Mountville, S.C. Info: [www.scmotorcoach.org](http://www.scmotorcoach.org).



**Harry Stout** of Stout's Transportation in Ewing, N.J., won the Temsa TS 35, left above, during the Motorcoach Marketing Council funding-raising auction at Expo. Stout's \$350,000 bid won the coach that was donated by CH Bus Sales and Temsa. At right is a 30-passenger Temsa TS 30, in Hampton Jitney livery, which was on display. The smallest of the Temsa models had a Ricon wheelchair lift with two tie downs. It also is equipped with a Cummins ISB engine, Allison B300, rear-view camera, rear window, REI A/V system and 110-outlets.



The Temsa TS 45 displayed at Expo, above, had a long list of features, including extended warranties. The coach warranty is 30 months or 250,000 miles. The coach has 110-volt plugs with USB ports, Alcoa wheels, preheater, enclosed parcel racks, leather seats, rear window, REI A/V system and wheelchair lift.

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### It's the law

The *FMCSA Compliance Manual for Passenger Carriers* and the *Passenger-Carrying Driver Handbook* were introduced at Motorcoach Expo by J.J. Keller and Associates. The publications are patterned after the company's highly popular trucking industry products.

"The manual hones in on all the motorcoach information and takes out the trucking material that doesn't apply. It is still pretty robust," said Jan Hamblin, director of strategic accounts at J.J. Keller.

The manual is offered as an online tool that explains FMCSA regulations in "authoritative, easy-to-understand explanations for safety professionals," according to the company.

It covers operations at typical passenger carriers, as well as para-transit providers. Included are sections on commercial driver licensing, insurance, alcohol and drug testing, hours of service, vehicle inspection and maintenance, accident procedures, enforcement, and Americans with Disability Act compliance.

Pricing begins at \$219 for the manual and one year of update service.

The 190-page *Passenger-Carrying Driver Handbook* is

spiral-bound and designed to go on the road.

"The handbook can be used for driver training and refresher training," Hamblin said. "It covers regulations and best practices, common-sense things that reflect professionalism, like dealing with your passengers and your uniform."

Pricing begins at \$9.29 per copy for small quantities with discounts for larger purchases.

For information, go to [www.JJ-Keller.com](http://www.JJ-Keller.com).

### Step aboard

Fuel economy has long motivated operators to watch their weight — on their coaches. Recent additions to equipment, such as emissions gear, electronics, belted seats, and stronger floors needed to support seat installations, are making it more important to keep motorcoaches on a diet.

Tarabus flooring displayed at Motorcoach Expo was touted as "the lightest, strongest flooring."

"We are a manufacturer of PVC flooring for the marine industry and for transit applications," said Perry DeGroot of Gerflor, which has U.S. offices in Bensenville, Ill.

The floor materials, manufactured in France, are offered in a variety of colors and patterns. "We do the faux wood look, which is very popular now," DeGroot said. "We have a wide range of color options to match the interiors of coaches. We make many with anti-skid surfaces, even a wood with anti-skid."



Bob Greene, left, and Donovan Albarran, center, of Amaya-Astron Seating, discuss one of the hottest topics on the Expo show floor, the federal seat-belt mandate, with David Annett of Annett Bus Lines in Sebring, Fla.

Most of all, the floors are light, he said.

"Ribbed rubber flooring is 13 pounds a square yard and smooth rubber is 8 pounds. Our flooring is 5 pounds. That is a huge difference, particularly over the life of a vehicle for fuel savings and meeting your gross vehicle weight."

Later this year Gerflor will introduce a floor that weighs four pounds per square yard, he said. "That little bit makes a big difference. Over the life of a coach it adds up."

For information, go to [www.gerflortransport.com](http://www.gerflortransport.com).

### Employment screening

Operators cruising the Expo floor were reminded that driver history records are available at the touch of a computer key through a partnership between the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and NIC Technologies.

The company has partnered with the FMCSA since 2010 to provide Internet access to the safety history records of commercial drivers.

"This information is available for free through a Freedom of Information Act request that can take up to four weeks," said Ilya Krifman, who represented NIC at Motorcoach Expo. "If you go through the pre-employment screening program online service, (you get) an instantaneous record online."

