

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

California takes direct aim at rogue coach companies

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The California General Assembly is considering adopting what may be the toughest charter bus regulatory legislation ever proposed in the U.S.

Passage of the bill is being advocated by the California Bus Association (and a host of others) because the association wants to

weed out substandard companies, says CBA lobbyist Josh Pane.

As currently written, Assembly Bill 636 would:

- Permanently revoke the authority of a charter bus company to operate if it is found to be running without the required state Public Utilities Commission permit, or if it knowingly employs a driver who

does not have the required CDL with proper endorsement and medical certificate.

- Permanently prohibit a person who drives for a charter bus company without the required CDL, endorsement and medical certificate from driving a bus of any kind.

- Require an officer of the California Highway Patrol to impound

a bus upon inspection if the charter bus company or its driver are found to be operating without the required documentation, certification or licensure.

The proposed law was prompted by a coach crash in October that killed 10 people, including the bus owner, and injured 40 others.

The subsequent investigation

found that neither the bus nor the driver should have been on the road. The bus had been declared non-operational five months earlier and the driver didn't have a passenger endorsement.

According to the California Bus Association, the operator was one of many "fly-by-night" charter

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Operators stew about flu scare but chug along

Motorcoach operators across the U.S. and Canada are collectively holding their breath, hoping the worldwide flu scare won't produce precipitous cutbacks in group travel.

So far, cancellations generally appear to be modest and localized. A few operators report trips being cancelled by schools and elderly groups. One New York operator reported having \$9,000 worth of school trips halted because of the scare.

Still, in anticipation of a possible worsening situation, operators say they're preparing for the possibility of decreased ridership and lost work.

At the same time, many operators report having stepped up their coach cleaning process, and begun offering alcohol-based hand cleaners on board.

A&A Travel in Houston received four school-related trip cancellations in a single day; the Louisiana schools were to travel to Houston.

"People don't want to come into Houston," says Carol Huff, co-owner of A&A, which operates three coaches. As a border state, Texas has gotten more than its share of flu scare attention.

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Upscale coach operators struggle

By Alex Vande Bunte

The tough economy seems to be hitting operators of executive coaches and limo buses particularly hard.

As corporate and other budgets are slashed and amenities are passed over to save money, executive coach and limo bus operators report being left by the wayside.

Mark Monroe of Country Coach in Warrenton, Va., is among those who admit the economic climate has been affecting customer readiness to indulge.

"People love what I do but everyone is watching their discretionary spending," says Monroe. "Even corporate customers have cut spending."

Rush Merhab of Star Limo in New Mexico, who benefits from



Luxury coach operators seek partnerships to find new business.

small- to medium-size conferences and events in his area, also has noted a slow downturn since the beginning of the year.

As upscale coaches have begun taking a back seat to cheaper forms of travel, the operators of executive and limo coaches have gone in hot pursuit of new ways to

keep their luxury vehicles on the road and their bookings filled.

In some cases, these operators have worked to form new partnerships.

For example, Michael Midgough of Coach Quarters in Columbus, Ohio, has reached out to

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Spot gains mark coach sales slide

For the second consecutive quarter, sales of new motorcoaches in the U.S. and Canada have fallen by more than 20 percent.

National Bus Trader magazine reports there were 372 new coaches sold during the first three months of this year, down more than 29 percent from same-period 2008 sales.

It was the industry's poorest first-quarter performance in five years. In the first three months of

2004, 326 new coaches were sold.

The first-quarter '09 decline followed a 23 percent drop in new coach sales during the final quarter of last year.

New motorcoach sales have declined for four consecutive quarters, when compared to year-earlier results, a firm indication coach builders are once again being jostled by the industry's notorious roller-coaster sales cycle.

Not since the first quarter of

last year have new coach sales posted a year-over-year increase.

In analyzing the sales figures, *National Bus Trader* Editor Larry Plachno noted that the first quarter obviously was influenced by current economic conditions. But beyond that, he said there were other factors that made the quarter unusual.

First, purchases of new coaches by Canadian operators plummeted

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Hurricane group forms to take on evacuation issues

GADSDEN, Ala. — Motorcoach operators from southeastern states have formed an advisory committee to serve as a liaison between the industry and the emergency management divisions of Gulf Coast states.

The committee is a direct outgrowth of the horrible experiences coach operators and their drivers endured late last summer when they responded to hurricane evacuation requests issued by Texas.

