

# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

## Drivers: Key to cutting crashes

CRYSTAL CITY, Va. — Motorcoach accidents undoubtedly could be reduced if everyone in the industry — from operators, to inspectors, to regulators — placed more emphasis on the men and women who drive the buses.

That's the key conclusion of analysts who are wrapping up a detailed examination of data collected during a two-year "bus crash causation study" conducted by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

FMCSA analysis division chief, William Bannister, who reported the preliminary study results at a Commercial Vehicle Safety

Alliance seminar here last month, said bus drivers were to blame for far more accidents than were mechanical problems on the buses they were driving.

"We see a definite need to focus on the drivers and driver-related issues," he stressed.

Bannister said the study still needs some fine tuning but the final report on the findings could be ready in a few weeks.

The study targeted serious accidents in New Jersey, which was chosen because of the variety and volume of bus traffic in the state and its unusually high number of serious

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## New-entrant oversight advocated

CRYSTAL CITY, Va. — New motorcoach operators should be schooled and tested on state and federal safety regulations before being allowed to put any buses on the nation's highways.

That was the overwhelming opinion of more than 150 representatives from all areas of the industry who spent two days last month discussing ways motorcoach travel could be made safer.

Brought together here by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance for a special bus safety summit, the group voted as its top safety priority government regulations that would require new-entrant carriers to pass

safety training classes and meet minimum safety requirements before receiving operational authority from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Currently, no such requirements exist, making it relatively easy for potentially unsafe carriers to set up shop, including those that are being reincarnated as new companies after being forced to shut down by regulators because of safety or other violations.

The new-entrant issue beat out, by a wide margin, seven other proposals that received serious attention in a series of meetings and workshops held during the

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### Singin' the Blues

*The Express 4500, upper right inset, produced by Blue Bird Coachworks in Fort Valley, Ga., has failed to catch on in a big way during the six years since its introduction as a moderately-priced coach/commuter shuttle. The high-end Wanderlodge has been produced on the same assembly line as the Express 4500.*

## Blue Bird Coachworks, Wanderlodge shut down

FORT VALLEY, Ga. — The 18-month drive by Complete Coach Works to make a viable company out of the former motorcoach and recreational vehicle divisions of Blue Bird Corp. has come up short.

Coachworks Holdings Inc., which was set up by Complete Coach Works to purchase the two Blue Bird divisions from Cerberus

Capital Management in mid-2007, was foreclosed on and taken over by its principal secured creditor, and the operation officially shut down at the end of February.

"As a result of this foreclosure, the current economic recession and other business difficulties, Coachworks has closed its plant in Fort Valley, Ga., and filed a Notice of Voluntary Dissolution with the

(Georgia) Secretary of State," said Mark Baxter, an attorney for the company in a letter to creditors.

"We, at Coachworks, are saddened by these developments and their consequences to all involved," said Baxter... "With all regards, we regret these unfortunate circumstances."

The assets of Blue Bird Coachworks and Blue Bird Wanderlodge,

as the two divisions were generally known, will be liquidated at a public sale, which has not yet been scheduled.

The shutdown does not directly impact the Blue Bird Corp. school bus manufacturing.

In his letter to creditors, Baxter said the liquidation of all equipment, inventory, accounts receiv-

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## Congress gets second coach safety measure

WASHINGTON — Two U.S. senators, Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, and Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, have reintroduced comprehensive motorcoach safety legislation that failed to gain much traction last year.

The far-reaching Hutchison-Brown bill would require seatbelts and improved fire protection on motorcoaches, plus stronger roofs and windows.

In Hutchison's view, it would "overhaul and dramatically increase the safety of motorcoaches to reduce deaths and serious injuries caused by accidents."

The original Hutchison-Brown bill, introduced in late 2007, got a cool reception from the motorcoach industry because it mandated a long list of safety features with no testing to support either their effectiveness or efficacy. (See Dec. 1, 2007, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Additionally, Brown and Hutchison were accused by some in the media of grandstanding, using bus tragedies to promote legislation of questionable value. Some of that

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## FTA brings consistency to charter service rules

WASHINGTON — The revised charter service rule that has been in place for just under a year is distinctly different from the old rule in many ways but perhaps none more important than the Federal Transit Administration's commitment to assuring the rule is interpreted and applied consistently.

The FTA is now using decisions it has made during the past year to help settle disputes between private motorcoach companies and public transit agencies, making it easier for the two sometimes competing industry sectors to better understand the rules of the game.

In the past, when rulings on disputed issues initially came from the FTA's regional offices, they often were in conflict with decisions made in other regions of the country, leaving the FTA with having to sort them out later at the headquarters level.

Under the revised rule, the regional offices no longer are the starting point for complaints. Instead, private carriers and transit agencies can now seek advisory opinions and cease and desist orders directly from the FTA general counsel without having to file formal complaints.

"Right now it is a good sign they are using previous cases to speak to the decisions," noted Ken Presley, vice president of the United Motorcoach Association. "This assures consistency, something we never got when we were going through the regional offices."

The swing toward consistency was illustrated in February when the FTA's acting chief counsel, Scott A. Biehl, cited past decisions to decide two disputes between Valley Bus Co. of Fargo, N.D. and Metro Area Transit, the public transit agency operated by the city of Fargo.

Valley Bus sought advisory opinions and cease and desist orders on Metro's establishment of a bus route that included the campus of North Dakota State University, and a contract the transit agency had with the college to provide shuttle service between remote parking lots and event venues.

Biehl sided with Metro on the first issue, saying the route developed by the transit agency did not meet the definition of a charter because it connected to existing bus routes, making it an extension of its regular-route system and legal for Metro to operate.

