

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Coach operators aren't high on marijuana tours

DENVER — Motorcoach operators in and around Colorado, which last year became the first state to allow recreational marijuana sales to people 21 and over, aren't fielding many — or in some cases any — requests for tours of the state's 334 licensed retail pot stores.

That's fine with some of the operators contacted by *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

"Colorado has so much more to offer," including skiing and conventions, said Todd Holland, president of Ramblin Express, which has 46 motorcoaches between its Denver and Colorado Springs offices. "That keeps us pretty busy so we're not focused at all at this point at what that new industry might offer."

The company has received a few inquiries about such tours, but

nothing more. Holland said he sees it as a "very small portion" of potential business, contrary to impressions some media reports may have created, and not a niche his company is likely to pursue.

"We have so much other business here that that's not a market that we're going to build our business around," he said.

Holland thinks such tours raise more red flags than opportunities

for his company.

Gladys Gillis, owner and CEO of Starline Luxury Coaches in Washington state, where sales of recreational marijuana began last July, also sounded a cautionary tone.

"I do think that it's a big risk for motorcoach operators since we're managed under a federal mandate and our drivers cannot partake, even if marijuana is

legal," said Gillis, whose company has 75 motorcoaches between its offices in Seattle and Pullman, Wash.

"I think the big risk for us is that historically drivers have been willing to accept food and drink from customers...but in the world of legalized marijuana, people can get ahold of THC-containing products that look like regular food and

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Photo by David Braun Photography — Las Vegas (www.DavidBraun.com)

High Roller. The 550-foot-tall observation wheel, billed as the largest in the world, is located in the heart of the Las Vegas Strip at an open-air shopping, dining and entertainment district called The LINQ. The High Roller can fit up to 40 people in each of its 28 enclosed, transparent pods. Info: www.lasvegas.com/activities/attractions/

Congress has month to pass highway bill or kick the can

WASHINGTON — With a month remaining before the deadline to pass a new highway funding bill, Congress is expected to do one of two things: agree to a comprehensive, long-term solution to perennial transportation funding shortages, or kick the can down the road.

Then again, it could take no action at all and dump the problem on the states, something that has been suggested by some lawmakers.

Whatever Congress does, it needs to do it fairly quickly, at least by congressional standards.

"Congress faces a choice in the coming weeks: commit to fixing our roads or settle for more of the same inaction and half-measures that have ravaged Washington now

for years," Dennis Slater, president of the Association of Equipment Manufacturers, wrote in an editorial published in the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, the largest newspaper in Wisconsin.

Slater's comments were aimed at Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., chairman of the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee, which has jurisdiction over the federal Highway Trust Fund. Ryan is expected to back a short-term measure.

"Ryan is in the position to decide whether, in the next few weeks, Congress will step up and tackle one of the biggest long-term fiscal challenges facing our nation, fixing the Highway Trust Fund," Slater wrote.

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Be prepared: Roadcheck 2015 is only a month away

GREENBELT, Md. — Attention Kmart shoppers: Roadcheck is rolling around (again) to a destination near you.

The annual North America-wide safety blitz, operated under the aegis of the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance, will be conducted from Tuesday, June 2, through Thursday, June 4.

Since Roadcheck is the largest

targeted-enforcement program of commercial vehicles in the world, motorcoach operators should be ready for 72 hours of rigorous and thorough destination and roadside inspections.

Last year, the out-of-service rate for motorcoaches increased for the first time in seven years. (See Sept. 15, 2014, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

A total of 1,071 motorcoaches were inspected during Roadcheck 2014, down from 1,471 inspected the year before.

The out-of-service rate in 2014 was 9.3 percent, up from 7.1 percent in 2013 (see Oct. 1, 2013, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The out-of-service rate for bus and motorcoach drivers during last year's Roadcheck also moved high-

er, to 3.9 percent. In 2013, the driver out-of-service rate was 3.1 percent and in 2012 it was 2.5 percent.

Each year, roughly 10,000 CVSA-certified local, state, provincial and federal inspectors at 1,500 locations across North America perform bus and truck inspections.

Experts say the first line of de-

fense during a Roadcheck check is drivers. Drivers should be reminded to keep a keen eye on their paperwork.

"It's not so much maintenance anymore; they're getting nailed for paperwork," says one safety specialist.

The CVSA offers its own set of tips to get ready for Roadcheck.

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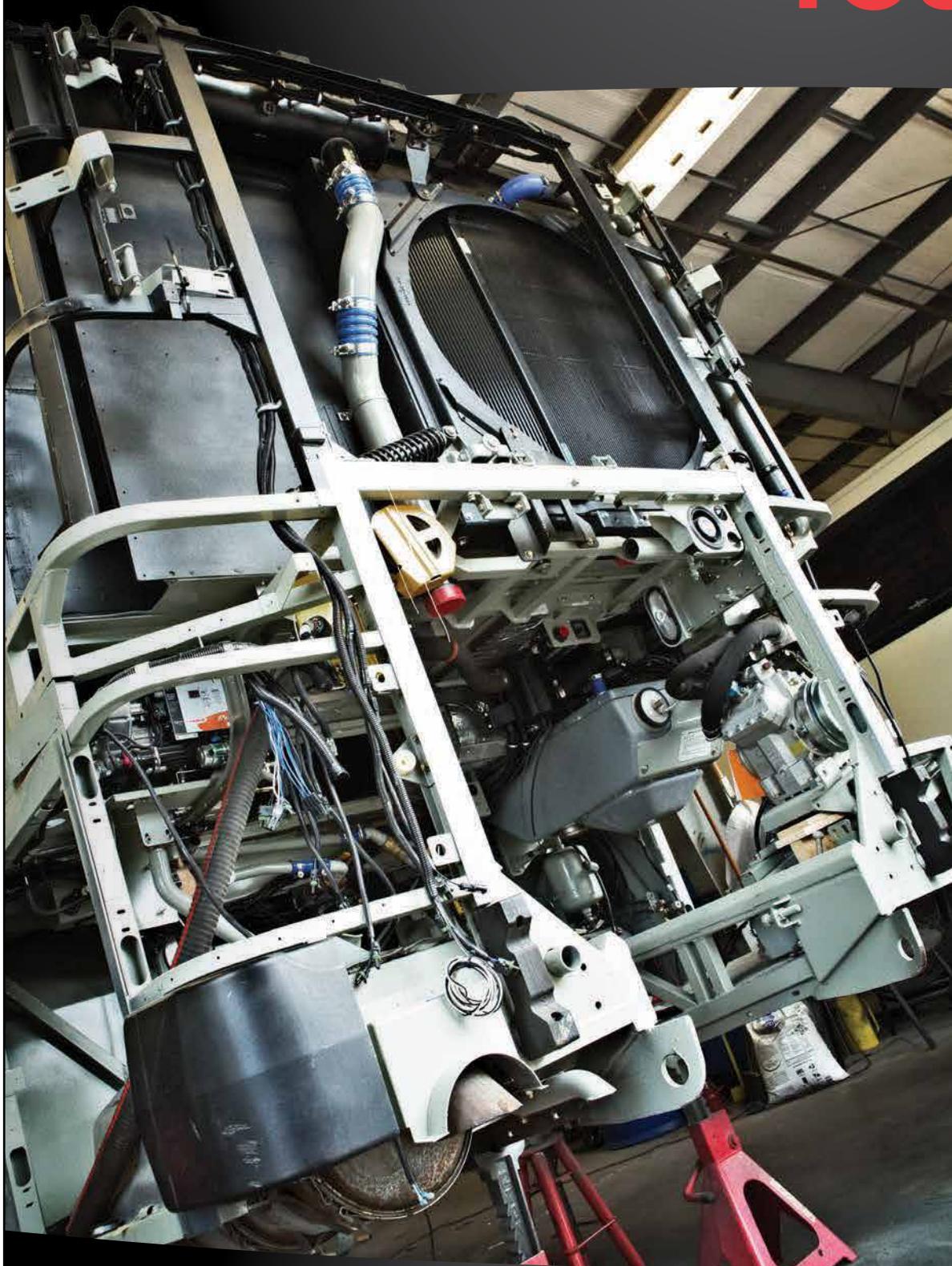
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Diesel price at lowest level in more than five years

WASHINGTON — The national average price of on-highway diesel fuel hit its lowest level in more than five years last month.