During the evacuations organized in the wake of Hurricanes Ike and Gustaf, drivers were treated like second-class citizens and Texas dragged its bureaucratic feet for months before paying for the coaches it requested. (See Oct. 1 and 15, Dec. 1 and Jan. 1 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Operators attending the late-January Southeastern Regional Motorcoach Operators Meeting in Orlando requested that an advisory committee be created.

Since then, motorcoach associations from all southeastern states and individual operators from those states have been recruited to participate in the committee.

The organizing effort was led by Jim Harris, president of the North Carolina Motorcoach

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Seattle Mariners reject shuttle

Local operator vows to try again

SEATTLE — Major League Baseball fans wanting to avoid the traffic around Safeco Field when they head to a Seattle Mariners game this season have to either hike from remote parking lots or grab a slow-moving city bus that can drop them off anywhere from in front of the ballpark to several blocks away.

That's because the ball club refuses to buy into the year-old federal charter bus rule and allow private motorcoach companies to operate a game-day shuttle service.

"They just weren't going to let us operate them," said Gladys Gillis of Starline Luxury Coaches of Seattle, which sought the contract but was rebuffed by the team at the last minute.

Although her proposal was sent to the club a month before the team's April 14 home opener, she said the ball club held off until the day of the first game before sitting down with her to talk about the proposed contract.

She said the team's attorney briefly discussed the contract and then ended the meeting by asking her if she would be willing to withdraw the contract so King County Metro Transit, Seattle's public transit agency, could continue to run the shuttles as it had been doing for years.

"I told them it was something I wasn't about to do," she said.

It was the last she heard from the ball team, which opted, instead, not to have any shuttle service this season and let fans either walk from the parking lots or use Metro's regular daily bus service, which has one route that stops in front of the ball yard and several others with stops several blocks away.

Team spokeswoman Rebecca Hale said the Mariners rejected the contract because it would have cost more than what it had been paying King County Metro in past years, and there were concerns about the private company being able to accommodate people with disabilities.

"It was not a complete contract," she said.

The stalling by the Mariners was similar to last year when the

team refused to negotiate with Starlight until just before the start of the season so King County Metro could seek a last-minute charter rule exemption from the Federal Transit Administration. (See Sept. 15 and Aug. 1 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The FTA granted the request, first allowing the transit agency to provide the service for 60 days and later extending the permit to cover the full baseball season. The decision cited concerns that Mariners fans would be without any service if the transit agency were not given the contract.

The action by the FTA drew objections from the United Motorcoach Association, which filed a federal lawsuit against the federal agency, arguing that the charter bus rule applied because private companies were available to operate the shuttle service. The suit is pending in U.S. District Court.

This year, King County Metro did not make an attempt to provide the shuttle service, leaving the ball club with the option of turning it over to a private company or having none at all. It chose the latter.

"So far it has not been a major

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Kentucky Derby bus shuttle handled by private operator

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Chalk up another major victory for the private bus industry in its drive to convince public transit agencies to abide by the year-old federal charter service rule and allow private operators to run major shuttles that previously had been operated — at great cost to taxpayers — by transits.

More specifically, chalk up a big-time win for Miller Trailways of Louisville and Indianapolis, which has been among the most aggressive operators in the U.S. at fighting to capture large shuttle jobs.

Miller's latest win came early this month when he operated the shuttle for both the Kentucky Derby and the Kentucky Oaks, two of the largest single-day sporting events in the United States.

As reported by the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, Miller's service "cost more and, in some cases, meant riding an older school bus, but the switch to a private bus company for the Derby shuttle avoided major problems."

That was high praise from a newspaper that had editorialized

against allowing Miller to wrest the shuttle away from the Transit Authority of River City, which had operated the Derby shuttle, using federal subsidies, for decades.

"This is not only a victory for Miller Trailways and all non-publicly subsidized operators but a larger victory for the taxpayer," said Ken Presley, vice president of industry relations at the United Motorcoach Association.

"When Congress is looking for ways to reduce the federal budget, they need look no further than local private-sector operators to reduce the burden on the taxpayer to provide safe, economical and efficient passenger service," said Presley.

