

# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

## Coach America drives toward bankruptcy court showdown

WILMINGTON, Del. — Coach America is headed toward a pivotal time in its Chapter 11 bankruptcy court proceedings.

The Dallas-based company will learn later this month if it will be sold at auction, including possibly broken into pieces, or if it will secure a financial reorganization that will allow it to continue

as one of the largest tour-and-charter bus operators in the United States.

Coach America has been pursuing a dual course since January when it sought protection from creditors in a filing with the U.S. Bankruptcy Court here.

The court action came after the company was unable to renegotiate

terms of more than \$400 million in debt, which has weighed it down for years.

The first hint of which route it might be headed toward will come April 13, the deadline for potential buyers to file bids for the company's assets, either in their entirety or in parts.

If competing bids are received,

then the company will conduct an auction April 19, which will be followed by a hearing April 23, where the company would seek court approval of the sale to the highest and best bidder.

If there are no bids, the company still could be sold.

Under the auction procedure approved by the court, Coach

America is allowed to set up a "stalking horse" bidder, which would submit a minimum purchase price agreed upon by the company and its lenders, which are first in line to be paid if the company is sold. The minimum bid would become the starting point for the bidding and increases

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## GAO to FMCSA: 'Work Smarter'

WASHINGTON — A federal watchdog agency says the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration could do more to stop reincarnated bus operators.

A report from the Government Accountability Office says the FMCSA should electronically screen data from all bus companies to identify potentially reincarnated carriers when they apply, and then investigate those applicants.

The FMCSA could use a "risk-based" approach to find operators that are likely to be companies that have been shut down for safety reasons and are trying to get back in business or to evade penalties, and review those applications to see if they are reincarnated or "chameleon" carriers, the accountability office report says.

"Preventing chameleon motor carriers from operating under a

new identity is important because they present significant safety risks to the motoring public," the report said.

FMCSA currently investigates every new bus company and household goods mover to find reincarnated carriers, but the agency has limited resources and has had mixed success.

If FMCSA automatically

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 ►

## Industry bashes Senate coach safety legislation

WASHINGTON — Two of the motorcoach industry's top spokesmen have teamed up in a push to get members of the U.S. House of Representatives to reject bus safety legislation the Senate passed last month and, instead, support House legislative provisions they say offer a much more reasonable approach to addressing industry safety issues.

United Motorcoach Association President Victor S. Parra and American Bus Association President Peter J. Pantuso delivered their message last month in testimony before a House subcommittee studying provisions of the competing pieces of legislation.

Parra told the Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing and Trade that the Senate bill is an example of "extreme government overreach," while Pantuso said the House version "gets it right the

first time."

At issue are the motorcoach safety provisions in Senate Bill 1813, which is the omnibus highway and public transportation legislation overwhelmingly passed by the Senate last month (See April 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*), and House Bill 7, the highway and public transportation legislation that's stalled in the House.

Both bills contain an array of industry safety proposals, including mandatory seatbelts, anti-ejection window glazing, crush-resistant roofs, fire suppressant equipment, on-board electronic recorders, and retrofitting of older buses. But there are stark differences between the two.

Parra said a number of provisions in the Senate version are overlapping, unnecessary, have not yet been fully researched and test-

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## Diesel fuel pump pain is widespread

In only a handful of states is the average price of diesel fuel now below \$4 a gallon.

At the start of this month, four states held that distinction — Indiana, Iowa, Missouri and Virginia.

And while diesel prices in those states averaged from just under \$3.90 to \$3.99 a gallon, the high prices leaders were in the West.

In California, diesel fuel aver-

aged just over \$4.48 a gallon, topped only by Washington state at nearly \$4.52, according to ProMiles.

The West Coast had the highest regional average at \$4.43 a gallon, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, while the lower Atlantic had the lowest regional average at \$4.11 per gallon.

According to analysts, one of

the primary reasons crude oil prices have remained stuck measurably above \$100 a barrel is because of the weak U.S. dollar.

A significant unknown in the oil market currently is whether the Obama Administration will tap the nation's Strategic Petroleum Reserve. The administration is under increasing political pressure — in an election year — to do something to ameliorate fuel prices.

## When it comes to paperwork, it's wise to follow the rules

When the subject is keeping up with paperwork required by federal law, motorcoach operators should file it under "P" — for "procrastinate at your peril."

That's the advice of Laurel Van Horn, who helps companies meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, as director of programs with the

Open Door Organization, and Mike Brown, director of Amerisearch and an expert in employee record-keeping.

"Do not wait for the government to come to you. Be proactive now," advises Van Horn. "The sooner you start the less trouble you're likely to get into."

One sure way to avoid trouble,

according to Van Horn, is to prepare and submit the annual reports required under ADA regulations applicable to the motorcoach industry.

Due at end of October each year, the reports include such information as a summary of the "Requests for Accessible Service" the company receives during the

previous 12 months, the number of new and used buses it purchases or leases, the number of buses that are accessible, and the total number of buses in the fleet.

Small operators that do not have wheelchair lift-equipped buses should not assume they are exempt from filing the annual reports or from other ADA reporting

mandates, cautions Van Horn.

In fact, they are now under close scrutiny by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

The two federal agencies teamed up to take action against 10 small carriers in December and

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# Lots of help helps museum recover from damaging flood

HERSHEY, Pa. — Thanks to an army of volunteers and assistance from both public transit agencies and private motorcoach companies, the Museum of Bus Transportation is rebounding from a devastating fall flood that damaged its storage garage and more than a dozen of its buses.

Repairs to the George M. Sage Memorial Annex, where many of the museum's buses are housed when not on display, will be completed in time for the museum's annual Spring Fling on June 2, ac-

ording to Tom Collins, president of the all-volunteer board that operates the museum. (See related story on Page 10.)

"That's our goal," said Collins, adding that the popular springtime event will feature old and new buses, including some damaged in the flood.

The flooding in September was set off by a tropical storm that overflowed nearby Swatara Creek, sending a six-foot wall of water racing through the annex and leaving it, and the buses parked in and

around it, packed with mud and debris. (See Oct. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The museum itself was not damaged because the building it shares with the Antique Automobile Club of America Museum sits on higher ground.

Collins said that while most of the damage to the annex and buses was covered by insurance, volunteers and businesses played major roles in helping the museum recover.

Much of the initial cleanup

work was done by museum members and others who took part in a series of day-long work sessions where they scrubbed floors and walls, dried and cleaned tools, and power washed buses.

They got a boost from North Capital Area Transit of Harrisburg, Pa., which donated storage shelves and bins it had removed from its parts facility during a renovation project.

"The result was a neater storage area than the museum had before the flooding," said Collins.

Although the volunteers initially cleaned each of the buses, several needed much more work and had to be sent to a restoration company for extensive restoration. Service First in Middletown, Pa., which was awarded a contract for the work during a bidding process, gave each bus another power wash, removed and cleaned the seats and side panels and cleaned other nooks and crannies in the buses.

"All of them have been returned in like-new condition and, fortunately, most of the work was

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# FMCSA launches motorcoach safety iPhone-iPad application

WASHINGTON — iPhone and iPad users can now sit on one of your coaches, search for safety information about your company, and have it displayed within seconds on their high-tech devices.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration launched an iPhone/iPad application last month, called SaferBus, that displays data the agency gathers as part of its Compliance, Safety, Accountability program in the compliance categories applicable to bus companies: unsafe driving, fa-

tigued driving, driver fitness, controlled substances and alcohol, and vehicle maintenance.