According to U.S. Department of Energy figures, the average price of diesel dipped as low as \$2.75 per gallon last month before ticking up to \$2.78 a month's end.

The price of diesel nationwide is roughly \$1.19 per gallon less than it was a year ago.

The last time the price was that low was in late December 2009.

Before the three-cents-per-gallon increase at the end of April, the price of diesel had fallen for five consecutive weeks, declining nearly

20 cents a gallon during that period.

The price of the motorcoach industry's No. 1 fuel declined in all sections of the country during April, with the biggest slide occurring in the Midwest, where the price averaged \$2.70, down more than \$1.28 per gallon from a year ago.

The Gulf Coast, which typi-

cally has the lowest diesel fuel prices in the nation, shared that distinction with the Midwest in April at \$2.70 a gallon.

The highest-price diesel during April could be found in California, where it averaged \$3.10 per gallon, down \$1 from a year ago. The price on the rest of the West Coast,

minus California, averaged \$2.96 at the end of April.

The average East Coast price was \$2.93 per gallon, down \$1.14 from a year ago.

As for regular grade gasoline, the national average price was \$2.48 per gallon at the end of last month, down \$1.20 from a year ago.

Academy expands to North Carolina, adds Boston-NYC service

HOBOKEN, N.J. — Academy Bus, the nation's largest privately owned motorcoach operator, has filled the last gap in its dominant presence along the Interstate 95 corridor by expanding into Raleigh-Durham, N.C.

Academy also has become a competitor in the busy line-run business between Boston and New York City.

Academy announced it had acquired the former Southern Coach Co., founded by the Louis Wade family more than 70 years ago, in Raleigh-Durham.

During the past 15 years, Southern Coach has had about as many owners and gone through as many iterations as perhaps any motorcoach company in the U.S.

It was sold to Coach USA in

2000, then sold to Lincolnshire Management when Coach USA was broken up in 2003/04, taking the name American Coach Lines.

Then, in 2006, American Coach Lines was purchased by Coach America. When Coach America went belly up in 2012, Transportation Management Services purchased the former Southern Coach operation, along with more than a dozen other former Coach America units, forming Horizon Coach Lines.

During the past year and a half, Horizon has sold off most of its operations, including several to Academy. Through its purchase of former Horizon operations in Florida, Academy has become the largest motorcoach operator in the Sunshine State.

By purchasing the former Horizon/former Coach America/former Southern Coach operation in Raleigh-Durham, Academy gains a significant base in North Carolina and arguably becomes the most important motorcoach operator along the most important highway corridor in North America — I-95 from New England to Florida.

Academy now has operational bases in Boston; Providence, R.I.; New York/New Jersey; Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.; Raleigh-Durham; and Jacksonville, West Palm Beach and Miami, Fla.

Academy said it has upgraded the fleet at its Raleigh-Durham operation by bringing in 30 new Academy-branded Van Hool coaches.

"We are excited to be operating

from the Triangle region and look forward to moving current and new customers in North Carolina," Academy said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Academy has quietly added GO Buses, or GO Bus, to its "company portfolio."

GO Buses is operating daily service between New York City and metropolitan Boston. However, unlike other Boston-to-New York line-run and curbside opera-

tors, GO Buses' route runs from the Riverside Bus Station in Newton, Mass., and the Alewife Bus Station in Cambridge, Mass., to Midtown Manhattan.

GO Buses coaches are equipped with a DVD player and large flat-screen monitors, outlets for electronics, restroom, Wi-Fi, and complimentary bottles of water. One-way fares range from \$18 to \$38.

Roadcheck

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Brakes, fuel and exhaust systems, lighting, steering, suspension, tires, wheels, rims and hubs are all listed in a prep package on its website. Don't forget battery terminals.

Typically, Roadcheck inspec-

tors annually perform more than 70,000 truck and bus inspections during the three-day marathon, 65 percent of which are North American Standard Level 1 inspections — the most comprehensive type of inspection.

Roadcheck has been around for 27 years.

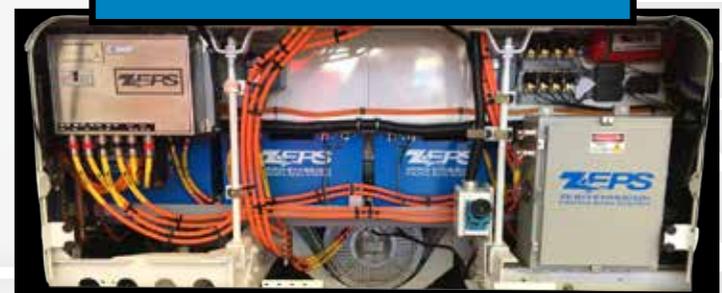


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THE DOCKET

More safety-focused regulations are predicted

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — A federal rule mandating electronic stability control systems on new over-the-road buses and trucks could be issued this month.

Canada also is ready and willing to create a mandate for electronic stability control systems.

Government affairs executives with industry safety equipment suppliers say the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is promising an electronic stability control rule this month. However, previous deadlines have come and gone.

One industry lobbyist said he would be happy “if they get it out before the end of the second quarter (June 30).”

He and others are optimistic a mandate will be announced this year.

The rule will require full electronic stability control for com-

mercial, over-the-road vehicles and will be implemented in two phases, with trucks and buses affected as early as 2017.

Debate about whether roll stability will be accepted under the mandate appears to have died out. Electronic stability control sys-

tems reportedly are outselling roll stability control systems by a ratio of 3 to 1, up from about 3 to 2 in recent years.

Electronic stability control systems provide more robust stability than roll systems.

Also on the regulatory front,

the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reportedly has been petitioned to create a rulemaking requiring collision mitigation systems on large commercial vehicles.

The agency has 120 days to grant or deny the petition, and

some observers think it likely the agency will grant it.

A notice of proposed rulemaking mandating collision mitigation systems would not come out until mid-2017, with full implementation not expected until the end of the decade.

Meanwhile, Bendix is pushing the government to grant permanent windshield clearance exemptions for safety devices.

Currently, devices can't be placed within the wiper sweep area of the windshield without an exemption. Those exemptions expire every two years, with Bendix's needing renewal in November.

The company would like such exemptions to be made permanent so it's easier for enforcement agencies to recognize what can and can't be placed in the windshield and to eliminate the work involved in pursuing exemption renewals.

Top official supports mandating ELDs and ESC in Canada

TORONTO, Ont. — Canada's top transportation official, Federal Transport Minister Lisa Raitt, has announced she supports both electronic logging devices (ELDs) and electronic stability control systems (ESC) for commercial vehicles in Canada “to improve safety for everyone on the road.”

Raitt told a leading Canadian trucking website she favors legislation that would mandate electronic logging devices and stability control systems.

“We want to mimic what's going on in the U.S. but we also want to be mindful of the fact that sometimes we can move the United States in a direction and I think when it comes to safety, this is incredibly important,” she said.

Raitt expects U.S. rules mandating ELDs and ESC to be issued in the fall. (See April 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.) As a result, she said she has Transport Canada geared up to get Canada in a position where ELDs and ESC can be

mandated.

“We believe that for safety reasons electronic logs is the way to go and we are going to be discussing this again,” she said. “I've already talked to (Ontario Transportation) Minister Steven Del Duca on this topic as well...and now that means we just need that one last push to make sure it's mandatory in Canada. I'm taking it seriously and I'm going to keep working to get it done.”

N.Y. bus group beats back new inspection fee for buses

ALBANY, N.Y. — The Bus Association of New York has proved that engaging in the political process to fight unfair regulations is well worth the effort.

When it learned earlier this year that the 2015-16 budget proposed by New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo called for imposition of a \$100 inspection or re-inspection

fee of all motor vehicles transporting passengers, BANY went into lobbying overdrive.