"It allows carriers to screen any variety of licenses that are associated with that driver. It will provide five years of crash and three years of inspection history," he said.

The FMCSA has said that carriers using the pre-employment screening program have experienced crash rate reductions of 8 percent and driver out-of-service rate reductions of 17 percent.

Drivers can obtain their own pre-employment screening program records from the website without charge. Prospective employers are charged \$10 per driver record or can purchase an annual subscription, which costs \$100 for carriers with 100 or more power

units, and \$25 for carriers with fewer units.

For information, go to [www.psp.fmcsa.dot.gov](http://www.psp.fmcsa.dot.gov).

### Driver records

Timely notification of driver citations or license suspensions is offered by SuperVision, a first-time exhibitor.

The service provides monthly reports, via email or Internet contacts, on driver license records. Email reports announce new violations, suspensions or expirations. Coverage varies by state.

The service is offered by Explore Information Services and Solera Companies of Eagan, Minn.

For information, go to [www.esupervision.com](http://www.esupervision.com).

### Health-care benefits

Lifestyle Health Plans was introduced at Expo 2015 as a strategic partner of the United Motorcoach Association.

The plans, described as wellness-oriented, health-care-benefit programs, are offered by the Medova Healthcare Financial Group LLC of Wichita, Kan.

"We offer products or programs that UMA is making available to its members," said Brian Bauer, executive director of business relations and development at Medova.

"Our focal point is incentivized wellness in the insurance design. More than 75 percent of U.S. health-care claims are due to preventable lifestyle diseases and conditions."

The health plan will enable motorcoach operators to comply with employer mandates included in the federal Affordable Care Act.

Beginning this year, the law requires companies with 100 or more full-time-equivalent employees to provide a minimal level of medical coverage or make an "employer shared responsibility payment." The mandate will apply to companies with 50 to 99 employees beginning Jan. 1, 2016.

"Our hope is that we can help UMA members think through that mandate," Bauer said. "A big piece

of our thinking also is that employee retention can improve by offering benefits that actually meet their needs. The plans have a lot of consumer-driven features."

Lifestyle Plans are designed as an Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) benefit, which differs from a fully-insured insurance carrier plan, Bauer said. Medova offers 16 standard plans with a range of costs, benefits, co-pays and deductibles.

For information, go to [www.lifestylehealthbenefits.com](http://www.lifestylehealthbenefits.com).

### Staying cloud connected

Passenger Wi-Fi, driver communications, GPS tracking and possibly surveillance cameras — the digital loads carried on a motorcoach can far exceed the bandwidth most offices used a decade ago. Cradlepoint made its first appearance at Motorcoach Expo to display its cloud-based networking system.

"We provide a cellular gateway for providing connectivity to anything on the bus, primarily for public Wi-Fi as well as digital signage controls, GPS connections, tablet software and anything else that is connected," said Daniel Dubief of Cradlepoint, which is based in Boise, Idaho.

Among the features of the Cradlepoint COR IBR1100 Series for vehicles is its ability to manage Wi-Fi demand.

"One of the things we have come across at the show is the over-utilization of Wi-Fi. Because it is cellular you do have surcharges," Dubief said. "One of our new products is a cloud-based solution that can limit how your passengers access the Internet while protecting them at the same time. You can help filter their access to specific sites such as Netflix, Facebook and other streaming video websites."

For information, go to [www.cradlepoint.com](http://www.cradlepoint.com).

### Mobile security

The ASA Electronics/Jensen exhibit featured an array of video and audio entertainment devices that are becoming standard equipment on motorcoaches. The booth also touted Jensen's Voyager line of observation devices, including cameras, recorders and screens.

Among the products shown by the Elkhart, Ind.-based company was a wireless digital observation system that uses a seven-inch, easy-mount monitor and a 12-volt DC plug.

The camera is designed for connection to the coach's rear clearance light and is said to transmit a "sharp, clear, uninterrupted picture" up to 60 feet without cables or wiring.

For information, go to [www.asaelectronics.com](http://www.asaelectronics.com).

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