Miller told the *Courier-Journal* the Derby shuttle went about as he anticipated. "We had some delays because of traffic and pedestrians but it went pretty well," he told the newspaper,

For the Derby, Miller's shuttles ran from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. He used 22 motorcoaches on a downtown shuttle, 17 school buses on runs to the parking lots at

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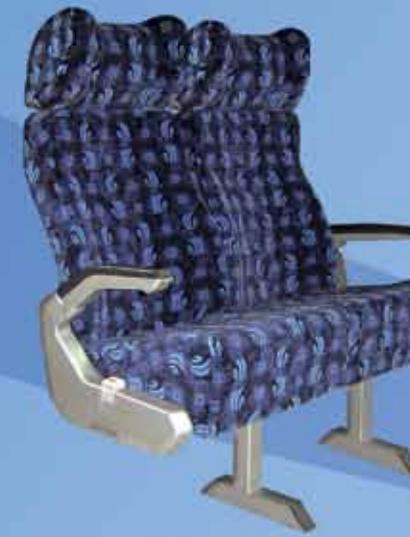
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THE DOCKET

Safety board cites driver, federal agency in crash

WASHINGTON — The National Transportation Safety Board has determined that a particularly ugly motorcoach crash near Mexican Hat, Utah, early last year was probably caused because the driver was overly fatigued and as a result wasn't aware he was barreling down a mountain grade with a curve at the end of it.

Nine passengers were fatally injured and 43 passengers, plus the driver, were injured when the coach hit a guardrail, went off the road and rolled completely over, coming to rest on its wheels.

Fifty-one of the 53 people in the bus were ejected when the roof of the coach was sheared off during the roll over.

In an unusual move, the NTSB voted unanimously to place partial blame on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, saying the agency's failure to implement motorcoach safety standards — which the NTSB recommended a decade ago — was a contributing factor to the crash's severity.

"I am extremely disappointed, watching NHTSA crawl toward

the standard we have asked them to make," said acting NTSB Chairman Mark Rosenker.

The board investigates accidents and makes safety recommendations. The traffic safety administration develops and sets regulations.

NHTSA spokesman Rae Tyson declined to comment on the board's action, but said the agency was "working very hard" on new safety standards for motorcoaches. He cited crash tests the agency began conducting in December 2007.

In all, the NTSB made eight safety recommendations to federal and state agencies, trade associations and the motorcoach operator, Busco Inc., doing business as Arrow Stage Lines of Omaha, Neb.

One recommendation is to develop and implement criteria, based on traffic patterns, passenger volume and bus types, that can be used to assess the risks of rural travel by large buses.

Because the crash occurred in a remote, mountainous area of Utah, it took an hour before the first emergency crew arrived. The near-

USDOT to probe motorcoach safety

WASHINGTON — Reacting to a string of accidents, as well as outside criticism, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood has ordered his department to conduct a comprehensive review of commercial bus safety.

The review, which will involve three USDOT agencies, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Highway Administration, is scheduled to be completed by August.

The announcement of the review came just days after the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration was blasted by the National Transportation Safety Board for failing to implement recommendations that could lead to new safety equipment on buses, including passenger restraints and stronger roofs and windows. (See accompanying article.)

est hospital with a trauma unit was 190 miles away in Flagstaff, Ariz.

The sequence of events laid out by NTSB investigators shows circumstances combined to worsen the accident.

The bus was part of a charter of

The safety board has prodded the highway traffic safety administration to enact its suggestions for 10 years.

The criticism of NHTSA came at a safety board hearing conducted to make public the results of the NTSB investigation of a bus crash near Mexican Hat, Utah, in January 2008 that killed nine people and injured 43.

Two years earlier, the NTSB aimed its guns at the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, another DOT agency, saying it had failed to identify dangerous motorcoach operators and get them off the road.

The catalyst for the criticism in 2007 was the horrible bus fire near Wilmer, Texas, in September 2005 that killed 23 nursing home residents.

The NTSB hearing conducted in the wake of that tragedy was punctuated time and time again

17 motorcoaches carrying 800 people. Heavy snow forced the closure of a high mountain pass, requiring the buses to take a longer route back to Phoenix through a remote area of Utah.

The driver of the bus that

with stinging criticism of the FMCSA by safety board members.

"I'm really pleased that somebody over there is finally looking at motorcoach safety," Jackie Gillan, vice president of the Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, told a Washington newspaper. "The secretary needs to look at this mode of transportation and get the agency moving."

Gillan asserted that LaHood's review should not be viewed as a substitute for congressional action on motorcoach safety.

"Legislation will ensure at the end of the day all these things are done," she said.

According to the latest government data, 51 people died in commercial motorcoach crashes in 2007, an increase from 39 in 2006. Figures for 2008 aren't yet available. Since 2000, at least 401 people have died in motorcoach accidents.

crashed suffered from sleep apnea and had trouble using a device to regulate his breathing while sleeping in the days before the accident. He also had head congestion and may have been suffering from altitude sickness.