Designed specifically for the Apple iPhone and iPad, the application can be downloaded free by visiting the Apple iTunes App Store or by going to the FMCSA "Look Before You Book" web page.

While any bus traveler with an iPhone or iPad can access and use the application, it appears to be aimed primarily at tour operators and others who charter buses and who have a professional interest a bus company's

safety performance record.

The FMCSA says travel professionals can more readily interpret the information and assess their options.

Here's what users will find on the application:

- Operating authority and insurance status: Determine if a bus company has valid USDOT operating authority and complies with federal insurance requirements.
- Safety performance records: Check the record of a carrier's performance in a number of safety

categories. The app provides a snapshot of the data that FMCSA also makes publicly available online at its Compliance, Safety and Accountability website.

- Safety ratings: FMCSA issues three types of safety ratings. The top rating is Satisfactory, followed by Conditional (may pose a higher safety risk) and Unsatisfactory (should not be operating).

The SaferBus app also allows users to report a complaint to the FMCSA National Consumer Complaint Database.

To get a company's USDOT number or Motor Carrier number, web users can go to the FMCSA website and enter the company name and headquarters.

Safety information in the app is based on 24 months of roadside inspections and violations of a company's drivers and vehicles, along the results of any DOT/FMCSA investigations of the company's safety practices.

Don't have an iPhone or iPad? Visit the USDOT website that contains the same information.

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# THE DOCKET

## Congress gives highway law another 90 days

WASHINGTON — The House and Senate have given the House another 90 days to try and come up with a new federal highway and public transportation law.

Late last month, the House passed — and the Senate later ratified by voice vote — a 90-day extension measure, avoiding a shut-down of federally funded highway projects and public transit systems through the end of June.

The extension was the ninth since the program formally expired in October 2009.

The House adopted the extension first.

After bitter partisan debate, it rejected pleas to adopt the Senate's two-year, \$109 billion high-

way bill and instead passed the extension.

The vote was 266 to 158, with 37 Democrats supporting the extension and 10 Republicans voting against it.

House leaders intend to use the three months to try to win agreement on a multi-year bill that has been stalled by objections from some conservative Republicans as well as most Democrats.

The Republican opponents don't like the spending levels in the bill, which would use funds raised from new oil and gas drilling to supplement the Highway Trust Fund.

Democrats object to the drilling, among other provisions.

In the argument leading up to the vote, Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., referred to the conservative Republicans who object to the bill as "bozos."

Rep. John Mica, R-Fla., called for the House physician to treat Democratic members who were suffering from "amnesia" because they seemed not to remember passing extensions when they were the majority.

The Senate had been pushing for its measure, which cleared last month on a lopsided bipartisan vote — a genuine rarity these days. (See April 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

However, with the eighth extension expiring at midnight

March 31, and with no long-term House bill, the Senate reluctantly passed the House extension.

This sets up a rematch by the end of June. If the House is able to come to terms on a bill it can pass, with or without Democratic support, its measure will then have to be reconciled with the Senate bill.

Although the two bills are similar in the way they approach important program reforms at the U.S. Department of Transportation, the conflicting terms, funding mechanisms and safety provisions will present serious obstacles.

Meanwhile, state transportation departments will continue holding their breath for a long-term highway program.

## Chicago-O'Hare coach credential revives dispute

WASHINGTON — Many in the motorcoach industry had thought the issue had been settled a half-dozen years ago: Federal law prohibited states and localities from requiring that interstate bus and truck companies display state or local credentials.

Now comes the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration with a notice in the Federal Register seeking comments on how the agency should answer a petition challenging the validity of a credential required by Chicago to be displayed on buses carrying passengers between the city and O'Hare International Airport.

Such trips are clearly interstate commerce, and, with a few exceptions, federal law, 49 U.S. Code section 14506, prohibits state or local governments from requiring credentials to be displayed in or on the motor vehicles of interstate carriers.

The city sticker does not appear to fall within any of the law's exceptions.

Although the law gives the U.S. Secretary of Transportation authority to exempt other requirements, the authority is very narrow and wouldn't seem to apply to the Chicago sticker.

In its notice, however, the FMCSA has indicated it may determine the validity of any credential, state or local, that might fall under the prohibition.

If in fact the agency has such authority, section 14506, despite its strong preemption language, might be significantly weakened.

## FMCSA issues new fraud letter warning

WASHINGTON — A new batch of fraudulent U.S. Department of Transportation letters — dated March 16, 2012 — apparently are being sent to bus and truck operators.

The letters appear to be from the "U.S. Department of Transportation Procurement Office" and are signed by a fictitious name of "Julie Weynel — Senior Procurement Officer."

The letters attempt to obtain banking information from the targeted companies.

## USDOT study: More money for highways needed

WASHINGTON — A new report from the U.S. Department of Transportation on the state of America's transportation infrastructure indicates there's a sizeable gap between current spending and projected levels of investment needed to maintain the nation's highway and transit systems.

The USDOT report, "2010 Status of the Nation's Highways, Bridges and Transit: Conditions

and Performance," projects that \$101 billion, plus increases for inflation, will be needed annually over the next 20 years from all levels of government — local, state and federal — to keep the highway system in its current state.

It also identifies investments to improve the current state of highways and bridges that could total up to \$170 billion a year.

The report shows that in 2008,

all levels of government spent a combined \$91.1 billion on highway capital improvements, a 48.4 percent increase over 2000.

The Obama administration's fiscal year 2013 budget request calls for \$305 billion for highway programs over six years, which reflects a 34 percent increase for roads and bridges over the previous authorization to address the outstanding need for resources.

The report projects that between \$20.8 billion and \$24.5 billion will be needed annually during the next 20 years to attain a state of good repair for the nation's transit systems and to accommodate expected transit ridership growth.

In contrast, all levels of government combined spent \$16.1 billion on transit capital improvements in 2008.



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# UMA's Victor Parra testifies on impact of rising fuel prices

WASHINGTON — United Motorcoach Association President and CEO Victor Parra told members of the House Committee on Natural Resources that rising fuel prices are having a negative impact on group travel.

And that means the growth of the economy generally and travel-related businesses specifically is being stunted.

"I can think of few segments of the economy that are impacted as significantly by the availability and cost of fuel, and the impact they have on economic growth and job creation," Parra told members of the committee.

The hearing, which had the cumbersome title of "Harnessing American Resources to Create Jobs and Address Rising Gasoline Prices: Family Vacations and U.S. Tourism Industry," was conducted here last month.

Parra appeared on behalf of both the UMA and NTA (formerly the National Tour Association).

"Travel and tourism is one of only a few industries that possess a positive balance of trade," said Parra. "In 2010, 55.7 million visitors from countries around the world arrived on our shores to visit the great destinations and attractions we offer.

"Travel and tourism supports

14 million jobs and \$188.3 billion in wages, ranking No. 5 in overall employment in the United States," Parra noted.

"In April 2002, the average national price of diesel fuel was \$1.32 per gallon. In 2002, the cost of fuel represented approximately 10 percent of an operator's cost.

"With the cost of fuel tripling in just 10 years, motorcoach travel and tour professionals are challenged to offer affordable domestic travel."