However, he agreed with Valley Bus on the second issue, noting that the contract between Metro and the university fit the definition of charter service because the transportation would be at the request of a third party and involved the exclusive use of a bus or van for a negotiated price. He suggested the transit agency take steps to do away with the contract.

### Precedents set

In both rulings, Biehl cited decisions issued by the FTA late last

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## Canadian operators endorse hours rules for transit drivers

TORONTO — Canada's transport minister has proposed scrapping the hours-of-service exemption for bus drivers at three public transit systems that are under the control of the federal government.

The announcement by Transport Minister John Baird was enthusiastically endorsed — as an important safety initiative — by Motor Coach Canada, the trade association that represents private bus operators in Canada.

"Over the past five years we have challenged the federal government's rationale for the transit driver exemption," said Brian Crow, president of Motor Coach Canada.

"The government has never been able to justify the exemption, yet, it is a known fact that transit drivers use the exemption to work double shifts and far exceed the maximum hours allowed for other bus and truck drivers."

Crow indicated Motor Coach

Canada's concerns are for the safety of transit bus passengers and other road users.

In Canada, both commercial bus and truck drivers have their hours of service regulated by rules that are based largely on scientific research and what is known about human physiology and fatigue.

But for the past 20 years, transit bus drivers in Canada have been exempt from hours-of-service regulations.

"The transit bus exemption never made sense, so we applaud the minister's intentions to make transit drivers subject to the same regulations", said Crow. "After all, the safety of bus passengers and other road users depends on drivers being alert and well rested, regardless of the type of bus."

With the exception of British Columbia, all Canadian provinces have similar transit bus driver exemptions in their regulations.

Transport Canada's proposal would only impact the three transit systems under its jurisdiction — Ottawa, Outaouais and Windsor, Ontario. However, if adopted, Motor Coach Canada believes it will compel other provinces to consider similar action.

"It will be very difficult for a municipal transit system to argue that its drivers should be able to drive without daily and weekly limitations," said Crow.

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# THE DOCKET

## 'Free Choice' Act introduced in Congress

WASHINGTON — Legislation being pushed by unions that would make it easier for them to organize companies in the U.S. was introduced in both the House and the Senate last month.

The Employee Free Choice Act, also known as "card check" legislation, would enable workers to form a union if a majority of employees simply sign authorization cards, taking away the ability of businesses to require a secret-ballot election.

The bill is widely expected to pass the House but faces a tougher fight in the Senate, according to

reports.

Many business and management interests, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, are against the bill.

"Labor's goal is to unionize small and large employers, radically regulate the workplace, and dictate the business decisions of public companies," said Tom Donohue, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and former president of the American Trucking Associations.

"(Organized labor is) not playing around, and neither can we," Donohue said as he announced a

national, multimillion-dollar program to fight card check and other labor initiatives.

Labor's view is that the current procedure is unfair because it gives management the choice of calling for the secret ballot.

"Management-controlled election process does not allow workers the freedom to make their own choice about whether to have a union," said AFL-CIO President John Sweeney. "Its one-sided rules give the bosses all the power and all the choices."

Conversely, business leaders contend that card check would

give unions the ability to coerce and intimidate workers during the sign-up process. A private ballot would make it difficult for any authoritative interest — be it management or union leaders — to interfere with an individual's choice, they argue.

Legendary investor and prominent Obama economic adviser Warren Buffett announced his opposition to the legislation. In an appearance on cable television, Buffett said, "I think the secret ballot's pretty important in the country. I'm against card check, to make a perfectly flat statement."

## Worst congestion points identified

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Interstate 80 at Interstate 94 split near Chicago is the worst bottlenecked section of roadway in the U.S., says the American Transportation Research Institute.

The ATRI ranked the severity of 30 bottlenecks and traffic choke points within the U.S. interstate system.

Second on the ATRI list is the I-95 at SR-4 conjunction in Bergen, N.J., followed by another Chicago-area highway, the I-90, I-94 "Edens Interchange" in Cook, Ill.

ATRI researchers used GIS/GPS technology and other information to identify the most severe congestion points.

The next seven worst highway choke points, which include two in California and two in Texas, are:

4. I-285 at I-85 interchange ("Spaghetti Junction") in Dekalb, Ga.
5. I-95 at SR-9A (Westside Highway) in New York City
6. I-40 at I-65 interchange (east) in Davidson, Tenn.
7. SR-60 at SR-57 interchange in Los Angeles
8. I-10 at I-15 interchange in San Bernardino, Calif.
9. I-45 (Gulf Freeway) at US-59 interchange in Harris, Texas
10. I-45 at I-610 Interchange in Harris, Texas

## UCRA board keeps 2010 fee proposal

Directors of the Unified Carrier Registration Agreement have reaffirmed their decision to more than double UCRA fees next year. (See March 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The action leaves the United Motorcoach Association, trucking organizations and other private-sector groups no alternative but to oppose the increase when the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration opens a rulemaking to formally establish the fees.

While the FMCSA will determine the fees, the UCRA board has recommended a fee structure for 2010. It is:

- 0-1 buses — \$83
- 2-5 buses — \$166
- 6-20 buses — \$497
- 21-100 buses — \$1,741
- 101-1,000 buses — \$8,373
- 1,001 or more buses — \$82,983

## Arkansas joins states limiting distractions

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — State lawmakers here, like their counterparts elsewhere in the U.S., are putting the kibosh on driver distractions.

Gov. Mike Beebe signed into law two driver distraction bills, including one that bans text messaging while driving — for all drivers.

The other new law targets cell phone use by the state's youngest drivers. The legislation prohibits

drivers under 18 from the use of any mobile device while behind the wheel. Exceptions would be made for emergency calls. CB radios are exempted.