The association repeatedly encouraged its members to contact

their legislators to oppose the fee, and the effort was successful.

“We have just received word that due to our members extensive outreach efforts and the ongoing and ef-

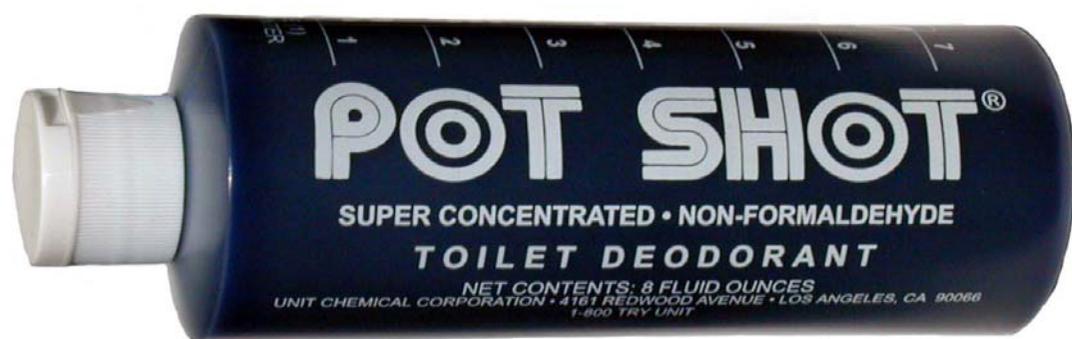
fective efforts of our lobbyists...the provision was removed from the governor's budget and has been passed by both houses,” BANY wrote in its weekly newsletter.

“BANY members have been relentless for the last four weeks contacting their legislators via a letter writing campaign and personal phone calls to lobby against the provision in the governor's proposed budget, which was singling out New York charter bus operators and forcing us to pay a \$100 inspection fee per bus for the Department of Transportation's 721-inspection program.”

New York operates one of the nation's most aggressive state bus inspection programs. Frequent and detailed inspections are a way of life for New York operators. Yet another inspection fee focused only on buses was too much to take.

After the proposed fee was rejected, BANY thanked its members for responding to the call to action.

“We ask our BANY members to contact their legislators one more time to thank them for their support in defeating this tax and protecting our charter bus operators,” the association said. “BANY thanks all of our members for their active support and participation in this Association wide initiative!”



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Congresswoman joins critics of FMCSA smartphone app

WASHINGTON — Sen. Debra Fischer, R-Neb., already has notified the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration that she plans on introducing legislation to reform the agency's Compliance, Safety, Accountability (CSA) program.

Now she is taking aim at the FMCSA's controversial smartphone app that makes safety rankings of commercial motor vehicle operators available to the public.

Fischer, who chairs the House subcommittee on surface transportation, joins several other high-profile critics of the QCMobile app, which was released last month.

"I have serious concerns about FMCSA's release of the app and the agency's decision to use resources to enhance public access to inaccurate data," Fischer wrote in a letter to Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. "So as not to misinform the public, it is my hope that FMCSA will remove inaccurate (safety) scores from QCMobile and provide disclaimers regarding proper interpretation of the data."

The congresswoman also asks Foxx in her letter to provide answers to five questions:

- Does FMCSA intend to offer easily identifiable disclaimers in QCMobile regarding the flawed scores?

- What was the cost incurred by FMCSA in developing QCMobile?

- Given the serious flaws with the CSA methodology, why was developing QCMobile a priority for FMCSA?

- Does FMCSA intend to collect user data? If so, for what purpose will FMCSA use this data?

- Does FMCSA intend to de-

velop other applications for mobile devices?

Fischer isn't alone in criticizing the FMCSA app. The trucking industry also has blasted the app, with the American Trucking Associations calling its release "recklessness cloaking itself as transparency."

And the Government Accountability Office, which issued a report in 2014 identifying flaws in the CSA program that limit the accuracy of the scores in predicting crash risk, also said it has con-

cerns about reporting safety scores publicly via the smartphone app.

"We don't feel that they're reliable, and so we don't think they should be reported on a website or, obviously, on an app," said Susan Fleming, director of infrastructure issues for the GAO.

The United Motorcoach Association also is opposed to the public release of CSA data, and it has first-hand experience with the FMCSA's release of such information via high-tech devices.

In 2012, the FMCSA launched

an application for iPads and iPhones that displays CSA data in the compliance categories applicable to bus companies: unsafe driving, fatigued driving, driver fitness, controlled substances and alcohol, and vehicle maintenance. (See April 15, 2012, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

That app didn't attract anywhere near the criticism and hand-wringing associated with the QCMobile app, which affects the much larger and politically powerful trucking industry.

Paying to drive is on the rise in America

WASHINGTON — With all the haggling in Congress over a new highway funding bill and disagreements over whether to raise diesel and gasoline taxes, little attention has been paid to the fact that more and more Americans are paying to drive on the country's roads.

A new Brookings Institute study reports that between 2003 and 2013, there was an "increased proliferation of tolls emerging throughout the country's road network to support new capacity and other ongoing improvements."

The study found that in 2013, there were nearly 5,400 miles of tolled interstate and non-interstate roads, a 15.1 percent increase from 2003. During the same 10-year period, total highway system mileage grew by just 3.6 percent. Toll roads have expanded their mileage by nearly 350 miles, or 7 percent, since 2011 alone.

Most of the increased toll mileage occurred on interstate highways: Tolled interstate mileage grew by about 17 percent in the 2003-2013 time frame, while total interstate mileage grew by

just over 2 percent, the study found.

Brookings points to reluctance by Congress to pass a long-term highway funding bill as a reason for the jump in tolled mileage.

"Amidst federal dysfunction, every financing option appears to be on the table to repair the country's infrastructure, and tolls are likely to be one of many possibilities attracting attention in the months to come," Brookings wrote.

Researchers also said the trend could continue because several states have initiatives in the works

to make tolls a highway funding option because of uncertainty about future federal funding.

President Barack Obama's proposed highway funding bill would remove the current ban on tolling existing lanes on interstate highways, but the president's bill is unlikely to secure congressional approval.

"Over time, tolls are becoming a fixture across many regions, especially as federal policymakers are reluctant to raise general revenue to pay for transportation projects," the Brookings study says.

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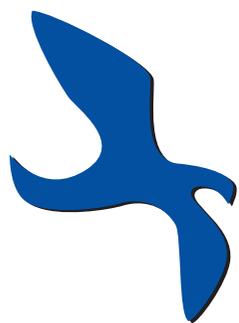
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Proof of IFTA registration can go electronic — sorta

CHANDLER, Ariz. — Meeting here recently, the board of trustees of the International Fuel Tax Agreement wrestled with the issue of changing the organization's credential for commercial vehicles to a digital form and possibly eliminating its longstanding

decals, but in the end shelved the idea. (See Dec. 15, 2014 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

That is NOT the end of the story, however.

During its discussions, the IFTA board agreed there is nothing in the current International

Fuel Tax Agreement or its rules that prevents an IFTA licensee from maintaining and displaying the IFTA license, which is required to be carried in every vehicle when it operates under IFTA, electronically.

This encompasses, presum-

ably, images on a driver's tablet, smartphone or laptop.

Not every motor carrier may want to try it and the board's remarks do not constitute an official opinion on the matter, noted one long-time IFTA observer.

"Still, provided the electronic

image of the IFTA license is readable by enforcement, there seems to us no reason it wouldn't work as well as a paper license," said Robert Pitcher, a vice president of the American Trucking Associations and a member of the steering committee of the IFTA industry advisory board.

Pitcher said there have been reports of some carriers already downloading their IFTA licenses to their drivers' phones.

"To the extent the IFTA license has been a problem for carriers, this development would seem to provide the industry some options to address that problem, and in effect make it go away," said Pitcher.

"If only the IFTA decals were as easily dealt with!"

Pitcher also is a member of IFTA's electronic credentials working group, which is spearheading efforts to replace — or to enhance — IFTA's credentials by the application of electronic technology.