Parra pointed out that UMA and NTA had recently joined a tourism industry coalition that is encouraging development of a nation-

al tourism strategy.

"As today's hearing highlights, energy needs to be part of that strategy," he said.

Parra recommended the committee consider policies that:

1. Alleviate energy shortages that force increases in fuel prices.
2. Encourage consumers to uti-

lize motorcoach transportation when appropriate and feasible.

3. Remove restrictions and facilitate motorcoach travel.

"UMA and NTA believe the travel and tourism industry is playing a vital — if at times underappreciated — role in our nation's economic recovery," said Parra.

## Energy secretary: Fuel to stay high

INDIANAPOLIS — U.S. Secretary of Energy Steven Chu isn't optimistic about the long-term outlook for fuel prices that bus and truck operators pay.

While advancements in conventional engine and vehicle technologies and alternative fuels will help control transportation's long-term demand for oil in the United States, growing demand from developing nations will continue to drive up fuel prices, says Chu.

To the extent they can, transportation companies should increase their diversification of fuel options and expand their use of alternative power technologies as a means of controlling their fuel costs in the face of rising prices, he said.

Although worldwide oil production has remained relatively steady over the past decade and, in fact, may be plateauing in the United States, Chu said, the growing demand for oil in China, India and other growing economies has effectively boosted oil prices to more than \$100 a barrel and fuel prices, which still track crude oil prices, have risen in step.



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# House bill would restore equipment 'bonus depreciation'

WASHINGTON — A bill that would re-establish bonus depreciation for equipment purchases has been introduced in the U.S. House.

The legislation offered by Rep. Patrick Tiberi, R-Ohio, and a bipartisan group of co-sponsors, would allow businesses to write off 100 percent of the price of equipment purchased this year, as they were allowed to do during 2011.

For motorcoach operators, the bonus depreciation could be used not only for buying new buses but also for purchases ranging from new computers to dispatcher

equipment.

"I've talked to small-business owners from across Ohio who have explained that the bonus depreciation is the single-largest factor for businesses considering expansion this year," said Rep. Tiberi.

Normally, businesses are required to spread depreciation write-offs over several years.

However, the bonus depreciation tax break was adopted in late 2010 and ran through 2011 in an effort to boost the manufacturing sector during the recession. (See March 15 *Bus & Motorcoach*

News.)

"Allowing job creators to use these tools for capital reinvestment is a common-sense way to encourage job creation and promote business expansion," Tiberi said in a statement.

"We're working to build support for this measure and encourage those who believe it's good for business to contact their congressmen."

The measure was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. Tiberi is chairman of its Subcommittee on Select Reve-

nue Measures, which has jurisdiction over federal tax policy.

Tiberi's bill is the second attempt this year by backers to get bonus depreciation passed.

Earlier in the year, a bill sponsored by Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dave Camp, R-Mich., was approved by the House and attached to legislation extending the payroll tax cut that went to conference with the Senate.

In conference, however, the bonus depreciation provision was dropped.

In the Senate, a bonus depre-

ciation extension was part of an economic stimulus bill introduced by Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del.

Like Tiberi's House proposal, the Coons bill has bipartisan support.

The U.S. Treasury estimates the tax break is so popular it will cost taxpayers about \$55 billion in lost revenue for fiscal 2011.

Most of that money, officials say, will be recouped in later years because businesses taking the 100 percent depreciation write-off in one year will not have a write-off in subsequent years.

# Federal study of speed limiters: Crash rate is reduced

WASHINGTON — Research conducted for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration shows that over-the-road trucks equipped with speed limiters had a 50 percent lower crash rate — in incidents where having a speed limiter was an important factor, compared to trucks without speed limiters.

Study researchers included data from 20 truck fleets, roughly 138,000 trucks and more than 15,000 crashes.

Approximately 15 percent of

the crashes were identified as "speed limiter-relevant." Assessing whether a crash was speed limiter-relevant was based on four types of information found in the dataset:

- Location of the crash (e.g., highway with speed limit less than 60 mph)
- Crash type (e.g., rear-end truck striking)
- Contributing factor(s) in the crash (used to exclude crashes; e.g., weather related)
- Crash narrative.

The speed limiter-relevant

crash rate for trucks without a speed limiter was five crashes per 100 trucks/year, compared to 1.4 per 100 trucks/year for trucks with a speed limiter.

In addition, the report indicated the overall crash rate for trucks without a speed limiter was higher compared with trucks equipped with a speed limiter — 16.4 crashes per 100 trucks/year for trucks without a speed limiter versus 11 crashes per 100 trucks/year for trucks with a speed limiter.

"Results from multiple analy-

ses indicated a profound safety benefit for trucks equipped with an active speed limiter," the report concluded.

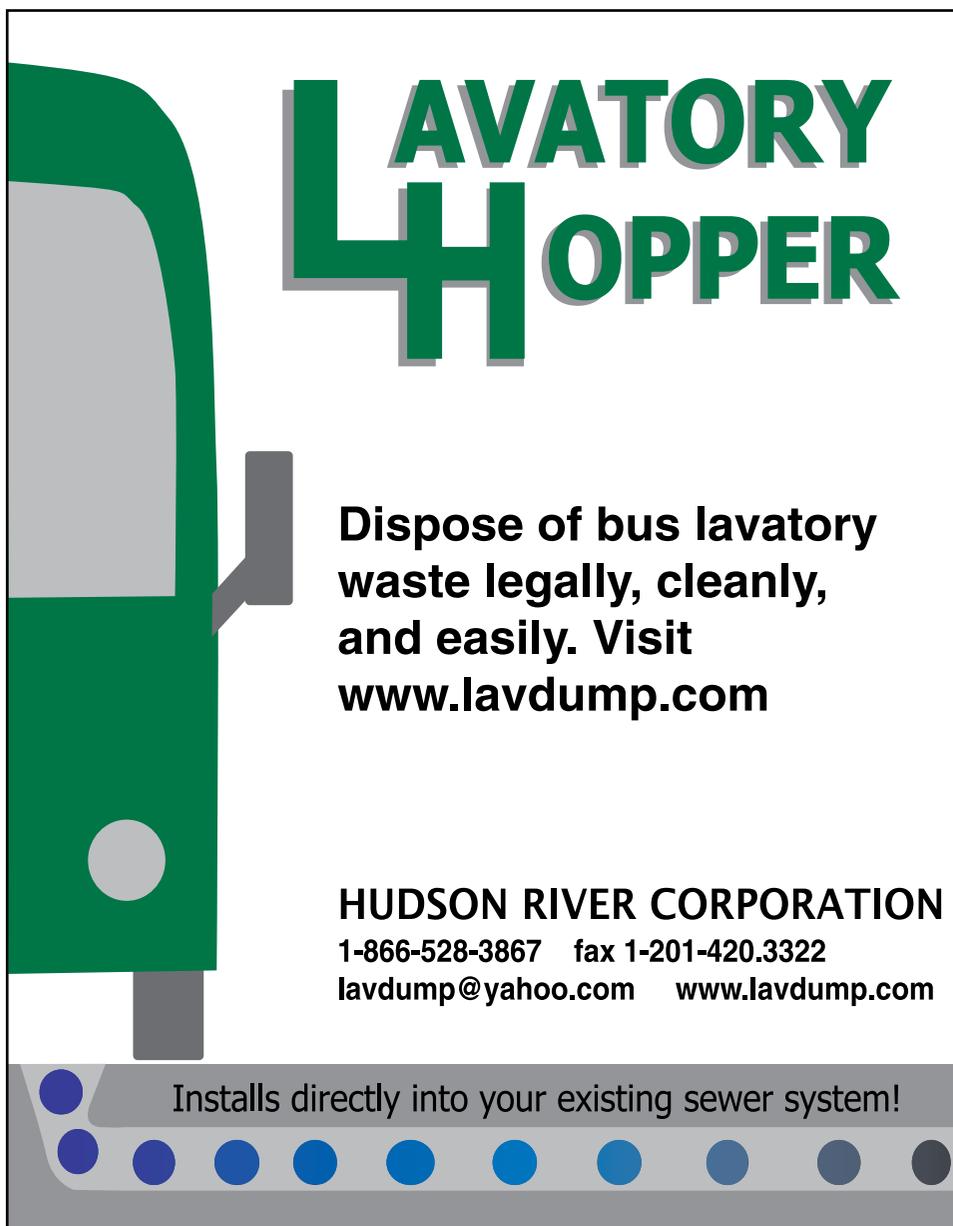
Safety advocates, the American Trucking Associations and other trucking groups support a federal regulation requiring speed limiters on all commercial vehicles and a 65 mph national speed limit for all vehicles.