Efforts to curb the practice of using electronic wireless devices, such as BlackBerry-type devices, while driving have picked up steam across the country following the National Safety Council's call for all states to ban drivers from all cell phone usage.

Currently, more than a dozen states forbid young drivers to use phones while behind the wheel. California, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Washington are the only states that have bans on all drivers using hand-held phones. With the exception of New York, each of these states also prohibits text messaging.

Alaska, Louisiana and Minnesota have their own text-messaging bans.

The Arkansas House approved another bill that would further restrict teen drivers. Lawmakers voted to send a bill back to the Senate for approval of changes that would strengthen the state's graduated driver's license system.

The bill would prohibit drivers under 18 from carrying more than one minor passenger. Exceptions would be made for relatives or if there is a licensed adult in the front passenger seat.

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# Rule requires onboard emissions diagnostics in 2010

WASHINGTON — As expected, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has announced it will require onboard truck and bus emissions diagnostics systems for at least one engine family per diesel engine manufacturer starting next year.

EPA's final OBD rule formally takes effect on April 27.

If a bus or truck's emissions of nitrogen oxides and particulate matter rise to twice the allowable levels mandated by EPA's 2010 standard the driver must be alerted by a warning light.

By 2019, all engines will have to comply with the mandate, and

the onboard diagnostic systems will have to alert drivers whenever emissions exceed the 2010 threshold.

"(Onboard diagnostics) is a complex and difficult regulation with which to comply," the EPA said in its announcement. "Should mistakes or errors in regulatory interpretation occur, the ramifications would be limited to only a subset of the new vehicle fleet rather than the entire new vehicle fleet."

Onboard diagnostic systems use electronic sensors to communicate with engine control modules and ensure that emission control

technology is functioning properly.

The USEPA final rule follows by about six months the publication of a similar mandate by the California Air Resources Board, which obtained a waiver from EPA in September to create its own onboard diagnostics regulations for heavy-duty diesel engines.

The EPA rule reportedly does not differ significantly from the onboard diagnostic standards set by California.

The apparent reason for the

phase in of onboard diagnostic systems for heavy-duty diesel engines is a lack of sophisticated sensors. Getting accurate measurements on the sensors is currently a challenge. Of particular concern to manufacturers is the lack of sensor technology for measuring levels of particulate matter.

The USEPA acknowledged the lack of particulate matter sensor technology in a technical support document released along with the final rule, noting that "sensors

which can directly measure exhaust PM will not be available for commercial sale in 2010."

The EPA noted that "certain sensor capabilities have not advanced as we expected" and that tightening emission thresholds too quickly could "lead to more onboard diagnostic detections and more onboard diagnostic-induced repairs and, perhaps, many onboard diagnostic-induced repairs for malfunctions having little impact on emissions."

## U.S. commission recommends increased highway tolls, taxes

WASHINGTON — A high-powered federal commission has recommended that Congress adopt a sweeping array of new and inflated highway user fees.

Critics of the commission's report say it does not address the way transportation money is spent nor does it call for reform.

The National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission recommended Congress increase fuel taxes by 15 cents per gallon in the near term, eventually replacing the fuel tax with a new tax on vehicle miles traveled.

Other revenue-generating ideas presented by the commission include a new sales tax on fuel; increases to the Heavy Vehicle Use Tax and other user fees, and a carbon cap-and-trade system that could hit users of diesel vehicles hard.

Critics of the recommendations point out the commission failed to address out-of-control spending of transportation funds for non-transportation uses.

That more money needs to be spent on aging U.S. roads and

bridges during the next few years generally has become widely accepted across the nation. And Congress will draft the next large-scale highway funding reauthorization bill later this year.

Over half the miles in the federal-aid highway system are in less than good condition, more than one-quarter of the nation's bridges are structurally deficient or obsolete, and roughly one-quarter of the nation's bus and rail assets are in marginal or poor condition, said the report.

But many groups that acknowledge the need to improve the highway system say they cannot support a case for new or higher taxes without sufficient reform and oversight built into the solution.

And while the commission states the need for a host of new taxes and fees, it also wants Congress to give states more power to implement more tolling and congestion pricing and to sell or lease infrastructure to the private sector.

Many highway user groups remain strongly opposed to the tolling of existing highways.

## Colorado adopts road \$\$ bill

DENVER — Motorcoach operators and others are leery about an omnibus transportation bill signed into law in Colorado, which includes the option of charging tolls to access existing free routes.

Trying to raise at least \$250 million a year to fix the state's roads and bridges, Gov. Bill Ritter put his signature on a bill he advocated, which includes raising transportation funds through an increase in vehicle registration fees.

The new law also creates a new government agency that could turn some freeways into toll roads and also authorizes issuing bonds to

pay for critical safety projects. Surrounding communities would have to support any toll deal.

The governor's initiative is expected to generate \$252 million annually over four years to upgrade 125 structurally deficient bridges in the state. The money will come via an increase in vehicle registration fees phased in over three years.

Attached to the bill is the creation of a "high performance transportation enterprise," which can pursue opportunities to charge tolls, issue revenue bonds and enter into agreements with private groups.

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# Graphics: One way to convince customers you're better

By Dave Millhouser

As I pulled into the truck stop, every head in the place swiveled towards... me. After a brief moment of self congratulation, I realized they were staring at the bus.

The coach had been on the floor at the UMA Motorcoach Expo in January, promoting breast cancer awareness, and I was moving it for Paradise Trailways.

If you've ever doubted the power of coach graphics, try driving a pink, 45-footer into a fuel stop full of trucks — and truckers.

We're talking PINK from the bottom of the luggage bays to the top of the windows, with huge lettering that read: "SIZE MATTERS."