To date, there has been little progress in that area — not just with respect to IFTA but more generally.

Over-the-road buses and trucks that operate on an interstate basis across the 48 contiguous states and all 10 Canadian provinces must display stickers demonstrating compliance with the International Fuel Tax Agreement.

The agreement is a cooperative program to collect and distribute fuel-tax revenue among member states and Canadian provinces. The program benefits carriers by consolidating licensing and reporting requirements through their home states.

IFTA decals are distributed annually to carriers, and failure to display them is probable cause for stopping a vehicle and grounds for a fine.

Large fleets, especially, don't like the decals because putting stickers on dozens of vehicles and making sure they do not get bleached out by the sun or washed off during cleaning is a lot of work. Maintaining the decals can be an issue even for small carriers.

There may be growing sentiment that while decals on vehicles have been the accepted standard for indicating a carrier is registered since the 1980s, technology has changed to the point some believe it is time to move on.

A major obstacle to electronic credentials is likely to be law enforcement agencies. Inspectors like decals because they can visually check compliance without getting in the vehicle or dealing with a driver.




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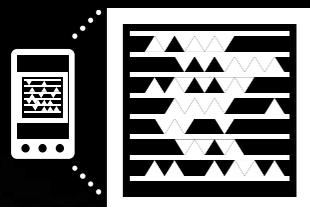
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Coach driver tip: Keep your trouble in front of you

By Joe Schirck III

I always tell my students, "Keep your trouble in front of you." The only place you have "true control" of your space when driving is the space in front of you.

You can't control what goes on to either side of your coach, and you can't control what goes on behind your coach. Even if you are watching your mirrors, you may be aware of what's going on behind and to the side of you, but you still have no control over it.

How can you use that space in front of you to your advantage? First of all, by maintaining a safe following distance. If you keep sufficient space in front of you, you will have more time to react if a situation develops, such as a vehicle suddenly changing lanes or a sudden stop of the vehicle in front of you.

Industry standards say you should maintain four seconds of

following distance time for day-light conditions on dry, flat roads.

Following distance time is measured from the time the rear of the vehicle in front of you passes a stationary object in or on the road (such as a street sign, shadow or line in the road). Count seconds aloud (one thousand one, one thousand two, etc.) until the front end of your vehicle passes the same point.

Four seconds is standard, but our company and some other companies have policies of six or more seconds. Of course, if the road conditions are less than ideal you would want to add to that time, maybe a second or two for darkness or a few seconds for wet or slippery roads.

My drivers have complained that you can't keep six seconds of space in heavy traffic because vehicles will pull in front of you if you leave that much space. This is very true!

To compensate, when you are

in heavy traffic you should drive a few miles per hour less than whatever speed everyone else is traveling at. That way when someone pulls in front of you, the gap between you and the vehicle in front starts and continues to open up right away.

I had been told so many times by my drivers that six seconds was impossible to maintain. Then I did an exercise at a driver refresher class one year. We took out a coach on a six-lane divided thoroughfare through a business district with heavy traffic.

Over the course of a few weeks, each of the 50 drivers took a turn behind the wheel. The other drivers in the group were tasked with "catching" the driver going under six seconds. They were to write down where and when it happened without telling the other drivers. There was a rule that it would not count if a car pulled into the gap as long as the gap kept opening up.

During the class, drivers were found to be in violation of the six-second rule only three times. Peer pressure worked, and the drivers all learned that six seconds is not an impossible task.

The space in front of you can also be used to your advantage in right hand turns on narrow roads. Turning from one narrow road to another with a 45-foot coach means you are going to have to encroach on another lane. Buses don't bend in the middle.

I have seen drivers swing way to the left before turning right. This allows a car behind you to slip between you and the curb or side of the road while you are completing your right turn. You may not be able to see it because it will be out of the sight of your mirrors. Since your rear wheels track inside of the front a collision with the car behind you is greatly increased.

Here is where "keeping your

trouble in front of you" comes into play. If you have to encroach on a lane to complete a right turn, encroach on the oncoming lane of the road you are turning onto. If traffic comes up, you can see it and react to it, and you can stop and allow the oncoming car to pass by.

Some courteous drivers may back up or move far enough to the right for you to complete your turn. But whatever happens it is all happening in front of you where you can see and can properly react to it.

Keep your trouble in front of you!

Joe Schirck III, a retired Naval Reserve hospital corpsman and a former Kansas firefighter, has 14 years experience in the transportation industry, six as a school bus/motorcoach driver and eight as safety director for Annett Bus Lines. He is a certified third-party CDL tester for the state of Florida and an active member of the Bus Industry Safety Council.

Overwhelmed? Try these tips to return sanity to your business

By David Finkel

According to a recent survey of 500 business owners, over 70 percent reported feeling "overwhelmed" running their companies. They felt pulled in too many directions, like they were wearing too many hats, with no time to take a breath and regroup.

Can you relate? Here are seven concrete tactics to deal with overwhelm in your company. Pick one or two to immediately implement to bring some sanity and joy back into the process of growing your company.

1. Pick one "bottom line" for the day, and get it done by 10:30 a.m.

A bottom line is the one thing that if you did it today would have the biggest positive impact on helping your company reach its most important goals.

2. Start your day by knocking out your bottom line — before you open your email.

Give yourself the gift of the first 30 to 60 minutes of your day to knock out your bottom line for the day. The power and momentum you'll carry into the rest of your day will help you regain a sense of control of your day.

3. Set aside one day per week as your "focus day."

A focus day is the one day per week that you set aside for you to invest on your highest-value proj-

ects or activities. Pick one day each week that you'll carve out a 3- to 5-hour block to work on your highest-value stuff.

4. Give yourself a break.

If you're taking one focus day per week and starting your non-focus days by knocking out your daily bottom line, then you're getting five to 10 upgraded hours per week of real, valuable work done.

So now cut yourself some slack...give yourself a break and go home (early). Or take a run. Or play hooky for a few hours in the afternoon and stroll through the park. The break will help you recharge and regain your sense of perspective.

5. Create a "stop-doing" list, and add to it regularly.

Too many business owners live their lives based on a to-do list to which they keep adding more and more. Once a week scan through your to-do list and decide if some of the items on it would be better deleted or delayed.

6. Narrow your focus to those fewer, better things that will truly make a difference.

Too many business people think the answer is more, but that just isn't so. The answer is about better. When you try to get too many things done you risk letting the good ideas drown out the great ones. Right now, focus on executing extremely well on one or two things, not skimming the surface of 12.

7. Each quarter, reduce your

"fewer, better" focus to a one-page plan of action for your company.

One page? Yes! You need to be able to see it all in one whole. Pick the top two or three focus areas for your company this quarter. For each, list the three or four concrete "criteria of success" bullet items that if you accomplished in that focus area by the end of the quarter you'd know you were successful. Then lay out the five to seven key action steps or milestones to accomplish those criteria of success. Congratulations, you now have your one page quarterly action plan.

David Finkel is CEO of business coaching company Maui Mastermind. This blog was published by SCORE.

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Setting a bad example for motorcoach drivers everywhere

By Dave Millhouser

BAM!

The whole bus shook, and came to an abrupt stop. I was backing a brand-new coach into a slot next to a building. This had involved pulling uphill on a side road, then backing across a busy street.

That's never a good idea, but the entertainment was just beginning. Assuming the coach had bottomed out, I pulled forward, waited for a gap in traffic...and started down again.

This time a pedestrian ran into the street, waved his arms, and yelled, "You're just going to ram that telephone pole again."

Well heck. Before beginning the maneuver I'd spotted a pole, and I kept it in view the whole time. Who knew they hunted in pairs? A "stealth pole" had lurked nearby, ready to pounce, and bit me on the bus-y butt.

Now that I have proved once again that I can still serve as a bad example, let's enjoy a few of the things I did wrong.

When you've just got to go backwards, it's better to back from

the busier TO the less-busy road. It wasn't possible in this case, so...

Spotting disaster

When backing up, it's always good to have a spotter. Backup cameras are good, but not perfect.