"This study confirms what ATA has been saying for years — speed kills and one of the most effective ways to prevent hundreds, if not

thousands, of crashes on our highways is to slow all vehicles down, including large trucks," said ATA President and CEO Bill Graves in response to the study.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is expected to initiate a rulemaking this year, mandating a 65-mph speed limit for over-the-road trucks and buses.

If the rulemaking happens, NHTSA is likely to seek to justify the mandate both on the basis of safety and reducing fuel consumption.



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## Safety debate

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ed, and — most importantly — impose unreasonable compliance deadlines.

“Many of the mandates are simply unworkable as the time frames in which the amendment would require each mandate to be accomplished and are not consistent with proceeding in a prudent and logical fashion,” he told the committee.

Parra said that before any major changes in motorcoach safety regulations are imposed, they must be extensively tested and supported by “sound science” as is suggested in the House proposal.

“Any mode of transportation that provides 720 million passenger trips annually, connecting people every day to essential jobs, career, education, healthcare and tourism, commands the best science and regulations our federal agencies can produce,” he said.

Pantuso agreed, noting that a loaded 45-foot motorcoach, weighing almost 50,000 pounds, creates a far different crash environment than that of an automobile.

“None of these regulatory decisions can be made overnight,” he said. “ABA is concerned that a rush to get any rule out will take precedence over getting the right rule out, one based on the best available research.”

The two also zeroed in on the controversial retrofit issue, saying language in the House version that gives the transportation secretary more discretion and requires the equipment be readily attachable and be enforced through visible inspection rather than disassembly is far favorable to provisions in the Senate proposal.

“This is important so that any retrofit requirement would not result in a complete restructure of the bus,” Parra testified.

Pantuso noted that while bus

operators can comply with requirements involving readily attachable equipment, they cannot re-manufacture a motorcoach.

“Such an order for (retrofitting) equipment like seatbelts would place bus operators in an unwinnable position,” he added.

### No lawsuit protection

Both also attacked the Senate proposal for not containing provisions that would protect bus operators from being sued for not having safety equipment that is not required by federal regulators on older buses. Such language is included in the House measure.

“While implementation is taking place, it is also vital that operators have in place liability protection for existing vehicles in their fleet as their fleets are replaced with new vehicles, another important feature of H.R. 7,” noted Parra.

Pantuso said such protection is easily defensible and is similar to the protection the federal government granted automobile manufacturers when air bags were mandated.

“The bus industry seeks nothing more than the treatment accorded other transportation modes,” he said.

Parra also warned that the Senate mandates carry a dangerously high price tag — possibly a combined total of more than \$1 billion — that could hurt the industry during a period when it can ill afford it.

“At a time when the motorcoach industry is struggling to recover in this economy, this is not the time to impose unnecessary and excessive mandates on an industry with an outstanding safety record,” he said.

### Tax credit help?

Pantuso, who maintained that the cost of the Senate mandates would be a disaster for motorcoach operators and force many of them



Victor Parra



Peter Pantuso

‘At a time when the motorcoach industry is struggling to recover, this is not the time to impose unnecessary and excessive mandates.’

out of business, suggested the cost issue be addressed through tax credits.

“It is clear that tax credits are a legitimate way to get advanced safety equipment into the motorcoach industry as quickly as possible,” he said.

While Parra and Pantuso attacked the Senate legislation, Joan Claybrook, former head of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and a leading automobile safety advocate, sang its praises.

She testified that Senate version accomplishes the goal of improving bus safety in three to five years, while the House proposal allows unnecessary and unacceptable delays.

Additionally, she pointed out

that while the Senate legislation requires that all new motorcoaches be equipped with seatbelts within three years, the House version doesn’t even mandate that the safety restraints be installed.

“H.R. 7 states that the standards ‘may’ include seatbelts or other occupant protections systems,” she said. “This makes it clear that a final rule issued under H.R. 7 need not include a seatbelt requirement and that the seatbelts are left up to the discretion of the (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration).”

While acknowledging that federal regulators currently are moving forward with a seatbelt regulation, she noted that no final rule has been issued and it still could be withdrawn.

Claybrook contended, too, that even if the House proposal was to mandate seatbelts as part of the occupant protection requirement, the bill does not require that any seatbelts be installed in a motorcoach for six years.

“The provision goes on to allow motorcoach owners to take another six years to equip only half of their fleet with seatbelts and then another six years to equip the other half of each fleet,” she said. “As a result, under H.R. 7, seatbelts would not be required on all motorcoaches until 18 years have elapsed from the date of enactment.”

Claybrook also took issue with provisions in the House proposal she said would prevent states and local governments from enforcing the new safety provisions during a 12-year phase-in period.

“This is, frankly, an usurpation of state police powers to protect public safety and an unpardonable effort to protect special interests over an inordinately long regulatory implementation period,” she asserted.

### Safety official weighs in

The committee also heard from National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Administrator David Strickland, who urged lawmakers not to include school buses in any seatbelt requirements being considered for motorcoaches.

He said school buses are different than motorcoaches and decisions on seatbelts should be left to states or local governments.

“The safest form of transportation for school children is school buses, period,” he said. “Adding the belts on the buses may actually decrease the number of buses available for children to ride, which would actually increase the number of fatalities of children who would be forced to take passenger cars.”

Strickland also seemed to agree with Parra and Pantuso that research and science should be important parts of any new safety mandates issued by the government.

He said NHTSA is close to promulgating rules on electronic stability controls for heavy-duty vehicles and roof-crush standards for motorcoaches and emphasized the regulations will rely heavily on “sound science.”

Strickland again reiterated that his agency’s seatbelt rule for motorcoaches could be issued this year.

## GAO to FMCSA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

screened for reincarnated carriers by comparing application data to data from older carriers, it could concentrate its resources on companies with the highest risks, says

the GAO.

“Targeting could reduce the population of carriers to be vetted to a manageable number,” the report said.

The FMCSA also could uncover reincarnated companies by improving the safety audits it con-

ducts on new carriers, and by using a single standard for proving that a carrier is a reincarnation, the GAO said.