Two lessons here: The lettering referred to the importance of catching cancerous tumors while they're small, and the colorful double entendre was intended to capture attention.

Less important on a cosmic scale, but important, the truckers made it abundantly clear that vivid graphics create vivid impressions.

For years, major retail chains have recognized the value of using

their over-the-road trucks as mobile billboards. They sport everything from colorful graphics and text, to whimsical photographs — all in an effort to keep their name in front of the public.

The brief, bright messages tell you something about their product or service, or reinforce their image or brand.

Old photos often show lists of destinations painted on the sides of buses, giving onlookers a sense of the possibilities available in a bus ride.

A hallmark of the modern coach industry is the ubiquitous "white bus."

Many coaches sold today are either manufacturer's stock units, or used buses, painted white. Nothing wrong with that (heck, you've gotta paint them something).

On the other hand, you could make the strong case that every coach that remains white is a lost opportunity to highlight the motorcoach company that owns it and our industry.

As an industry, we have found it difficult to identify and define, for our customers, traits that make one coach company better than an-

other. It's tough to ask more for quality, when clients don't know what it looks like.

As the old saw goes, books are judged by their covers. Publishers are onto something when they put lots of effort into the cover. It doesn't matter how good a book is, if you don't notice it.

Folks assume a bus that looks great on the outside is luxurious on the inside and well maintained... and they are often right.

You can spend a lot of time trying to convince customers you're better than the other guy, but if your buses look identical — the lowest price will get the business.

It may not be fair, but your passengers prefer an attractive coach, and they'll brag about riding in a distinctive bus. (And it's WAY easier to find when the event is over.)

Next time you're in a lot full of buses, be aware of which ones you notice, and what assumptions YOU make about their owners.

Law and safety enforcement officials notice, too. They make an effort to target likely offenders, and (again, fair or not) sometimes make judgments based on appearance.

I've told this one before (but

am not silly enough to think these stories are worth remembering). A friend had his bus wrapped in a spectacular mural, and was kind enough to let us display it years ago at UMA Motorcoach Expo in Albuquerque.

As he made his way from Massachusetts to New Mexico, his company got a steady stream of charter requests, each west of the other. People saw the phone number on the coach, and based on appearance alone, wanted to charter it.

Appearance is not a sure indicator of superiority but if a coach doesn't look good, potential customers will never get past that to other, more substantial, aspects of quality. If you can't convince clients you offer something special, then you can only compete on price.

All of the manufacturers, and many independent graphic shops, offer a ton of options for making coaches distinctive. They can range from spectacular reflective lettering, to murals, logos and even photographs. If you want, they can help with designing a scheme that meets your needs.

A graphics package can vary in price from the cost of a set of tires,

to a good used car. Computer technology has reduced the expense while offering an infinite range of ways to express what your company offers.

Most coach sales organizations are happy to fold the cost of graphics into the sale price (and include it in the financing).

Most modern graphics are decals, so when you sell the coach, you often don't have to repaint it. Heat-gun those jewels off, and you're all set.

You don't even have to worry about the next buyer leaving your graphics in place. (Nothing's more fun than screaming around in a bus with a competitor's name on it).

The pink coach shown at this year's Expo must have looked OK because I wasn't stopped by a cop wanting to see what sort of boob was driving it.

Dave Millhouser is a bus industry marketing consultant and freelance writer. Contact him at: [dave\\_millhouser@hotmail.com](mailto:dave_millhouser@hotmail.com).



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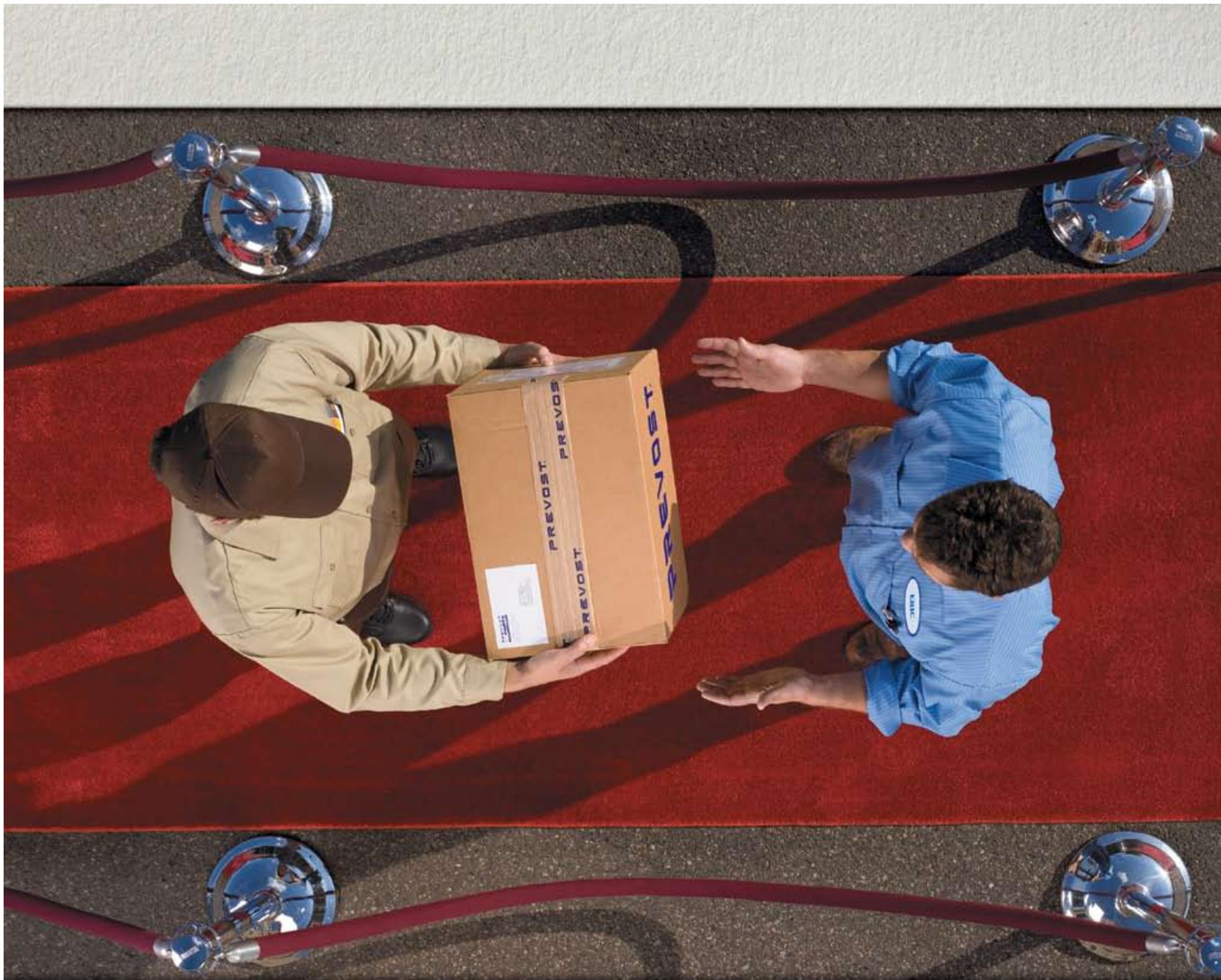
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## Focus on drivers