In the darkness and cloudy conditions, and perhaps because of fatigue, the driver took a wrong turn and was on a road that wasn't part of the intended route when the crash occurred.

A passerby drove eight miles to Mexican Hat, the nearest town, to call 911 on a telephone. Medical helicopters weren't able to respond to the accident. Crash victims used their cell phones to provide illumination at the pitch-black crash site but couldn't use the phones to make calls because of the remote location.

In 1999, after another tragic bus crash, the NTSB recommended that safety standards for motorcoach roofs be strengthened, that buses have easy-to-open windows that don't shatter, and that steps be taken, including possibly requiring seatbelts, to prevent passengers from being ejected in rollovers.

Several board members expressed frustration those recommendations have not been implemented — 10 years later.

NHTSA has "left motorcoaches back in the '60s and '70s," said Rosenker. "It's time now. It's not like the technology doesn't exist."

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Party switch by Specter: Will it aid card check bill?

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter's decision to bolt the Republican party — and become a Democrat — has raised fears his move could bolster chances of the Senate passing the Employee Free Choice Act.

However, Specter's support for the bill isn't seen as being automatic.

The oft-times independent-minded Specter said in a Senate speech in March he would vote against the bill that would make it easier for unions to organize workplaces. (See April 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.) He repeated his vow after his switch announcement.

However, some political ob-

Measure seeks to make safety gear affordable

WASHINGTON — The Commercial Motor Vehicle Advanced Safety Technology Tax Act has been reintroduced by Reps. Mike Thompson, D-Calif., and Geoff Davis, R-Ky.

The bill would amend the Internal Revenue Code to provide income tax credits to help accelerate the adoption of advanced safety systems for over-the-road buses and trucks, plus school and transit buses. (See May 15, 2008 and Nov. 1, 2007 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

"Reintroducing this bill (H.R. 2024) is the right thing to do. It is about encouraging investment in safety through the purchase and installation of technologies on trucks and buses that have been tested and proven to work," said Stephen F. Campbell, executive director of the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance.

"It will reduce the deaths occurring from the most prevalent truck and bus crash types on our highways, which have been hovering around 5,000 per year for the last decade," Campbell said.

The safety technology included in the bill is: brake stroke monitoring systems; vehicle stability systems; lane departure warning systems, and collision warning systems.

The legislation encompasses both original equipment and after-market installation of the safety systems. It also would:

- Create a tax credit for fleet owners valued at 50 percent of the retail cost of the system, with a maximum of \$1,500 per technology
- Allow fleets to purchase multiple technologies, but limit the total amount of credit permissible to \$3,500 per vehicle

servers think it will be harder for him to sustain his opposition to the bill as a Democrat.

Specter was one of three GOP votes that helped pass President Obama's \$787 billion economic stimulus act. That vote outraged many Republicans in Specter's home state of Pennsylvania.

Specter said he switched parties because the GOP had grown too conservative and because he stood little chance of winning the Republican primary for Senate because of his vote for the Obama stimulus bill.

Specter plans to run for reelection in 2010 as a Democrat.

With the expected seating in the Senate of Al Franken, whose election victory as a Democrat in Minnesota is being challenged in court by the incumbent Republican Norm Coleman, Specter's switch gives Democrats the 60 votes needed to break a GOP filibuster and advance legislation.

However, Specter said he would not automatically side with the Democrats.

"My change in party affiliation does not mean I will be a party-line voter any more for the Democrats than I have been for the Republicans," he said. "I will not be an automatic 60th vote for cloture."

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Senate bills target highway leases

WASHINGTON — A bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate last month that would peel back the tax benefits private companies get from leasing public highways, making those privatization deals less attractive to investors.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., chairman of the Senate Finance Committee's panel that oversees infrastructure issues, and Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, the finance committee's top-ranking Republican, co-sponsored the bill.

The Bingaman-Grassley measure would stretch out the depreciation and amortization periods for highway investments.

Bingaman introduced a second bill that would deduct privatized highway miles from a state's mileage total used to calculate federal aid for roads and bridges, a move that would cut into a state's share of federal highway money.

In introducing the bills, Bingaman said states "should have some latitude to determine how to operate their own highways, [but] that doesn't mean that the federal taxpayer should subsidize selling off these highways."

Bingaman said his subcommittee "uncovered... [that] the federal

government — and taxpayers in all states — now subsidize these deals through exceedingly generous tax provisions."

A spokesman for Bingaman said the goal is to make sure that taxpayers are treated fairly when it comes to the privatization of highways.