A spokeswoman for the FMCSA said the agency is reviewing the findings and recommendations.

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# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

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# Federal cellphone rules for drivers: Getting it straight

WASHINGTON — Can over-the-road bus drivers no longer talk on Bluetooth headsets while driving?

Are coach operators now required by law to establish company policies that ban drivers from picking up cellphones while driving?

The new federal rule restricting use of handheld cellphones by drivers of commercial vehicles has raised a host of questions since it went into effect in January.

In response to calls and e-mails from drivers and operators, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has posted a slate of questions and answers on its website, clarifying aspects of the regulation.

The complete "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) — Ban on Hand Held Cellular Phones" can be found at [www.fmcsa.dot.gov/about/other/faq/cellphone-ban-faqs.aspx](http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/about/other/faq/cellphone-ban-faqs.aspx).

According to an FMCSA official, drivers and employers most

frequently ask whether hands-free cellphone use is still permitted under the new rule.

The answer is "yes."

The rule provides that drivers can make, answer and end calls as long as they can do so by touching a single button. So, Bluetooth earpieces and other wireless devices

connecting the phone to a single-button control on a steering wheel or dashboard are allowed.

Drivers are not allowed to reach for a phone that's not close to them — even if they intend to use the hands-free function. Nor are they allowed to dial a phone number that requires touching more than one

button.

Regarding the issue of whether employers are required to have written policies about cellphone use, the answer is "no."

However, employers who allow drivers to use handheld phones face fines of up to \$11,000 under the rule.

"A motor carrier may establish policies or practices that make it clear that the employer does not require or allow hand-held mobile telephone use while driving a (commercial motor vehicle) in interstate commerce. The carrier is responsible for its drivers' conduct," says the FMCSA.

## More drivers test positive for drugs

An increased number of truck and bus drivers, pilots, and rail operators, who are federally mandated to be randomly drug-and-alcohol tested, are testing positive for drugs, especially cocaine and amphetamines, according to a survey from Quest Diagnostics.

The study found a 33 percent jump in testing positive for cocaine during 2011 among "safety-sensitive workers."

The data, collected from 1.6 million drug tests done last year, also show a nearly 26 percent increase in positive tests for amphetamines.

The upward numbers come on the heels of stricter government drug testing rules, which took effect in October 2010, along with new lower drug testing cutoff levels for substances, such as cocaine and amphetamines, according to a CBS News WebMD report.

Safety-sensitive workers tested positive for cocaine at the highest levels since 2008, and methamphetamine use was at the highest level since prior to 2007. Both of these drugs are stimulants, the study points out.

Researchers suspect the increase in positive tests for the substances likely stems from the newly reduced cutoff point, as well as from greater use of prescription medications containing amphetamines to treat ADHD.

The number of positive drug tests among safety-sensitive workers is lower at 1.7 percent than the general workforce, which was 4.1 percent, the study found.

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JOHN RUSKIN, BRITISH ESSAYIST  
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## Museum recovery

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

covered by insurance," said Collins.

Two buses were "adopted" for restoration by Peter Pan Bus Lines of Springfield, Mass., and Trans-Bridge Lines in Bethlehem, Pa.

Others, with less damage, were cleaned and detailed by volunteers at the garage and the running gear on all of the buses was checked by Wolf's Bus Lines in York Springs, Pa.

Collins said four of five transit buses the museum was planning to sell before the flood eventually were sold as salvage.

"And we got almost as much for them as we were hoping to get on the market," he noted.

The fifth bus was kept for a new interactive display that's being put together by the museum. The area behind the bus' driver position is to be cleared and the front

part will be refurbished so visiting children can climb aboard and sit in the driver seat. Collins said the museum already has an old car as part of the display and plans to eventually add a truck and a motorcycle as well.

"It will be great for the kids," he said.

Information about the museum is available at [www.buseum.org](http://www.buseum.org), or by calling 717-566-7100, extension 119.

Meantime, as the museum moves toward recovery from the flood, it has taken on another project, developing a suitable memorial to long-time museum friend and motorcoach industry sparkplug Bob Beard, who died in December at the age of 78. (See Jan. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Collins said about \$1,500 has been collected for the memorial and plans are moving ahead to honor the retired Trailways and

## Coach America

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

would be accepted in increments of \$250,000.

In the event only one qualified bid is received, the auction would be canceled and the company would have to seek approval from the court to accept the bid.

However, if the amount of the single bid is not enough to pay off the first position lenders, then the company also would have to obtain permission from those creditors before the sale could be completed.

If no sale takes place, then Coach America would be able to pursue the second of its options and move ahead with a financial reorganization that could result in the company continuing in operations. The scope of its business, though, could be substantially reduced under such a plan.

Although plans for the auction have been on the court docket for several weeks, it is not yet known

if any buyers are interested in acquiring either all of the company's assets or possibly only selected operations. The company operates in about three dozen cities in more than a dozen states.

### Coach USA interest?

Reports continue to circulate in the industry, however, that Coach USA is looking into trying to acquire some Coach America operations. Industry speculation has centered on Lakefront Lines in Ohio, Dillon's Bus Service in Maryland and Franciscan Lines/Grey Line San Francisco as possible Coach USA targets.

Coach USA declined to comment directly on the reports, though.

"As a matter of course, we never comment on the operations of other companies or any speculation about our business," said spokesman Steven Stewart, director of corporate communications for Stagecoach Group, which owns Coach USA.

## Paperwork rules

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

January because the companies failed to file ADA-required annual reports. The action did not result from having failed to provide accessible service for passengers with disabilities.

"They just didn't do any of the paperwork that's required to be sent into the government," Van Horn explained. "They ran afoul of the Department of Justice just for that one specific thing."

### Employee-related forms

Brown, whose firm conducts background checks on job applicants, frequently fields questions

about Form I-9, the record of employment eligibility verification, and E-Verify, the Internet-based system operated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration, which allows employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of newly hired employees.

Both I-9s and E-Verify originated from the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which requires employers to examine documentation from each new employee to prove his or her identity and eligibility to work legally in the U.S.

Brown says that rules applying to both I-9s and E-Verify are complicated and change frequently, but

# Museum 'Fling' to feature variety

HERSHEY, Pa. — Vintage, new and unusual buses will be featured at the 2012 Spring Fling of the Museum of Bus Transportation here on Saturday, June 2.

The 8 a.m.-to-4 p.m. affair will take place in and on the campus of the Antique Automobile Museum here, where the Museum of Bus Transportation occupies most of the lower level.

Wolf's Bus Lines of York Springs, Pa., will provide a shuttle to transport guests to the museum's nearby George M. Sage Me-

Greyhound driver.

They include a plaque featuring his name and a model of an Eagle coach, one of his favorites, that will be displayed inside the museum; a brick paver with his name that will be installed in front

Meanwhile, management of Coach America continues to reshape the business through what is being called a companywide evaluation designed to improve its competitive position, enhance its operational effectiveness and make certain its fleet is optimally deployed.

The streamlining also seems likely to be designed to make the company more attractive to potential buyers.

### Units being closed

The review has resulted in the closure of some operations and reportedly will lead to others.

Two of the most recent shutdowns have occurred at opposite ends of the country.

Cruise Connection of Florida was shut down March 18 after 25 years in business, and Coach America's Las Vegas operation was closed.