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bus-related accidents.

The FMCSA initially projected it would get between 50 and 100 accidents to study in a single year. However, only 23 accidents were recorded during the year, too low to be statistically useful and resulting in the federal agency extending the study to a second full year.

In the end, only 39 serious accidents — 26 of them involving motorcoaches and the others involving transit buses, school buses, small buses and large vans — occurred during the two-year study period that ended in 2006.

Of the 39 accidents, 19 were found to be caused by bus driver errors or mechanical problems with the buses, while blame for the other 20 was attributed to other motorists, pedestrians or bicyclists.

Bannister noted that of the criti-

cal 19 accidents, bus drivers were directly to blame for 15 of them, mostly because of inadequate surveillance and inattention. Of the four accidents that were traced to problems with the buses, two were fires, one was a brake failure and the fourth was due to ice on the road, but was not considered a driving error.

He said some of the driver mistakes did not rise to the level of traffic violations but were simply driver mistakes, such as looking away for a moment and either running off the road or hitting other vehicles.

Still, five of the 19 drivers were found to have out-of-service violations, including reckless operations, driving too fast for conditions and violating the hours-of-service rule. In contrast, none of the bus drivers who were involved in the 20 other accidents that were caused by other people committed out-of-service violations.

## New-entrant oversight

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

seminar.

Ranked second among the priorities was a suggestion that states inspect all buses registered in their state at least once a year. While states with aggressive safety and enforcement programs inspect many of their buses on a regular basis, some inspect them only periodically and others do it only occasionally.

Tied for third in the voting were requirements that all buses be equipped with electronic recorders so driver logs and hours of service could be more easily tracked; drivers and patrol officers receive special training in recognizing problems that could lead to bus fires, and driver training programs be developed that emphasize motivating drivers so they drive safely and

want to remain with the company.

Also receiving votes were the development of procedures that identify and remove rogue motorcoach companies from the industry, make medical examinations for drivers more stringent, and hold passenger carriers to higher standards than other commercial drivers.

The priority list will be reviewed later this month at a CVSA Passenger Carrier Committee meeting where an action plan to promote the ideas will be drafted, according to Steve Keppler, director of policy and programs for the alliance.

He said the material will be used in CVSA's interactions with federal lawmakers on pending motorcoach safety legislation, as well as during discussions with House and Senate members on highway and transportation spending issues.

Bannister noted, too, that all but one of the drivers involved in the 19 accidents had prior driver violations on their records, including some for speeding, failing to obey traffic lights or signs, and improper passing or changing lanes. However, 16 of the bus drivers who were not at fault in their accidents also had traffic tickets on their records.

Although the drivers took the blame for most of the 19 accidents, five of the buses they were driving had out-of-service violations, including faulty brakes, maintenance issues and lighting, steering, suspension, frame, axle and windshield problems.

Other key findings from the study included:

- Of the bus drivers involved in all of the accidents, 16 were between the ages of 50 and 59; eight were 60 to 69; eight were under the age of 40; six were between the ages of 40 and 49; and one was

more than 69 years old.

- While bus drivers were blamed for most of the 19 accidents, other motorists were found to be at fault in 16 of the 20 other accidents that were not attributed to the buses or the bus drivers. The other four were caused by pedestrians or bicyclists.

- Most of the study findings, including the high percentage of accidents caused by drivers, were similar to those found in a large truck crash causation study the FMCSA did earlier in this decade on 963 crashes. The only exception was that there were no pedestrian accidents in the truck study.

Bannister said that while the small number of accidents included in the study prevents analysts from extending the statistics nationally, they still can make valid conclusions on a smaller level.

"It gives us something we can talk about and we can say that the

bus driver is the key in most accidents," he noted.

To possibly reduce accidents, the study results suggest that state and federal motorcoach inspection programs be adjusted to focus more on drivers and less on buses, and possibly narrowing the bus inspections so they concentrate more on critical areas such as brakes.

Additionally, the study advocated that transportation regulators make sure the commercial driver's license system of reporting violations from state-to-state is working; more education and safety programs be developed; traffic enforcement be stepped up, and a program be developed that would rate drivers based on their abilities and driving history.