Come to think of it, neither are spotters.

Years ago, backing a Scenicrui- ser into a tight space, my spotter continued to wave me backward well after an overhang had punched through the rear window.

Things might have gone better if he'd been a bit more observant, or if I'd have walked around before maneuvering.

Bus drivers need to understand that they're like captains of a ship. The ultimate responsibility is theirs, not the person directing them.

A modern version of this tale might involve a bus with a vertical exhaust stack being parked under a tree limb. A "regen" could produce fiery fall colors nearly any time of the year.

When you just can't get someone to spot for you, the walk-around becomes darn near mandatory, providing the opportunity for a driver to spot potential targets.

Any time backing was necessary I tried to get someone else to drive. Failing that, I attempted the "instrument approach," scanning the whole area for potential problems before maneuvering.

I once was asked to park an Eagle demo on a beach so a photographer could shoot pictures for a brochure.

Wandering onto the sand before backing in would have let me know that, near the water, it was very squishy. As the tide came in, the squishy marched steadily towards the drive axle of the bus. If the photographer hadn't noticed the surf ruining his shots, that demo might still be half buried on Padre Island.

As it was, a great deal of cursing and spinning wheels could have been avoided by simply walking around the intended parking spot.

Buses are heavy

This holds true any time your bus is going "off-road." You have to make sure the surface can bear the weight before you pull onto it.

Most modern coaches have remotely controlled mirrors, allow-

ing drivers to adjust them to suit the situation. It's silly not to use this feature. Bear in mind that a backup camera is compromised if the lens is dirty. Even if you clean them every day (and that is a good idea), in bad weather they can quickly become opaque, so drivers can't count on them.

It's worth noting that many 45-foot coaches have steerable tag axles. On some models, the tags lock in place when reverse gear is selected, preventing the tires from jamming sideways and damaging the axle.

Parts are breakable

Rolling backwards in neutral can break expensive suspension parts. In addition, backup beepers only sound when reverse is engaged, so coasting backwards is never wise.

If you are able to maneuver or park a coach so backing can be avoided, seize the opportunity. When you must back up, watch the front end so it doesn't "reach out and touch someone."

Remind yourself that you're driving the equivalent of a giant forklift, with the steering wheels in

the rear. You knew that, but it's worth repeating.

Back in the day (in this case, a pun that means the statute of limitations has run out), a friend had an MC-8 on a nighttime charter in Washington, D.C. On the opposite side of the city from his garage, its automatic transmission burped and refused to advance any farther, but reverse worked fine.

He found alternative transportation for his passengers, then backed the bus all the way across Washington.

On the one hand, this is a really BAD idea, but on the other, isn't it fun picturing the looks he got as he made his way backwards across our nation's capital? Imagine him pulling up next to you at a traffic light.

There's a metaphor in there somewhere.

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



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Opportunity knocking? Rural intercity service, Amtrak links

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — The push by Amtrak to expand its network by linking up with more intercity bus connections not only increased travel options for rural Alabama residents but it also boosted business and marketing opportunities for Capital Trailways, an Amtrak bus carrier partner.

That's according to Mark Szyperski, a consultant to the Montgomery-based bus company.

Szyperski said Capital Trailways applied for and received Federal Transit Administration 5311(f) funding to establish rural line-run service in western Alabama in 2011.

The route serves small towns between Mobile and Tuscaloosa, and connects with the national rail line in both cities.

Residents in towns such as Camden, Ala., population 2,257, and Marion, Ala., population 3,686, now have access to the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, the

University of Alabama and three other colleges in Tuscaloosa, as well as the city of Mobile's attractions and services, said Szyperski, president and CEO of Nashville-based On the Mark Transportation consulting services.

Among the 5311(f) requirements is that carriers "must make a

meaningful connection with an intercity carrier" and "cannot be a commuter service or an airport service," Szyperski said, adding that Capital Trailways satisfies the first requirement by linking up with Greyhound Lines at both Mobile and Tuscaloosa.

A key issue in getting the service running was devising a workable schedule.

Szyperski pointed out, for example, that the service arrives in Tuscaloosa at 7:45 a.m. but doesn't leave until 4:40 p.m. That's because the route is five hours and 20 minutes of drive time one way.

Since a two-way trip would put the driver over the 10-hour driving limit set by federal hours-of-service rules, an eight-hour off-duty break was factored into the schedule.

Partnering with the Tuscaloosa Transit Authority and Amtrak proved a public relations and marketing boon to the bus company, he said.

Capital Trailways and the transit authority worked together with chambers of commerce in several towns along the route to stage ribbon-cutting ceremonies to build interest and buzz about the new service.

"This has been a really positive public-private working relationship. The city of Tuscaloosa promotes our system, we have our cards in their rack card system, they know our routes," he noted.

The Amtrak connection has proven equally beneficial for both the train service and the bus company.

"They used to have train service go through Mobile from New Orleans and so forth. They cut that out more than a few years back. They were very much interested and wanted to have that connection back," Szyperski said.

For Capital Trailways, the Amtrak connection means that reservation, ticketing, bus stop and station information is listed on the Amtrak website. In addition, the partnership enables the bus company to run advertising in local papers promoting the idea that residents can "Take the train to New York."

"If you want to get someone real excited in Thomasville, Ala., tell them they've got an Amtrak train coming through their city," which has a population of 4,099 and no train station or train tracks, he said.

Szyperski advised operators interested in establishing a scheduled service in partnership with the rail line to contact Adam Krom, Amtrak's director of connectivity, at (215) 349-4612.

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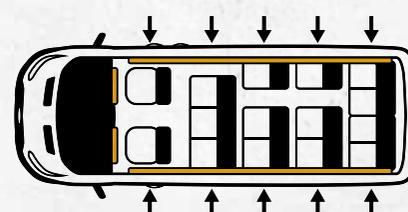
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Prevost vice president Dann Wiltgen retiring this spring



Dann Wiltgen

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Prevost sales executive Dann Wiltgen is retiring this spring after 20 years with the Quebec-based motorcoach manufacturer.

Wiltgen, vice president of pre-owned coach sales and new coach key accounts at Prevost, got his start in the motorcoach industry in manufacturing and then customer service before moving into sales and corporate accounts at Prevost. He became a vice president in that area 10 years ago.

Jack Forbes will take over as vice president of corporate accounts and commuter sales.

Wiltgen, who grew up on a Wisconsin farm, admits he was lukewarm about joining Prevost when approached by the company in the mid-1990s.

“At the time I thought of Prevost as a small company, far away in Canada,” he said. “But the interviews in Quebec sold me. The people I met were so dedicated, proud and passionate about their work and that left a deep impression on me.”

Prevost President and CEO Gaetan Bolduc said he has mixed feelings about seeing Wiltgen retire.

“Dann’s strength in building strong customer relations is a reflection of Prevost’s core values and one that others within our organization have learned from him,” Bolduc said. “His mentoring approach has given all those around him the right attitude to carry on as he takes his retirement. I am thankful for all the great work he has done for Prevost and the industry.”

During his career Wiltgen never shied away from a challenge, including convincing his colleagues to embrace what was, at the time, an audacious-sounding objective: to make Prevost the No. 1 motorcoach brand in North America.

“Over the years, Dann really helped Prevost raise the game in terms of customer relationships,” said Mike Colbourne, president and CEO of Pacific Western. “He always took the time to listen, and he always followed through to make sure that our needs were met. That’s been so important in terms of nurturing genuine partnerships between Prevost and its customers.”

One of Wiltgen’s cornerstone achievements at Prevost was the relationship he helped build with Greyhound Lines — another bold objective initially received with some skepticism.

“Our first Greyhound order for 50 buses might have raised an eyebrow or two in the industry,” Wiltgen said. “But when we land-

ed the subsequent order for 140 coaches, people really sat up and took notice.”

Dave Leach, president and CEO of Greyhound Lines, said Wiltgen was instrumental in the initial negotiations between Prevost and Greyhound.