Federal tax law now allows companies that lease highways to depreciate the value of the lease over 15 years, while the actual length of highway leases and proposals tend to be much longer. Indiana, for example, has leased its toll road for 75 years.

Also, concessionaires can amortize, or recover the costs, for the intangible benefit of the right to collect tolls over 15 years, while receiving that benefit over the full length of the lease.

"We're subsidizing these transactions in a way that's just not fair," added the Bingaman spokesman.

The tax bill would change the tax code to allow companies leasing a highway or a bridge or other piece of infrastructure to depreciate the cost over 45 years, the estimated useful life of highways.

The bill also would push out the amortization period to 15 years

or the length of the lease, whichever is longer.

The bill "takes the thumb off the scales so that these deals will either go or not go on their own merits but not because of tax advantages," said Tim Lynch, a senior vice president of American Trucking Associations.

Privatizing highways is a trend that began in 2004 with Chicago's 99-year lease of its Skyway for \$1.8 billion to a Spanish-Australian conglomerate headed by the Macquarie Infrastructure Group.

The same conglomerate, which includes Spanish bank Cintra, paid \$3.8 billion for its 75-year lease of the Indiana Toll Road.

Lynch and other critics argue that those deals — and others proposed or discussed in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Massachusetts — are helped greatly by the tax provisions allowing quick repayment of costs.

"These are supposed to be privatized deals where the private sector can do something better than the public sector, but if you are skewing the deals because of tax benefits then maybe they're not such great deals after all," he said.

Homeland Security agency revises worker I-9 form

WASHINGTON — The Citizenship and Immigration Services unit of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has revamped its Form I-9, which employers must complete for all newly hired employees.

The revised form, which was supposed to become effective in January, took effect last month. Previous versions of the form may no longer be used.

The new I-9 shows a revision date of "02/02/09" and an expiration date of "06/30/09." The revision date can be found in the lower right-hand corner of the form.

The expiration date does not necessarily mean it will be revised again before it expires. Certain forms must carry an expiration date to comply with requirements from the Office of Management and Budget, and the expiration date imposed by the OMB could be extended without further revision to the form.

The basic purpose of the I-9 is to determine the eligibility of individuals to work legally in the United States. All employers must complete and retain a Form I-9 for

each individual they hire for employment in the U.S. This includes both citizens and noncitizens.

Using the form, the employer must examine the employment eligibility and identity document(s) an employee presents to determine whether the document(s) reasonably appear to be genuine and relate to the individual. Information from the documents is recorded on the form. A list of acceptable documents can be found on the last page of the form.

One of the most significant changes to the form is that expired documents are no longer acceptable. The previous I-9 allowed employers to accept expired U.S. passports, as well as expired identification documents from the list on the form.

Employers do not need to replace previously completed I-9s with the new version.

However, the older versions of the I-9 can no longer be used. When an employee must be reverified because employment authorization has expired, employers must use the revised Form I-9 with its list of acceptable documents.

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Federal estate tax up in the air

Eight years ago, President George Bush signed into law the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act, a law that included several federal tax reforms, including:

1. Increasing the amount of standardized deductions for married couples
2. Increasing the amount of the child credit and the number of families who qualify for it
3. Lowering tax rates
4. Increasing the annual amount of contributions to IRAs and 401ks
5. Increasing the amount of contributions to education savings accounts
6. Making the tax credit for adoption permanent

The act also changed the laws concerning federal estate taxes.

Under the Bush tax cuts, both the estate tax rate and exemption amount were lowered in annual incremental amounts, with the estate tax being completely eliminated by 2010.

Prior to the 2001 law, estates valued at \$675,000 or less were not subject to — or were exempt from — the federal estate tax. Any amount over \$675,000 was taxed at a maximum rate of 55 percent.

For example, if an estate in 2001 was valued at \$1 million, the first \$675,000 of the estate would not be subject to the estate tax. However, the amount over the exemption amount, or \$325,000, would be taxed.

Under the 2001 tax law, however, the amount of the estate sheltered from estate taxes was raised initially from \$675,000 to \$1 million and the maximum rate of estate taxes was reduced from 55

percent to a flat rate of 50 percent.

The amount of the exemption increased and the rate of taxes decreased each year between 2002 until 2010. Here are the scheduled changes by year, exemption amount and tax rate (respectively):

2002, \$1 million, 50 percent
2003, \$1 million, 49 percent
2004, \$1.5 million, 48 percent
2005, \$1.5 million, 47 percent
2006, \$2 million, 46 percent
2007, \$2 million, 45 percent
2008, \$2 million, 45 percent
2009, \$3.5 million, 45 percent
2010, Estate tax eliminated

Sunset provision

For the federal estate tax to remain abolished after 2010, Congress must act to make the change permanent. Otherwise, the exemption amount and estate tax rate will return to pre-2002 levels in 2011: the first \$1 million of the estate will be exempt from federal estate taxes and any amount over \$1 million will be taxed at 55 percent.