Bannister said the FMCSA also is working on a list of important safety tips for drivers and operators that it will put on its website, and that could help, too.

The new-entrant proposal stirred wide interest from most of the industry representatives, many of whom said they worry about operators who start motorcoach companies with very little knowledge of the business.

Some suggested new operators be issued temporary operating authority so regulators can monitor their performance for a period before granting permanent authority.

Others recommended that start-

up businesses be required to have their own repair shops or contracts with existing service centers so there would be some assurances that maintenance work and repairs on the buses were being done.

And a few called for the new-entrant carriers to be required to cover the cost of the training and testing.

The summit, the first held by the organization in several years, drew representatives from throughout the country and included oper-

ators, safety managers, law enforcement personnel and federal and state regulators.

"We were very pleased with the turnout as well as the participation," said Keppler. "The information and dialogue was constructive, informative and useful."

He said the people he spoke with after the conference all said they were returning home with something useful that they could apply in their own jobs

## National Interstate hikes dividend, names counsel

RICHFIELD, Ohio — Directors of National Interstate Corporation have increased the company's quarterly dividend to seven cents per share of common stock. The quarterly dividend rate formerly was six cents per share.

National Interstate has increased its dividend annually since

its initial public offering in 2005. The first dividend payable at the new higher rate was March 13, to shareholders of record March 3.

Separately, the company announced it has appointed Arthur J. Gonzales, 49, vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary. Prior to joining National Inter-

state, Gonzales was executive vice president and general counsel of J&P Holdings Inc., a Bedford Park, Ill.-based insurance holding company.

National Interstate Corp. is the parent company of National Interstate Insurance, the coach industry insurer.

## How to contact us

To submit or report news, Letters to the Editor, articles, news releases or to report corrections:

E-mail: [bsankey@busandmotorcoachnews.com](mailto:bsankey@busandmotorcoachnews.com)  
 Fax: (405) 942-6201  
 Mail: 3108 NW 54th Street  
 Oklahoma City, OK 73112  
 Call: (866) 930-8421

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# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

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## Driver medical exams: Help may be coming

CRYSTAL CITY, Va. — Help is on the way for motorcoach company owners and managers who worry about the validity of their drivers' medical examinations.

A plan to create a registry for medical professionals authorized to perform the required physicals on drivers could be in place in 18 to 24 months, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

Charles Horan, director of bus and truck standards for the agency, said once the measure is approved, only specially trained and tested medical doctors, osteopathic doctors, chiropractic doctors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners will be permitted to give the physicals.

"It will eliminate doctor shopping and I put a lot of emphasis on that," he told an audience of motorcoach industry representatives attending a Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance bus safety seminar here last month.

Operators for years have worried about the quality of the examinations their drivers get when they have physicals that are required of them to retain their medical certificates.

While some large motorcoach companies contract with physicians to manage their medical programs, others rely on nearby, independent doctors to perform physicals.

Some companies, however, still allow their drivers to get physicals from their family physicians or other doctors — a practice safety experts say is ripe for abuse and doctor shopping.

Medical experts who spoke at the seminar said motorcoach operators can take steps to protect themselves until the medical registry is developed by requiring their job applicants and veteran employees to have their physicals done only by company-retained doctors and then paying close attention to the results of the examinations.

Operators never should allow their employees to choose the examining doctors, they stressed.

Dr. Jeff Liva, a physician who serves as the medical director for several large carriers, said operators should retain their own doctors and make sure they are up to the task by quizzing them on the medical examination form.

"If they're not quite sure, then you need to look for someone else," he said.

He said a major problem with doctors untrained in conducting medical exams of motorcoach drivers is they often ignore or miss signs of possible medical problems, either those they might find during an exam or those noted on the medical form filled out by the driver.

"I see 'yes' checked off all too often on

an exam form and then nothing written in after that by either the driver or the doctor," he said. "The doctor always must address it and not just blow it off."

Liva emphasized, too, that doctors should routinely question drivers about over-the-counter drugs they might be taking because many of the drugs can interfere with driving as much as prescription drugs.

"There could be side effects to the over-the-counter medication so the doctor must not only ask about the drugs, but also find out why the driver is taking them in the first place," he added.

To help verify the examination, he recommended that operators obtain a signed medical release from the drivers so a copy of the examination can be obtained from the doctor for a thorough review.

Dennis Russell of Coach America and a long-time transportation safety director, emphasized that operators also should watch for possible medical problems that a driver might be developing while on the job, such as blurry eyes and fatigue.

"When in doubt, send them for a physical," he said.

And to make sure their drivers are staying healthy and safe, he suggested that drivers be given a physical at least once a year rather than every two years as is required by the U.S. Department of Transportation

## Goldwasser forms brokering service

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. — Jeff Goldwasser, who grew up in the motorcoach industry and has more than 25 years of professional experience in the business, has started a nationwide bus brokering service.

Goldwasser's family operated Peak Tours, a coach and school bus company, in New York for 40 years. He also was general manager of Classic Coach on Long Island for a number of years.

For the past two years, Goldwasser has been selling pre-owned coaches in the northeastern U.S. for Daimler Buses of North America.

Goldwasser says he offers a "fresh new approach in helping the interested party either purchase or sell a unit. Whether the interest is fleet sales or a single unit, I can assist."

The "fresh approach" Goldwasser says he provides is to help coach buyers and sellers make informed decisions, get all questions answered, treat customers with the respect they deserve, and actually do what he says he'll do.

Goldwasser says he has a network of coach buyers and sellers, and has expertise with all makes and models.

For information about Jeff Goldwasser Motor Coach Sales, go to [www.jeffgoldwasser.com](http://www.jeffgoldwasser.com).