“He found a way to get us what we needed,” Leach said. “Those were the first buses in North America with seatbelts, and Prevost made that happen in an environment where there were no requirements or regulations, but it was the right thing to do. The support we received

was eye opening. They care, and Dann cares. He has always made himself available, always been responsive and very professional. He is one of those guys who doesn’t come along very often.”

Wiltgen said he would miss working with his colleagues and cus-

tomers. “This industry gets into your blood, and more than anything it’s the sense of community and closeness that all of us in the business share.”

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Congress

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Congress must pass some type of highway funding measure before May 31, the expiration date of the stopgap measure passed last year upon the expiration of 2012's MAP-21 funding law.

If it can't pass a long-term measure, it likely will be forced to pass another short-term measure to give lawmakers more time to hammer out a more comprehensive bill. Even though lawmakers were aware of the May 31 deadline when they set it in December, most of them showed little urgency to act until recently.

There currently are several proposals — some comprehensive, some just frameworks — but as of last month none had widespread bipartisan support.

The Obama administration has come out with a six-year, \$478 billion "Grow America" transportation plan. However, GOP leaders are unlikely to approve that plan.

Raise fuel taxes?

Much of the debate on Capitol Hill over highway funding has centered on whether to increase the federal fuel tax on diesel and gasoline purchases as well as whether to embrace President

Obama's idea of paying for a multi-year funding plan in part through repatriation — revenue gained from a one-time tax on overseas corporate profits.

Many lawmakers, as well as Obama, are opposed to raising fuel taxes.

A bill has been introduced in the House that would tie the current flat-rate federal fuel tax to inflation as a long-term highway funding measure and appropriate an immediate \$12 billion to the Highway Trust Fund to ensure short-term solvency. The trust fund receives its money from fuel taxes.

The bill, called the Bridge to Sustainable Infrastructure, would also establish a task force to oversee the Highway Trust Fund and its solvency and put in place measures to raise fuel taxes if Congress fails to prevent shortfalls in the fund by the start of 2017 and 2020.

The bill has some bi-partisan support — it is cosponsored by 10 Democrats and seven Republicans — and has the endorsement of the American Trucking Associations, the Chamber of Commerce, AAA, AFL-CIO and a long list of others.

The bill does not include any regulatory changes or mandates

and is just 35 pages long, centering solely on bringing revenue to the Highway Trust Fund.

Rep. Bill Shuster, R-Pa., the top transportation policy writer in the House, told reporters last month that he was expecting a proposal to solve the funding problem before the deadline, saying that "whichever is the one that gets me the money to do a long-term bill is the one I favor."

Tax reform

Shuster would not say exactly what type of highway plan House colleagues would be considering prior to the May deadline, but he indicated that a long-term plan might be included as part of a broad tax overhaul package.

"I believe there is bipartisan support to do some form of tax reform," he said, referring to comments by several lawmakers, including Ryan, that they want to tie any highway bill to reforming taxes.

However, because a tax reform measure would be a monumental feat that would take longer than a month to advance through Congress, there's a growing expectation that lawmakers will consider a short-term funding fix to buy time for tackling tax reform.

Transportation Secretary An-

thony Foxx, in pushing President Obama's plan, has said that approving a short-term fix is not ideal for states that are crafting long-term construction projects.

Yet another highway funding proposal that was expected to be introduced by the end of last month calls for implementing a user fee on goods movement to create a national freight trust fund dedicated to infrastructure expansion, upgrade and repair, according to its author, Rep. Alan Lowenthal, D-Calif.

Lowenthal said his bill would raise roughly \$8 billion a year dedicated to freight-related infrastructure projects throughout the nation that would set up a Freight Transportation Infrastructure Trust Fund funded through a national 1 percent waybill fee on the transportation cost of goods.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., transportation policy committee chairman, also is working on a proposal that he said would authorize highway programs for five or six years. Inhofe said he expected his bill to be introduced before the May 31 deadline, but he acknowledged that there are issues with identifying a sustainable source of funding for a major highway account and getting GOP colleagues with strong conservative ideolo-

gies to back the measure.

Conservative approach

Referring to his fellow Republicans, Inhofe said: "What they don't realize is that...the only alternative to a highway reauthorization bill is a short-term extension that costs about 30 percent more — clearly ours is the conservative approach to it."

Sen. Barbara Boxer, a California Democrat, has confirmed that she was working on an agreement with Inhofe on a long-term bill. Boxer said she would back most funding proposals for the bill but downplayed the likelihood of passing the measure as part of a comprehensive tax reform package later this year.

While most transportation groups have called on Congress to advance a long-term highway measure, several industry leaders, such as American Road and Transportation Builders Association President and CEO Pete Ruane, say they expect lawmakers to approve a short-term funding patch prior to the May deadline.

"I think it's going to be a fairly short one," Ruane said. "The good news is (a transportation plan) is in front of them. They're seriously looking at it, and they're going to do something."

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More than 61,000 American bridges are in need of repairs

WASHINGTON — As politicians in Washington struggle to come up with a plan for a new highway funding bill, some troubling statistics have been released that point out the urgent need to fix the nation's crumbling transportation infrastructure.

A study by the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) found that there are 61,064 structurally compromised bridges across America's highway system. And, the study notes, trucks, buses, cars and other vehicles cross those bridges 215 million times a day.

ARTBA said that although there are 2,000 fewer structurally deficient crossings than two years ago, the long-term situation is getting worse. The association said that the federal Highway Trust Fund is the source of 52 percent of highway and bridge capital investments made annually by state governments, but the fund is in danger of running out of money.

Congress has had to approve nearly \$65 billion over the past five years to cover revenue shortfalls in the highway fund, but has struggled to approve a long-term funding solution. The latest extension of federal highway and transit funding through the trust fund will expire on May 31 unless Congress takes action.

"Many of the most heavily traveled bridges are nearly 50 years old," ARBA Chief Economist Alison Premo Black said. "Elected officials can't just sprinkle fairy dust on America's bridge problem and wish it away."

"State and local governments are doing the best they can to address these significant challenges, given limited resources. It will take committed investment by legislators at all levels of government. Without additional investment from all levels of government, our infrastructure spending will be a zero-sum game," Black said, noting that there is a current backlog of more than \$115 billion in bridge work and \$755 billion in highway projects, according to U.S. Department of Transportation data.

Bridges are regularly inspected for deterioration and are rated on a scale of zero to nine, with nine being "excellent" condition. A bridge is classified as structurally deficient and in need of repair if its overall rating is four or below.

ARTBA said that even though the bridges may not be unsafe, it proposed that signs be posted to notify the public that they have structural deficiencies that need

repair.

The ARTBA analysis of the bridge data supplied by the states to the federal government found that:

- The 250 most heavily crossed structurally deficient bridges are on urban interstate highways, par-

ticularly in California. Nearly 87 percent of these bridges were built before 1970.

- Pennsylvania (5,050), Iowa (5,022), Oklahoma (4,216), Missouri (3,310), Nebraska (2,654), California (2,501), Kansas (2,416), Mississippi (2,275), Illinois

(2,216) and North Carolina (2,199) have the highest numbers of structurally deficient bridges. The District of Columbia (14), Nevada (34), Delaware (48), Hawaii (61), and Utah (102) have the least.

- At least 15 percent of the bridges in eight states—Rhode Is-

land (23 percent), Pennsylvania (22 percent), Iowa (21 percent), South Dakota (20 percent), Oklahoma (18 percent), Nebraska (17 percent), North Dakota (16 percent) and Maine (15 percent)—fall in the structurally deficient category.



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Legal pot

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

drink, so if a driver partakes in something and they're unwittingly getting THC in their system, I think that's probably going to be the bigger threat that the motorcoach industry needs to deal with," Gillis said.

THC is the chemical in marijuana that leads to the "high."

Gillis issued a policy in her company prohibiting drivers from accepting any food and drink from customers about the time marijuana was legalized in Washington and after she saw how packaging for medical marijuana food and beverage products was strikingly similar to packaging for non-marijuana products. She fears someone exercising poor judgment might think it would be funny to give a driver food or drink containing pot.