Given the current state of the economy, it is perhaps unlikely that the estate tax will be allowed to die.

In January, The Wall Street Journal reported that the Democrat-controlled Congress and President Obama had different plans for the estate tax. Both Congress and President Obama plan to take action to reverse some of President Bush's tax cuts, including preventing the estate tax from disappearing in 2010.

During his campaign, President Obama said he was in favor of making the 2009 estate tax exemption and rate levels permanent (\$3.5 million exemption; 45 per-

cent tax rate). However, Congress is in favor of returning the tax to pre-2002 levels.

Does it matter?

The belief that estate taxes only affect the rich is not true. It does not take a very wealthy person to reach the \$1 million dollar exemption. For example, small business owners and family farms likely will have to pay estate taxes to pass on their legacies to their loved ones — legacies that may have taken an entire generation to build.

And these are families who already are suffering in the struggling economy to maintain their livelihoods.

Estate taxes are a tax on death. They punish those who worked hard and want to pass on their property to not only their families, but also to charities and other worthy organizations. Estate taxes discourage people from saving and starting small businesses.

While there will be a federal estate tax, when people already are stretched financially and their investments have lost great value, does it make sense for the federal government to further penalize them with a tax at their death?

If Congress and President Obama lower the exemption rate to \$1 million, more families will face the possibility of federal estate taxes. An experienced estate planning attorney can help families — with all levels of assets — protect their legacies.

Article from G. Martin Johnson Ltd. For more information, go to <http://www.gmartinjohnson.com>.

Obama officials back push for cap-and-trade proposal

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration and the Democrat-controlled Congress appear to be in lock step on the need for far-reaching environmental legislation designed to reduce greenhouse gases and expand alternative energy sources.

While most of the interest generated by the legislation has focused on its impact on giant power plants and consumer electric bills, the ground transportation industry is likely to be swept up — in a major way — in its reach.

That's because vehicles are considered a major contributor to global warming pollution. For example, more than 38 percent of the carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in California come from burning diesel in trucks and buses and gasoline in cars, according to state officials.

Last month, cabinet-level officials from the Obama administration went before Congress and rejected claims that the carbon emissions bill would result in massive U.S. job losses and large increases in fuel bills.

"The 'no, we can't' crowd will spin out doomsday scenarios about runaway costs," said U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson. "But EPA's available economic modeling indicates that the investment Americans would make to implement the cap-and-trade program of the American Clean Energy and Security Act would be modest compared to the benefits that science and plain common sense tell us a comprehensive energy and climate policy will deliver."

The proposed clean energy law calls for a host of energy independence and greenhouse gases reduc-

tion initiatives, including a cap-and-trade program.

"Aggressive action to reduce the impacts of climate change is needed, and the U.S. must be a leader in the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood told a House committee.

But several members of the House panel, most of them Republicans, predicted a cap-and-trade program would be costly not only for business, but for consumers as well.

"Cap-and-trade, cap-and-tax will simply kick American families when they are down," said Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich.

"This is the largest assault on democracy and freedom in this country that I've ever experienced," said Rep. John Shimkus, R-Ill. "I've lived through some tough times in Congress — impeachment, two wars, terrorist attacks — I fear this more than all of the above activities that have happened."

The 640-page draft legislation seeks to lower carbon dioxide emissions to 20 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and more than 80 percent by 2050, through a cap-and-trade system.

Under the program, carbon emitters would receive tradable federal permits called "allowances" for each ton of pollution emitted into the atmosphere.

Entities that emit fewer than 25,000 tons per year of carbon dioxide equivalent would not be considered large enough emitters to be covered by the program.

The USEPA has estimated that the cost of the allowances would range from \$13 to \$17 per metric ton CO2 equivalent in 2015, and from \$17 to \$22 in 2020.

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Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

ISSUE NO. 146

A PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION

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Thinking of diversifying your fleet? Look before leaping

By Dave Millhouser

Frolicking along Highway 401 west of Montreal, a peek at the rearview mirror revealed a vehicle gaining on me. We GENUINE bus drivers have a low tolerance for such things, so I stood on the throttle.

No joy; minutes later this jewel took to the passing lane and blasted by me. The humiliation was compounded by the fact it was a trolley bus.