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## Safety bill

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

criticism could resurface with Hutchison making noises about running for governor of Texas and Brown identifying with a tragic bus crash involving a sports team from Ohio.

Hutchison and Brown announced they were introducing their slightly revised bill on the two-year anniversary of the coach crash in Atlanta that killed five college baseball players, plus their driver and his wife.

"In the two years since the Bluffton University bus crash, it has become clear that we need mo-

torcoach safety reform and we need it now," said Brown. "This bipartisan legislation will help prevent bus trips from becoming tragedies."

Added Hutchison: "In the past several years, there has been a rash of deadly motorcoach crashes, including the Bluffton tragedy, and three catastrophic bus accidents that resulted in the injury and death of scores of Texans.

While the coach industry appears to view the Hutchison-Brown bill cautiously, the United Motorcoach Association has committed to working with the senators to fashion a bus safety bill.

"We look forward to working with Senator Hutchison's and Sen-

ator Brown's staffs on this important issue," said Ken Presley, vice president of industry relations at UMA. "They are well versed in these issues and we all want the same thing — safe motorcoach operations for our passengers.

"Texas citizens can be proud of Senator Hutchison. She is a champion of these issues and, while we don't completely agree on all things, we do agree that the protection of motorcoach passengers is paramount.

"Consensus with these two champions of bus and motorcoach safety is inevitable," said Presley.

The Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act of 2009, which Brown

and Hutchison introduced, would require the U.S. Department of Transportation to upgrade federal safety standards for motorcoaches, increase driver operating standards and training requirements, and adopt "safety-enhancing technologies."

Specifically, the legislation would require:

- Safety belts and stronger seating systems "to ensure occupants stay in their seats in a crash."
- Anti-ejection glazing on windows.
- Strong, crush-resistant roofs that can withstand rollovers.
- Improved protection against fires by reducing flammability of the

motorcoach interior, and better training for operators in the case of fire.

• Improved commercial driver training.

• Electronic on-board recorders, with "real-time capabilities to track precise vehicle location, and recorded data not accessible to manipulation by a driver or motor carrier."

A version of the Brown-Hutchison legislation was introduced in the U.S. House by Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga.

A competing bus safety bill also has been introduced in the House by Rep. Bill Shuster, R-Pa. (See March 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

## Blue Bird

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

able, work in process, finished goods, vehicles, tooling and other assets probably would not raise more money than is owed to the principal secured creditor. That means, of course, other creditors could receive nothing.

When Riverside, Calif.-based Complete Coach Works announced in July 2007, it had entered into an agreement to acquire the two Blue Bird divisions, it was generally acknowledged CCW executives faced an uphill climb to make the two units a viable business.

That's because, in addition to

acquiring the product lines, CCW and its top executives (brothers Dale and Dean Carson and right-hand man Macy Neshati) also inherited a pile of problems — with a long history — that extended into virtually every aspect of the operations.

There were quality and reliability issues with the Express 4500 and 4000 motorcoaches that stretched back to their launch; there were parts, service, engineering and logistical challenges; there was a looming safety recall of Wanderlodge, and there was a highly-touted Wanderlodge product launch on the near-term horizon.

Additionally, the Carson team

faced a learning curve and a different corporate culture.

But the biggest challenge was distribution. Blue Bird Coachworks was a very small player and the U.S. is a very large market, making direct sales a nearly impossible task. It had no distribution network.

But as intractable as those problems were to ameliorate, even more significant was the timing of the purchase.

The only consistent buyer of Express 4500 and 4000 coaches had been the federal government and when it stopped making purchases last year because of budget constraints, there were no contracts for Express 4500s from the General Services Administration.

Public transit agencies also got hit by the budget crisis and slowed or stopped their buying, closing that avenue as well.

Within six months of the acquisition, the bottom completely fell out of the recreational vehicle market and has remained that way since. Well-heeled individuals dramatically slowed their purchases of Country Coaches, Monacos,

Winnebagos, Beautrys, Fleetwoods, Mandalays and, of course, Wanderlodge.

In its hey day, Blue Bird sold upwards of 100-110 Wanderlodge annually at \$700,000 per coach, making it a strong revenue contributor even though it was often disrespected by executives at the much larger Blue Bird school bus unit.

Former Blue Bird executives say the Complete Coach Works team could have been more aggressive in playing to former Wanderlodge customers. "They didn't work for him (the previous customer)," said one former senior Blue Bird executive.

Nine months into the deal, tragedy struck: Dean Carson, a talented and accomplished bus sales executive and key CCW player, was killed in a private plane crash.

The collapse of Blue Bird Coachworks and Wanderlodge has been a tough blow for the 125-150 workers at the two operations, as well as for the team at Complete Coach Works, the nation's largest supplier of remanufactured transportation vehicles, emissions upgrades and wheelchair-lift retro-

fits. CCW also has two well-known affiliate companies, Transit Sales International and Shuttle Bus Leasing.

A company spokesman declined to be interviewed for this article.

The sale of Blue Bird Coachworks and Blue Bird Wanderlodge to Complete Coach Works was part of a corporate restructuring of Blue Bird Corp., the large school bus maker. Within a year of purchasing Blue Bird in 2006, Cerberus decided to break up the company.

It moved Blue Bird's transit bus lines to North American Bus Industries in Anniston, Ala., which it also owned, and it decided to sell Blue Bird Coachworks and Wanderlodge. The school bus operation remains a standalone company based in Fort Valley.

At the time, Complete Coach Works saw the acquisition as a "perfect fit" and an opportunity to expand its operations into the southeastern U.S. (See Aug. 1, 2007, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.) The fit may have been fine, but the timing wasn't.