"Cruise Connection did close, a decision consistent with management's belief that Coach America

must ensure its fleet is deployed in a manner that maximizes return on assets," said spokeswoman Jeana Foxman. "Unfortunately, the recession has impacted the cruise business and short-haul, low-fare airlines also had an adverse impact."

Although the company would not comment on any other closures, it was learned independently that the Las Vegas unit also has been shut down. At one time, Coach America had a huge Las Vegas presence, which evolved from the former K-T Services and Gray Line Tours of Southern Nevada operations. At one time, those two companies operated more than 175 coaches.

Early this year, Coach America also closed its bus operation near Dallas, where the company is headquartered. The operation, in Grand Prairie, was the remnants of Gray Line of Dallas and Fort Worth, and the Dallas operation of Kerrville Bus. At one time, it operated upwards of 100 coaches but

of the museum; the addition of his name to the museum wall that contains the names of industry leaders who have died, and another plaque that will be attached to a restored 1955 Trailways VL100 bus that will list him as the driver.

that number reportedly had dwindled to around 30.

Coach America, which is owned by the New York investment firm of Fenway Partners, turned to bankruptcy after failing to get its investors to redo terms of its heavy debt. It currently owes \$403 million, including \$318.7 million in first-lien loans and revolving credit, \$30.5 million in a second-lien loan.

It also owes \$39.5 million in secured motorcoach and equipment loans and about \$15 million in unsecured vendor bills. (See February *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Since the filing, the company also has changed leadership, dismissing its chief executive, George Maney, and replacing him with Laura Hendricks, a senior vice president.

For court documents and other information about the bankruptcy proceedings, go to [www.bmcgroup.com/restructuring/site/disclaimer.aspx](http://www.bmcgroup.com/restructuring/site/disclaimer.aspx).

It is not permissible, and you would get a note on your audit. In other words, these bus companies have these big employee files and they stick the I-9 in the employee file — wrong! They (the I-9 forms) must be in a separate file and they must be locked in a separate place."

### Paper 'n penalties

On paper vs. electronic I-9s: "The problem with paper I-9s is you can fill them out wrong. I highly recommend you use an electronic self-auditing system. There are a lot available, and they're not expensive."

On penalties for faulty records: "From the coach operators' per-

A bus-related flea market will be set up inside the museum, where an anticipated group of 25 vendors will sell and display all types of bus artifacts.

Information on vendor space can be obtained by calling the Museum at (717) 566-7100 ext. 119. A modest fee is charged to display.

A special admission price of \$5 will be in effect at the museum. A food court also will operate throughout the day.

A friend of Beard's also collected money for another memorial at the museum, but the project failed to gain the favor of the museum board and the money has been returned to those who donated it.

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spective, if they're not following these rules — and a lot of them aren't — there are real problems.

"There is a law for making mistakes on I-9s. It's \$100 per mistake at the discretion of the auditor. If you have a thousand employees and every single one of your I-9s is wrong, that's \$100 times a thousand."

On maintaining current, accurate records: "I strongly recommend you find out what is required in your state. You've got to treat it like you treat your taxes.

"Do I want to cheat on my taxes thinking the government may not audit me? No, it's not worth it. It's not an expensive proposition to deal with this. It's an easy thing to deal with."

# Preparing for the worst: Fire and passengers in wheelchairs

By Dave Millhouser

While heading from the factory to its new home in New York City, Apple Coach Company's new flagship bus, a bright red Eagle, burst into flames.

The fire was unusual, originating in the front of the coach, under the dashboard.

Most bussy "thermal events" start in the back, of course, so this one caught the driver's attention quicker than usual.

The excitement grew when the flames ruptured some compressed air lines, creating a napalm moment.

The coach rolled to the shoulder and burned to cinders. It was known thenceforth as the "Baked Apple."

One thing this event had in common with most motorcoach fires: no one was hurt.

One of you dear readers may prove me wrong on this but, other than the Hurricane Rita tragedy in 2005, the last fatality I'm aware of in a commercial motorcoach fire happened more than 50 years ago.

In that instance, a truck hit a gasoline-powered coach head on, and it burst into flames, trapping injured passengers.

In the Rita catastrophe, the individuals who died were mostly disabled, infirm, frail and very old.

Despite the perceptions created by the colorful visuals of today's 24-hour news cycle, and reporters breathlessly declaring that everyone dodged death "in a nick of

time," bus passengers are not being burned when there are incidents.

Most coach fires only damage property. That's bad, of course, and could get worse.

New federal mandates are forcing manufacturers to jam an increasing number of chunks of technology into engine compartments. They all seem to generate and trap heat, raising the ambient temperature. Some, like defective turbochargers, may provide a source of ignition.

Dual tires (which sometimes blow and burn) are in the back, close to that hot engine box.

There will always be some fires because buses are an amalgam of heat sources and electrical gizmos, crammed into a box of flammable stuff.

A sizable percentage of our passengers are senior citizens, and many of us aren't quite as agile as we used to be.

Even more vulnerable are the increasing number of wheelchair-bound customers we're carrying. Wheelchair lifts are often in the rear of the coach, creating a situation where our least-mobile passengers are seated close to a potential source fire...one of their greatest fears.

In some configurations, the lift is mounted amidships which may give them a slight head start.

So far, we've been lucky with regard to fire fatalities. To maintain that streak, there are two important considerations.

One is technology. Tire monitoring systems can prevent fires by alerting drivers to hot or underinflated tires. Properly maintained, they can preserve tires, prevent burning buses and save lives.

Fire suppression systems should prevent, or drastically slow, engine compartment fires, gaining valuable time to evacuate passengers.

If you're ordering a wheelchair-lift equipped coach, you should have these systems. Manufacturers could help by folding both technologies into a "wheelchair lift-option package."

Second is training. Airlines have trained flight attendants to deal with passengers in emergencies, while the pilot tries to find a parking place. Our driver is all we've got.

Have you given thought to how you want your drivers to handle an incident when wheelchair passengers are on board?

The situation is compounded by the fact that, at the first hint of fire, the electrical system is probably going to shut down, and manually cycling the lift is painfully slow. In most cases, physically impaired individuals are going to have to be assisted or carried.

It might help if, at the outset of a trip, your drivers informally assess wheelchair-bound folk. Are they exceptionally heavy or fragile? Are nearby passengers able to help in an emergency? Are they going to try and use the lift's door, the front entrance, or the emergency windows depending on the fire's location?

Having procedures or a plan might save time if the worst happens.

Someone must have more ideas, and it would be good if we had the discussion in time to prevent a tragedy.

One thing's for sure. *Dave Millhouser* When wheelchair customers are on board, drivers need to act at the first hint of fire; better too soon than too late.

Passengers in the rear of a line-run coach approaching Boston smelled smoke, and alerted the driver, who radioed the terminal for instructions.

Misunderstanding the severity of the situation, management told him to keep coming. As the coach advanced up the Pike, the fire advanced up the aisle...as the driver doggedly forged ahead.

Eventually the heat forced all the passengers into the stepwell, and between the crowding and the smoke, the driver finally decided to stop. As his developing Chariot of Fire coasted to the shoulder, he opened the door and bellowed the obvious — "EVACUATE."

Everyone was OK. But it could have ended very differently if there'd been a wheelchair passenger.

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



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# Feds probe D-model MCIs after Greyhound cites crashes

WASHINGTON — The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration revealed late last month it has begun an investigation of an apparent series of driveshaft failures on D-model MCI coaches operated by Greyhound Lines.