It turns out that, in response to customer interest, a creative Canadian operator was rebuilding older coaches as trolley buses. They were a hit as convention shuttles, and still worked fine for airport transfers.

One hallmark of tough times is that good business people search for alternative sources of revenue. Typically they look for something that fits with what is already working for them.

A number of coach operators have longingly looked at limousines, sedans and small, midsize and trolley buses. At the same time, staring back at them, are limousine companies, ogling motorcoaches and trolleys as a way to supplement their stagnant, or shrinking, income.

In this transportation version of a singles bar, each might stumble into a match made in heaven — or disaster. Like the old song: "I cocked an eye at her, she cocked an eye at me... and there we were... cockeyed as

could be."

Everyone who successfully offers passenger transportation for hire has learned to buy and maintain vehicles, hire and train drivers, and sell their service. Too often, they stare across the bar, and assume that those skills are compatible with other transportation services. It's the "grass is greener syndrome."

Limo operators often migrate towards coaches by way of party buses and trolleys. Their customers ask for those services for weddings, bachelor parties and other events. And the size of the vehicles in their fleet begins scooching upward on them. At the same time, they inch past various regulatory milestones, such as drug testing and CDLs, often without knowing.

In many jurisdictions, limo and cab operators can treat their drivers as independent contractors, which saves money and bother. This all evaporates when the vehicle reaches a certain size and method of dispatch. Often no one raises a flag until the IRS or other government agencies become involved.

Years ago a Maryland limo operator thought he'd found a loophole, and treated his coach drivers as contractors. When the drivers got surprise 1099s, there was nearly armed insurrection, and the company no longer exists.

The HUGE revenues that limo folks think coaches earn shrinks dramatically the first time a bus fails far from home. Limos,

trolleys and party buses tend to sleep in their own bed at night, and a distant breakdown introduces a new and varied world of hurt.

Coach operators lust after the huge margins that limos, party buses and trolleys seem to command, without understanding that, like buses, those businesses also have dark sides.

The seasonal cycle that makes coach operators nervous is more intense in smaller vehicles. The economic cycle is pronounced in those types of businesses because most folks don't NEED them. And the customers are often very demanding and sometimes alcohol is involved.

Limousines, trolley buses and small and midsize buses don't hold their value as well as motorcoaches, which means at least two things. If you're in that business, you need to get back your investment quicker. If you leap into the fray, and things don't go well, you are going to take a pounding when you sell the equipment.

Maintenance is different. Motorcoach builders normally take responsibility for support and warranty for all but a few components.

Smaller vehicles are handled differently. You'll need to deal separately with a number of component manufacturers on the same unit. Chassis, body, HVAC and entertainment systems typically are handled by their own builders, not the assembler. If you're

lucky, a good dealer can make things simple, but each supplier tends to think it was the other guy's (or YOUR) fault.

Opportunities do exist, but before leaping look at a couple of things.

Is there a market for what you're going to try? It's great to have clientele already lined up to cover most of the risk. How stable is the need you're going to try and fill? (You don't want to gear up for one large client, and then find them on hard times.)

What is the regulatory environment in the area you are serving? Coach regulations are generally more straightforward than limousine, and less varied across jurisdictions. Know the rules going in; education is expensive when taught by tax and regulatory people.

Coaches and limos are two different businesses, and need to be operated that way.

It's one thing to leap onto an opportunity, but it can be painful when you think you're landing on grass, and it turns out to be green concrete.

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Navistar continues effort to change emissions rules

WARRENVILLE, Ill. — Despite criticism from competitors and a stand-pat position by federal regulators, Navistar Inc. continues to press for an easing of 2010 federal diesel engine emissions rules.

Top Navistar executives say the company is pursuing its own solution to meeting 2010 emissions standards because it doesn't believe the fuel savings claimed by competitors will justify the higher costs and more complicated systems associated with their new engines.

James Hebe, Navistar's senior vice president for North American sales, has urged trucking executives to support the company's call to allow a gradual phase-in of the standards, warning that the current economic downturn could lead to at least one more poor year for truck sales and possibly two.

Hebe, in a meeting with top officials from American Trucking Associations, said Navistar's 2010 engines will be ready on time, but the company was continuing its drive to ease the rules because the recession, coupled with the higher costs, "will drive a 'no-buy' decision by many fleets."

Navistar — which will use ex-

haust gas recirculation in its new models — has proposed that the Environmental Protection Agency allow fleets to buy either 2007-compliant engines or 2010 models, to both provide costs savings during the recession and give fleets more time to test the new technologies.