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## Charter ratings

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

year in similar complaints involving Miller Transportation Inc. of Louisville, Ky., and Jeans Bus Service of Greenville, S.C.

In the Miller case, the FTA declined to issue a cease-and-desist order because a new route started by Transit Authority of River City in Louisville on the campus of the University of Louisville was not exclusive to the university students and faculty and it connected to the transit agency's regular routes.

However, a second issue in which Miller contested TARC operating a parking lot shuttle service for the college's football games was decided against the transit agency. The FTA said the service appeared to match the definition of a charter under the revised rule and suggested TARC not operate the service

next football season.

"FTA has consistently held that football shuttle services usually constitute charter because it is the exclusive use of a bus or van to transport football fans to and from park-and-ride lots for a negotiated price," then Chief Counsel Severn E. S. Miller wrote in the ruling.

The Jeans case also involved a shuttle service and had the same result as Miller's issue. The FTA said a shuttle service between a remote parking lot and the Clemson University football stadium operated by Clemson Area Transit in Clemson, S.C., was a charter and the transit agency was not allowed to operate it.

### Rulings helpful

Presley said UMA receives a large number of inquiries from motorcoach operators wondering about transportation services on

university campuses and the consistency the FTA appears to be displaying should be a major help to them.

"I just hope FTA remains consistent on the position they have expressed," added Victor Parra, president and chief executive of UMA.

Meantime, Valley Bus said it was pleased with the FTA decision regarding the shuttle contract between Metro and North Dakota State and it likely would bid on any shuttle work the university might request, said Cordell Sinding, assistant general manager.

"I don't think they knew the rule" he said of Metro.

At the same time, Julie Bummelman, Metro transit administrator, said her agency has already dropped the contract it had with the university. "We decided it probably was something we should not be doing," she said.

# Study urges driver sleep screenings, 'doctor shopping' ban

SOMERVILLE, Mass. — A new study by an affiliate of the prestigious Harvard Medical School supports mandatory sleep apnea screenings for obese commercial vehicle drivers, including bus drivers, and a prohibition against "doctor shopping" by drivers to obtain their medical certification.

The study confirms previous findings that obesity-driven testing strategies identify commercial vehicle drivers with a high likelihood of obstructive sleep apnea and suggests that mandating sleep apnea treatment could reduce the risk of crashes.

"Commercial vehicle drivers with sleep apnea are much more likely to fall asleep at the wheel, and the condition is increasingly common as Americans become more obese," said Dr. Stefanos N. Kales, M.D., the study's senior author and medical director of employee and industrial medicine at Cambridge Health Alliance, a Harvard Medical School teaching affiliate.

"Additionally, we found that drivers who suffer from obstructive sleep apnea frequently underreport symptoms and diagnoses, and often do not follow through with sleep study referrals and sleep apnea treatment," Kales added.

The 15-month study examined 456 commercial drivers from more than 50 employers. At least 15 percent of the employer organizations operate passenger buses.

Seventy-eight (17 percent) of the drivers studied met the screening criteria for suspect obstructive sleep apnea. These drivers were older, more obese, and had a higher average blood pressure.

Of the 53 drivers who were re-

ferred for sleep studies, 33 did not comply with the referral and were lost to follow-up, Dr. Kales reported. The other 20 were confirmed to have obstructive sleep apnea but, after diagnosis, only one of these complied with treatment recommendations.

"It is very likely that most of the drivers who did not comply with sleep studies or sleep apnea treatment sought medical certification from examiners who do not screen for sleep apnea and are driving with untreated or inadequately treated sleep apnea," Kales said.

Obstructive sleep apnea is a syndrome characterized by sleep-disordered breathing, resulting in excessive daytime sleepiness, sleep attacks, psychomotor deficits, and disrupted nighttime sleep. It increases the risk of vehicular accidents by two- to seven-fold, and is common among commercial vehicle drivers.

In addition to being unrecognized or unreported by drivers, obstructive sleep apnea often remains undiagnosed by many primary care clinicians despite the fact sleep apnea increases the risks of hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and heart disease.

The study's authors noted that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is considering recommendations to require sleep apnea screening for all obese drivers based on body mass index, or BMI, which is a calculation based on height and weight.

"(Obstructive sleep apnea) screenings of commercial vehicle drivers will be ineffective unless they are federally mandated or required by employers," said Dr. Kales.

The study also supports a prohibition against doctor shopping. Said Dr. Kales: "Such action would prohibit drivers diagnosed with a seri-

ous disorder, that might limit driving or require treatment, to seek out more lenient or less rigorous medical examiners."

For a copy of the study, contact David Cecere at Cambridge Health Alliance, phone (617) 503-8428, or e-mail [dcecere@challiance.org](mailto:dcecere@challiance.org).



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## ABC grows graphic services

FARIBAULT, Minn. — ABC Companies has expanded its graphic services with new digital graphic capabilities.

The expanded services include a variety of graphic applications designed to help operators market their services, enhance their image, launch new products and services, and upgrade their businesses.

A variety of large- and small-format imaging graphics is now available to customers, including:

- Full and partial bus wraps
  - Fleet graphics and advertising
  - Special event and trade show displays
  - Visual merchandising and point of purchase selling
  - Banners, billboards
  - Magnets, stickers, labels
- ABC said its digital graphics

feature high-quality, 3M materials, assuring superior quality and durability.

And, the latest in-house production equipment includes solvent-based digital printing and contour cutting tools for ultimate imaging quality and precision finishing.

The graphics division also can provide project management services, including:

- Original, custom graphic designs
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- Digital retouching
- Hi-resolution scanning
- Digital production and printing
- Professional Installation

The expanded services are available at all five ABC service centers.

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