"That can not only put everybody at risk that's in the vehicle, but it can put the driver's license and ability to make a living in jeopardy," she said.

There's also the issue of smoking prohibitions that several operators interviewed by *Bus & Motorcoach News* said they have on their motorcoaches.

But that doesn't necessarily

mean tourists visiting marijuana retail stores couldn't light up onboard some motorcoaches. Laws for marijuana consumption in Colorado are similar to laws for alcohol consumption, with consumption prohibited in a private personal vehicle and in a public vehicle like a city bus, said Jeff Wilson, associate attorney at the McAllister Law Office PC in Denver, which has expertise in marijuana legal issues.

"However, you are permitted to consume it in privately chartered vehicles such as luxury limousines or charter buses," Wilson said.

Whether law enforcement might take issue with that is a little bit of an untested area, he said, but based on his review of state law, smoking would be allowed on a privately contracted charter bus with at least 33 occupants, including the driver. Local jurisdictions, however, can enact more restrictive prohibitions, meaning some places could outlaw smoking on a charter bus, he said.

Marijuana smoking on minibuses probably would not be allowed since such vehicles aren't classified as luxury limousines or charter buses under the statute. The latter are exempted from criminal prosecution at the state level, Wilson said.

Marijuana cannot be consumed in public, according to a state of Colorado website. Retail marijuana is intended for private, personal use in locations not open or accessible to the public, the site says. Some hotels allow pot smoking in their rooms, which is legal, but Denver law, for example, doesn't allow smoking from balconies visible from a public place. It's also illegal to consume marijuana in or around a licensed retail store, the site adds.

Asked if charter bus windows would need to be tinted to block smoking passengers from public view outside, Wilson said that would be a "safer bet," but he isn't sure bus windows would qualify as public view. For instance, people can smoke on their back porch because that's not treated as public view, even if someone can see them from the street, he said.

"But these are kind of untested areas...where the lines are," he said.

Wilson also doesn't see any legal requirements to have drivers protected from smoke, but acknowledged it could be a gray area. Studies have shown the intoxicating effects of secondhand smoke are basically insignificant, he said, noting that police may have a different interpretation.

Some motorcoach operators also have expressed concern about passengers potentially bringing marijuana across state lines out of Colorado, which is illegal.

Jake Byrd, operations manager for Charter of the Rockies, which operates four motorcoaches out of its Denver office, said he's had a couple inquiries about offering pot tours, with one tour broker asking if passengers could smoke onboard.

No, he replied, not even if the broker offered, as one did, to build an enclosure around the driver to protect him or her from secondhand smoke.

"I'm like, 'You're not building any compartments on my buses. You're not smoking on the bus,'" he said. "They didn't call me back."

But if passengers didn't smoke and followed all the rules, Byrd said he would be open to the business. After all, buying and possessing marijuana is legal in the state.

"Whether I agree with smoking marijuana, which I don't, it's legal in Colorado, it's legal to possess, it's legal to purchase in several different fashions, either for personal consumption or medical use, and so I don't see any reason that I should turn them away, but

they all want to smoke on the bus and we're not going to cross that line," he said.

Pot tours won't be run on any of the roughly 170 motorcoaches operated by Nebraska-based Arrow Stage Lines, said Brandon Osborn, president of marketing and business development.

"Primarily, first and foremost, we are a drug-free culture from top to bottom," Osborn said. "That's our vision statement, that's who we are, that's what we stand for. So that would not be an attractive business segment for us, no."

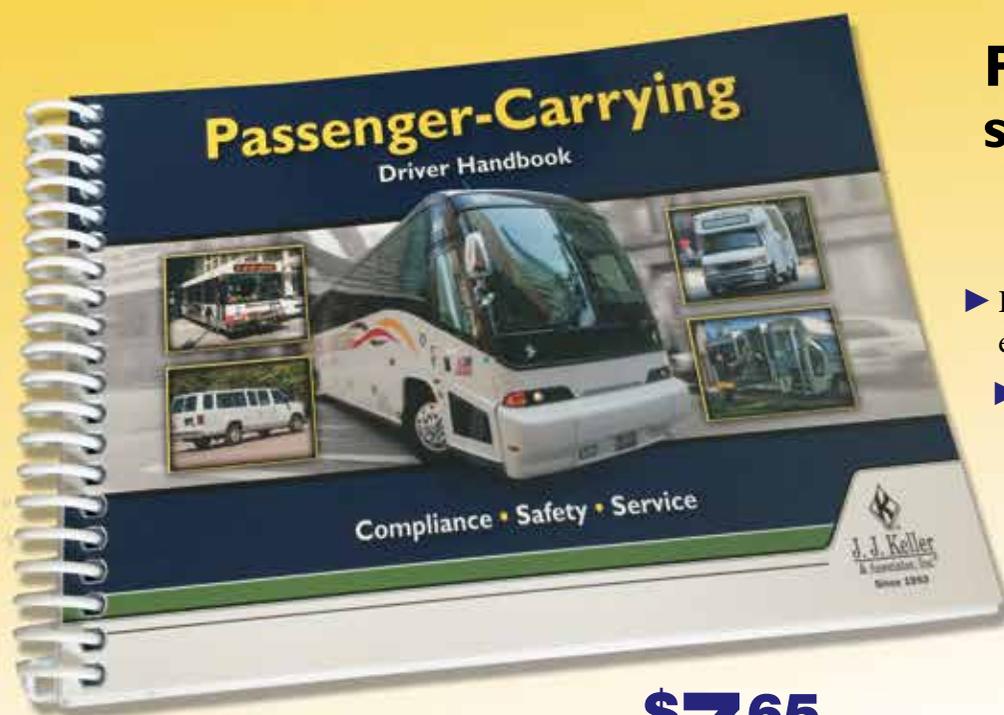
Promoting pot tours would contradict the company's policy and what customers expect from Arrow, he said.

"The landscape of our business is consistently changing — it's changing at a faster pace than it ever has and that comes from state regulations, state laws; that comes from federal regulations, federal laws," Osborn said. "As the landscape of our business changes, we'll have to adapt to it as well, but the drug-free culture is something that we will never abandon because we know that gives our clients and fellow operators who work with us peace of mind."

"Safety's always been paramount to us, it will always be a top

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17 ►

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Legal pot

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

priority with all our customer service and that's something that, regardless of the way the states change their legislation, will remain the same. I'm confident in that."

Alaska and Oregon are other states that allow or will soon allow recreational use of marijuana, with Oregon's law taking effect this July. Alaska's took effect in February, as did a similar law in Washington, D.C. (The website www.governing.com offers a map and stories on states' marijuana status in the U.S.)

In Colorado's neighboring state of Utah, meanwhile, Cory Smith, who owns Smith Coaches in Price and operates six motorcoaches between Utah and Colorado's western slope, said he's never been approached about marijuana tours over the 14 months it's been legal to buy recreational pot.

"Nobody has said anything to me," he said. "I don't know of anybody doing it."

Steve Herrera, manager of Herrera Coaches Inc. in Albuquerque, N.M., also hasn't been approached about pot trips to Colorado and doubts there's a business opportunity there, but he isn't sure.

He said he would consider such tours if requested, but could not allow onboard smoking and would be concerned about people possibly bringing marijuana into New Mexico.

Tour operator Rick Moore, owner of R.L. Moore Bus Tours in Dallas, has run four or five trips to Colorado since last April that have included marijuana stops as a small part of a larger itinerary that can include activities such as snowmobiling and visiting the Coors Brewery in Golden. Customers can't smoke on the buses, which he doesn't own, and must sign waivers protecting him and his company against marijuana possibly being returned to Texas.

Moore said interest in the pot tours isn't strong.

"I still get a few calls," he said. "I think it's kind of died down a little bit."

Addison Morris of Colorado Rocky Mountain High Tours, which offers pot tours in limousines, said interest from people because of the industry's novelty and the chance to legally smoke marijuana faded quickly. She gears her tours toward what she calls mature professionals seeking confidentiality and luxury and has evolved her company to focus largely on the educational and business as-



While motorcoach operators have yet to benefit from the legalized marijuana industry in Colorado, some companies, including Colorado Rocky Mountain High Tours, have found a niche running limousine pot tours.

pects of Colorado's marijuana industry. She even incorporates accredited cannabis business courses into her tours.