The investigation was launched after Greyhound's parent company, FirstGroup America, filed documents with NHTSA alleging Greyhound had experienced "several driveshaft failures" on D coaches, starting in March 2010.

The filing said that when the driveshafts failed they were not contained by safety loops designed to keep flailing drivelines from possibly damaging other components that could lead to a crash.

In two incidents reported by FirstGroup, "the driveshaft failures resulted in loss of control of the bus and multiple injuries and fatalities."

Specifically, FirstGroup cited damage to the steering lock of the tag axle possibly causing loss of control.

MCI issued a strong statement, following publication of the first news reports of the NHTSA investigation, asserting that the initial media accounts had been inaccurate or misleading.

Saying it wanted to "clarify misperceptions," MCI said "certain articles have inaccurately stated or implied that NHTSA has already made determinations concerning the coaches, when in reality the NHTSA announcement simply relayed what one coach operator has reported to NHTSA, and the fact that NHTSA would be seeking additional information in order to make any determinations.

"MCI welcomes NHTSA's investigation and will provide its full support and cooperation," the company said.



Last month, a Greyhound coach dropped a driveshaft on Interstate 40 in Oklahoma City. The failed driveshaft and busted-off safety loop can be seen resting on the

pavement, at center, along with a shock absorber broken away from its bracket, at top right.

Photo by Derf Dnomyar

"MCI is proud of the safety and reliability of its D-series coaches, in addition to all of our other models. We are confident that NHTSA will conclude after its investigation has been completed that the claims are without merit."

The driveshaft incidents experienced by Greyhound are baffling in many respects — and to many people in the industry.

The most serious aspect, of course, is the allegation that crashes are resulting from the driveline failures and fatalities have resulted.

The crash — where fatalities occurred after a driveshaft failed — happened mid-morning on March 15, 2010, on Interstate 37, about 14 miles southeast of Pleasanton, Texas. Pleasanton is 35 miles south of San Antonio.

The coach was a 1995 MCI

102 DL3 that was being operated by a Greyhound affiliate, Americanos USA.

It was traveling south on I-37 when the driveshaft broke, causing a loud noise and vibration, according to a "reconstruction investigation" by the Texas Department of Public Safety.

According to witnesses, the driver and a co-driver, who was standing behind the driver, were trying to figure what had happened to cause the vibration and noise from the rear of the coach.

The driver then "locked the brakes" and the coach slid to the right, reported investigators. The driver then "overcorrected back to the left," causing the coach to enter into a side skid. The coach eventually slid into the median and rolled onto its right side.

Two people were ejected from

the coach during the roll and were crushed to death.

The Texas DPS investigation concluded the driver should have been able to bring the coach to a safe stop despite the driveshaft failure. The investigators said the "heavy application of the brakes by the driver caused her to lose control."

The other incident reported to NHTSA cites driver distraction and error.

The latest instance of a Greyhound coach dropping a driveline occurred last month in Oklahoma City on March 28.

A DL3, that had gone through the extensive Greyhound refurbishing program in Nappanee, Ind., was returning to Oklahoma City from a West Coast trip and was less than five miles from the downtown terminal when it

dropped a driveshaft on I-40.

The driveshaft came loose at the transmission end, flailed around, knocking shock absorbers loose from their brackets on the tag and drive axles, pulling hydraulic lines out of the transmission, tearing the driveline yoke to pieces, and knocking the driveline safety loop off the coach.

Debris apparently hit a leveling valve, raising the coach to its full height.

Despite the melee the driver was able to bring the coach to a safe stop.

The incidents are confounding to industry experts for a whole variety of reasons. They cite a busload of possible issues and causes: design, component replacement, maintenance and repair, parts quality, operational issues and other factors.

And, they ask, why are the incidents occurring regularly at Greyhound?

As a rule, driveshafts seldom fail and fall completely off a coach. They, and the u-joints that are integral to them, are robust components but they are subject to lots of stress.

Angle is very important. For example, if there is too much driveshaft angle it overstresses the u-joints, which can fail. If suspension height varies because leveling valves are set incorrectly or fail, then angles can get out of whack, stepping up possible failure.

Maintenance, periodic inspections and keeping bearings greased also are critical.

NHTSA said it will examine whether the buses have a safety defect. Its investigation will cover an estimated 4,000 D models produced between 1992 and this year.

An investigation can lead to a safety recall but no vehicles have yet been recalled.

## Greyhound gains as economy expands; FirstGroup takes hit

ABERDEEN, Scotland — Revenue at Greyhound Lines, North America's largest intercity carrier, rose during fiscal 2012, as the company reaped the benefits of an improving U.S. economy, its parent company reports.

Last month, FirstGroup plc issued a "trading update" for the year ended March 31, saying it would report actual numbers for the fiscal year during the third week of May.

"Greyhound continues to perform well from a transformed operating model with like-for-like revenue expected to increase by 4.2 percent" during fiscal 2012, said FirstGroup.

In the U.S., Greyhound operating margins improved during the year, and in Canada, where Greyhound has eliminated uneconomic routes, business is on track to meet profit expectations.

FirstGroup also said it was "pleased with the success of Greyhound Express, which continues to perform strongly."

More than 1.8 million customers have used Greyhound Express, according to FirstGroup, and plans are on track to expand the service to more than 600 city pairs, making it the largest such network in North America.

Interestingly, Greyhound continues to be the revenue growth

leader among FirstGroup's U.S. business units, which also include FirstStudent and First Transit.

FirstStudent, the nation's largest private school bus operator, is recovering from budget cutbacks by U.S. school districts.

Revenue at the school bus operation has developed "in line" with FirstGroup expectations, with top-line income expected to come in 1.4 percent lower than fiscal 2011, but operating margins for the second half of the fiscal year are expected to be slightly ahead of the same period last year.

At First Transit, the large transit management company, revenue for fiscal 2012 is up 1.5 percent,

and the operation continues to renew contracts and win new business, according to FirstGroup.

First Transit expects to see more communities outsource public transit services.

Meanwhile, FirstGroup's operations in the United Kingdom met overall earnings and cash targets during fiscal 2012. But the outlook for fiscal 2013 in the U.K. appears decidedly more difficult.

While passenger revenue for the U.K. bus division is expected to post a 1.5 percent increase for fiscal 2012, the outlook for the bus unit is sketchy.

"The economic environment is presenting challenging trading con-

ditions with considerably lower growth...rates emerging in Scotland and the north of England, where a significant portion of our urban operations are concentrated and approximately 60 percent of our U.K. bus passenger revenue is generated," said FirstGroup.

To cope on a long-term basis, FirstGroup plans to sell and dispose of selective assets.

FirstGroup's announcement that it expects tough sledding in fiscal 2013 was not welcomed by U.K. stock traders, who sent FirstGroup shares in their biggest tumble in more than three years in the days following the company announcement.

# Travel Exchange 'road shows' to promote new UMA-NTA event

ORLANDO, Fla. — NTA (formerly the National Tour Association) has developed a traveling road show to promote Travel Exchange, the co-located event that will join the UMA Motorcoach Expo with the annual convention of NTA next year.

The first Travel Exchange Road Show was a breakfast conducted here last month. Orlando also happens to be the site of the first Travel Exchange in late January at Orange County Convention Center, a popular location of past UMA Motorcoach Expos.