The classes through Clover Leaf University in Denver, which says it's the nation's only Cannabis University approved, regulated and licensed by the Colorado Department of Education's Private Occupational School Board, include

topics such as how to start a medical or retail marijuana business, growing marijuana and break out hemp-related businesses, she said. Courses include legal issues, marketing, packaging and regulations.

Morris' tours relate to the classes. For example, people learning the marijuana-growing business tour growing operations, she said.

"This is what people want..."

they're looking at this as an investment, as a business opportunity not only in Colorado, but in their state," Morris said, noting that most of her customers come from Florida, New York and Texas.

"Everyone believes that it will become legal in their own state," she said. "They're preparing. That's where I've gone with my business."

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Greyhound has tough quarter; outlook improves at FirstGroup

ABERDEEN, Scotland — Lower gasoline prices, prompting more travelers to use private automobiles, sent revenue at Greyhound Lines lower during the final quarter of fiscal 2015, resulting in flat revenue for the year, Greyhound's parent company reported last month.

During the fourth quarter, revenue at Greyhound likely declined by 5.5 percent from the final quarter of fiscal 2014, said FirstGroup, the Aberdeen-based bus-and-rail company that owns Greyhound and is by far the largest bus-and-motorcoach operator in North America. Refined numbers will be released in June.

FirstGroup said the decline in fourth-quarter revenue reflected "the adverse effect on customer demand from sharply lower fuel prices, which improves the affordability of other forms of transport for some trips compared with Greyhound.

"As a result, U.S. dollar revenue for the (fiscal year ended March 31) is expected to be flat," FirstGroup said.

Greyhound revenue in fiscal 2014 was nearly \$991 million. Flat revenue for fiscal 2015 could mean that for the second consecutive year Greyhound revenue has failed to reach \$1 billion. Fiscal 2013 revenue was \$1.02 billion.

FirstGroup said Greyhound is "actively managing mileage, time-

tables and pricing" in response to the changed market conditions.

"Given recent levels of activity we expect margins for the year will be modestly below the prior year level (of 7.4 percent)," added FirstGroup.

"Greyhound Express revenues have been more resilient, with like-for-like revenues expected to increase by 3 percent for the year."

FirstGroup noted that implementation of new pricing and yield management capabilities at Greyhound continues, noting that "we remain confident of achieving our 12 percent margin target, recognizing that long-term oil price trends may impact the timing."

Overall business at FirstGroup during the three months ended March 31 "was in line with management expectations, and our transformation plans continue to progress," the company said. The highlights:

- **First Student.** FirstGroup said the second year of its contract pricing strategy was achieving improved terms, with fourth-quarter trading modestly affected by adverse weather in the northeastern U.S.

- **First Transit.** A "solid fourth quarter" completes another year "of growth and margin performance."

- **U.K. Bus.** There was volume growth and positive yield, with progress on cost efficiencies.

- **U.K. Rail.** Passenger demand continues to drive revenue, and earnings are outperforming expectations.

"Overall trading for the year is in line with our expectations and we continue to make progress with our multi-year transformation plans, which will improve the group's financial performance and ensure we deliver sustainable value creation in the medium term," said FirstGroup Chief Executive Tim O'Toole.

"The pricing improvements we made in the 2014 bid season, together with further cost savings, mean we expect to make solid margin progress in First Student for the year, and we are also encouraged by the results achieved at this stage in the 2015 bid season," O'Toole said.

First Student, the largest private school-bus contractor in the U.S. and Canada (with 49,000 buses), is the biggest contributor to operating profit at FirstGroup (31 percent in fiscal 2014), even though its revenue contribution is 22 percent.

First Transit, one of the biggest managers of public transit agencies in the U.S. and Canada, achieved organic growth on existing contracts in the second half of fiscal 2015, reaching "towards the top of our planning range," FirstGroup said.

"As a result...revenue growth

for the year is expected to be 5.5 percent. We continue to expect margins of around 7 percent for the year and into the medium term in this low capital intensity business."

First Transit, which contributed 20 percent of operating revenue at FirstGroup on 12 percent of revenue in fiscal 2014, operates roughly 12,500 transit buses and maintains more than 35,500 more.

FirstGroup's important rail segment signed two rail franchise agreements in recent weeks. The First Great Western franchise now runs to April 2019, and an extension of the First TransPennine Express contract is expected to run to April 2016.

At the same time, FirstGroup continues to suffer the consequences of losing two major U.K. rail franchises last year. The transfer of First Capital Connect and outright loss of First ScotRail is taking a toll on revenue and cash flow.

However, the overall improving outlook for the company apparently has encouraged investors, which have moved the price of FirstGroup shares higher by double digits since they hit a five-year low at the end of March. Still, the stock is trading at one-quarter of its five-year high, reached in November 2010.

For more information, go to www.firstgroupplc.com

In a 'New York State of Mind?' Take a local bus tour

NEW YORK CITY — In his 1976 song "New York State of Mind," Billy Joel sang about vacationing by taking a bus "on the Hudson River line."

Now, nearly 40 years later, New Yorkers looking to take a trip while staying close to home can take motorcoaches up the Hudson Valley and out to Long Island's Southampton beach, with overnight trips to

the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, the thoroughbred races in Saratoga Springs and to Niagara Falls.

New York State tourism officials are sponsoring the bus getaways this spring and summer as part of the so-called "I Love New York Bus" service, which is designed to boost tourism and the New York economy.

The buses are operated by Southampton-based Hampton Jitney, with pickups and drop-offs in Manhattan at 44th Street and Third Avenue

The service that began with 14 fall and winter outings is intended to add opportunities for tourism in the state while helping the economy and employment in related businesses.

People

WASHINGTON — Suzanne Te Beau Rohde has joined the American Bus Association as vice president of government affairs. She leads the association's legislative, regulatory, policy and lobbying efforts.

Te Beau Rohde succeeds Clyde Hart, who retired after 14 years with the ABA and the motorcoach industry.

Te Beau Rohde has 20 years of experience in senior-level positions in the transportation industry, including her most recent position as special assistant to National Transportation Safety Board member Earl Weener.

She also has served as chief counsel at the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and as vice president of government affairs and affirmative action at the Chicago Transit Authority.

DES PLAINES, Ill. — Guy Vachon has joined Motor Coach Industries as vice president of aftermarket sales. Vachon will be responsible for MCI Service Parts' PSM (regional parts solutions

managers) field representation, and will also oversee the management of large national accounts and the strategic direction of the customer service support team.

At the same time, Jim Stibgen becomes director of customer service and continues to manage the customer service support teams, including the call center at MCI Service Parts in Louisville, Ky.

Prior to joining MCI, Vachon was director of aftermarket sales and service with Morgan Olson, a leading truck body manufacturer. He also was general manager of the Daimler-owned Select-Trucks Center in Chicago, and also held leadership positions with Navistar, Hendrickson and Federal-Mogul.

FARIBAULT, Minn. — Scott Evans has joined ABC Companies as account manager in the company's Southeastern Region. He will work with customers in Kentucky, North and South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia.

A graduate of the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Evans spent 15 years in the automotive industry with Lexus and a major software provider, Reyn-



Guy Vachon

Scott Evans

olds & Reynolds, covering the Southeast.

"We are very pleased to have Scott join our ABC Team," said Brian Pinckney, sales manager of ABC's Southeast Region. "His experience in sales and account management and his commitment to providing excellent customer service and support is a perfect fit with ABC's customer-focused direction."

RICHFIELD, Ohio — The board of National Interstate Corporation has expanded the number of directors in Class II from four to five members and appointed John Cholnoky as the new director.

Prior to retiring in March 2014, Cholnoky served as president of General Reinsurance Corporation, a Stamford, Conn.-based subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway Co. that offers a broad range of auto/motor exposures and coverages.

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