For the Orlando Travel Exchange preview, local tour operators, DMOs and tour suppliers were invited to join members of the NTA-UMA Task Force, who had been meeting in Orlando to refine plans for the inaugural event.

Task force members Cathy Greteman of Star Destinations (member of both NTA and the United Motorcoach Association), Paul Nakamoto of Roaring Camp Railroads (NTA member), Audrey Bialas of Pennsylvania Dutch Convention & Visitors Bureau (member of both NTA and UMA), and Larry Hundt of Great Canadian Holidays/ Great Canadian Coaches (motorcoach operator and UMA board member) provided insight and answered questions about next year's co-located show.

## UMA, NTA refine schedule for initial Travel Exchange

ORLANDO, Fla. — The United Motorcoach Association and NTA (formerly the National Tour Association) have refined the schedule for their joint 2013 event here: Travel Exchange, the combination of the UMA Motorcoach Expo and the NTA Annual Convention.

The schedule that was confirmed here last month at the NTA/UMA 2013 Task Force meeting will give members of both organizations a better idea of how the UMA and NTA events will be integrated.

"Travel Exchange represents an extraordinary opportunity for motorcoach operators, motorcoach industry suppliers, tour operators and travel industry suppliers to develop new business contacts outside their normal parameters," said Victor Parra, UMA president and CEO.

"The schedule has been carefully developed to best facilitate networking, learning, and buying and selling among all participants."

With the schedule now confirmed, the event dates have been adjusted by one day and now are set for Jan. 20-24. The schedule can be

Here's a sampling of how task force members responded to the question: "How will the partnership with UMA change the NTA show?"

Paul Nakamoto: "For the NTA member side, as a tour supplier, it's not going to change at all what you've done in the past with NTA. You're still going to have your pre-scheduled appointments, and you'll still be able to make additional appointments on site."

"The difference is now with the UMA side, you've got all the motorcoach operators. At the UMA Expo this year, I actually made contact with two motorcoach operators, and I picked up a new series tour for next year just because of that relationship. So, working with the UMA motorcoach operators is a tremendous thing."

Audrey Bialis: "UMA motorcoach operators that do operate tours have the option to take appointments. So, not only are you going to be able to schedule appointments with NTA operators, but when the appointment scheduling opens, throughout the whole time that it is open, keep checking back because as they register and choose that ability to take appointments, you'll be able to reach a whole new audience that you might not have been able to reach before."

Larry Hundt: "In our case, this

will be the first time in many years that our tour-planning staff is going to come with our coach-operators staff to the same conference. We're going to attract quite a few new tour operators who are going to come to the show because there's so much more at this show now."

"The UMA operators number about 900 in our total membership, and we will have a lot of our major companies here who have a tour department, and you'll have access to talk to them. They'll be bringing their tour-planning staff because it will be a one-stop shop for them."

"You'll have access to a lot of new companies and new faces that have the potential of bringing business to you."

The Orlando road show breakfast, the first of a series of such events, was conducted at the Rosen Centre Hotel and included an inspirational talk by Harris Rosen, president and chief operating officer of Rosen Hotel & Resorts.

Rosen, a long-time member of NTA and the owner of six hotels and a handful of convention facilities, credited his career success to the group travel industry.

"Today, Rosen Hotels has about 6,500 rooms, and we have three convention properties. None of what I have today would have been possible without your industry. If it weren't for the motorcoach industry, Rosen Hotels would not exist today. So thankful and appreciative I am of your industry."

NTA registration for Travel Exchange began April 10, with special early-bird rates. The association is encouraging members to ask questions about the event via e-mail at [questions@ntastaff.com](mailto:questions@ntastaff.com). Travel Exchange will be Jan. 20-24.



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## West Coast listening session on EOBRs

BELLEVUE, Wash. — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has scheduled another listening session on electronic onboard recorders to take place during a meeting of the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance here April 26.

The initial listening session in the latest round of hearings designed to gain input on proposed regulations mandating electronic on-board recorders for over-the-road buses

and trucks was conducted last month in Louisville, Ky.

The hearings are designed to get input on the connection between possible driver harassment and EOBRs.

The Bellevue session will be from 1:30 to 5:30 p.m., Thursday, April 26, on the second floor of the Hyatt Regency Bellevue, 900 Bellevue Way NE, Bellevue, WA 98004.

## Detroit transmission Allison Transmission launched by Daimler, 'excellence' program furthers integration emphasizes service

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — The repositioning of the Detroit Diesel brand from your father's engine company to the integrated powertrain supplier of your kid — and known simply as "Detroit," was largely completed last month with the introduction of the Detroit transmission.

Detroit now lays claim to being the only OEM that can offer a "complete powertrain package," which includes Detroit axles, heavy-duty engines and a transmission.

The integrated powertrain is a key strategic element of Daimler Trucks North America, which owns Detroit Diesel, and is aimed at having uniform production standards and processes worldwide, resulting in efficient, high quality and low-cost-of-ownership products.

The 12-speed, direct- or over-drive automated Detroit transmission combines a traditional clutch-actuated manual gearbox with high-speed, computer-controlled shift and clutch actuators, which automatically select the right shift pattern for fuel economy and engine power.

"Automated transmissions represent the next generation of technology that will increase efficiency and enhance performance," said Martin Daum, CEO of Daimler Trucks North America.

Initially, the Detroit transmission will be paired next year with the Detroit DD15 engine in Freightliner Cascadia over-the-road trucks.

Daimler/Detroit's announcement gave no indication whether a Detroit transmission might eventually find its way into the powertrains of over-the-road buses.

The Detroit transmission is based on Mercedes-Benz technology that has been tested and used in select European markets since 2005.

Early this year, Daimler introduced Detroit axles, a line of on-highway axles.

INDIANAPOLIS — Allison Transmission has launched a national service certification program to assure its customers receive "an even greater level of maintenance and repair services for their Allison automatic transmissions."

Allison has long been the leading supplier of transmissions to the motorcoach industry.

The new program implements "key performance metrics for Allison authorized distributors that are designed to provide customers with the fastest, most-accurate and cost-effective transmission service."

The Allison Excellence program requires distributors to meet aggressive customer service standards focused on timeliness of repairs, inventory stocking and customer feedback.

"Allison Excellence outlets understand that every hour a vehicle is out of service is an hour in which that vehicle is not producing or generating revenue for its owner," said Dennis Breedlove, Allison Transmission director, global channel development and aftermarket programs.

Allison Excellence service is now available at more than 165 certified service centers with nearly 3,000 factory trained technicians across the U.S. and Canada.

Meanwhile, Allison became a public company last month when more than 26 million shares of Allison Transmission Holdings Inc. stock was sold on the New York Stock Exchange for \$23 a share, or a total of just over \$6 billion.

The shares began trading, with the sticker symbol of "ALSN," in mid-March. All of the shares sold were by selling stockholders; Allison did not receive any proceeds from the sale of the shares.

The Carlyle Group and Onex Corp. acquired Allison Transmission from General Motors for \$5.6 billion in 2007.



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## Calendar

### APRIL 2012

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

### JUNE 2012

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

**12-15 Pennsylvania Bus Association Annual Meeting**, Sheraton Erie, Erie, Pa. Info: Email [efarrell@pabus.org](mailto:efarrell@pabus.org).

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

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