All other U.S. diesel engine makers will use selective catalytic reduction to meet the 2010 standards.

Navistar's new models will exceed the new emissions standards, but the company will use clean-air credits it has earned in past years from EPA to achieve 2010 compliance. Hebe said the company's EGR engines will be fully compliant by 2012, when Navistar expects to run out of credits.

Hebe predicted the 2010 SCR and EGR engines both will be between \$8,000 and \$10,000 more expensive than 2007 models, but Navistar believes its engines will be cheaper to maintain and operate.

SCR engines require operators to add diesel exhaust fluid (urea) to clean up engine exhaust, adding to the system's costs. However, the other engine makers have said

Cummins confident of emissions gear

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Executives with Cummins Inc. say they're confident the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will approve the company's use of copper zeolite in engines designed to meet 2010 emission rules, removing a potential roadblock for the new models.

"We've been working fully and openly with EPA" on plans to use copper zeolite as a catalyst, said James Kelly, president of Cummins' engine business, "and we believe it will be approved."

fleets will gain fuel efficiency from the new models.

The last two times EPA tightened emission standards — in 2002 and 2006 — fleets went on buying sprees in the model year before the rules changed, actions dubbed "pre-buys." With the sagging economy, analysts now predict there won't be a pre-buy in '09.

Navistar's competitors have refused to join the call for relaxing implementation of the 2010 standards.

A coalition of environmental interest groups also has asked EPA not to modify the timeline.

"Delay of these standards would both set back vital human health protections and reward manufacturers who failed to comply

He added that there was "no danger" the company would be forced to use another material.

Cummins plans to use copper zeolite to help break down harmful exhaust gases into nitrogen and water in its 2010 engines with selective catalytic reduction technology. Most competitors are using iron zeolite.

EPA earlier raised a flag about copper zeolite, saying it might produce dioxin, a cancer-causing poison (see Feb. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*).

with the deadlines," the groups wrote in a letter to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson. Signers included the American Lung Association and the American Public Health Association.

In mid-January, a top U.S. Environmental Protection Agency official said his agency had "absolutely no intention" of granting the request by Navistar for a two-year delay in implementing 2010 federal diesel emission standards.

"Changing the timeline at this point would not only be bad for the environment and unfair for companies that have invested millions of dollars to do the right thing in meeting the environmental standards, but is something that, based on the input and discussions that I have had,

"We've shared all of our data with the EPA, and there is no issue of toxicity," said Kelly, adding that Cummins' engines might not receive formal EPA approval until Nov. 1.

Cummins, which had decided earlier not to use SCR to meet the 2010 rules, changed direction last year (see Sept. 15, 2008 *Bus & Motorcoach News*) after its work on copper zeolite showed a marked improvement in engine performance and fuel efficiency, according to Kelly

cannot be justified," said Margo Oge, director of EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality.

Hebe took issue with claims by critics that Navistar was looking for a delay because it isn't ready for the new rules.

"We are the 'greenest' truck maker in North America today, without a doubt," Hebe said, and the emission credits the manufacturer will use are proof of its compliance.

"EPA created the use of banking credits, they encourage it" as an incentive to original equipment manufacturers to exceed emission standards, Hebe said, and Navistar will only be allowed to use about 80 to 85 percent of its credits for the 2010 engines.

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2010 engines = more fault codes

Beginning next year, motorcoach technicians will have to deal with a significant increase in possible engine fault codes because of the onboard diagnostics systems that will come with 2010 and later model engines.

In the past, mechanics essentially had two fault codes they could work with on a sensor. Now, with onboard diagnostics, that same sensor has five codes.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulations require 2010 and later model-year engines to be bundled with diagnostics that use an array of sensors to monitor the new emissions-control systems (see April 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*).

If a coach's emissions of nitrogen oxides or particulate matter exceed certain thresholds, the onboard diagnostics system must alert the driver via a dashboard signal.

The additional fault codes appear because the onboard diagnostics systems monitor emissions performance, a measurement that was not required before the EPA's 2010 mandate.

The upside for technicians is that no new equipment is required to read and interpret the new fault

codes when an emissions level gets out of whack.

In other words, the technician's job hasn't changed pre-onboard diagnostics and post-onboard diagnostics. He or she uses the same voltmeter, the same troubleshooting guide and the same laptop computer to process fault codes.

Technicians working at engine manufacturer distributors and dealerships, however, will need more training to deal with the additional complexities of the onboard diagnostics systems.

For example, Detroit Diesel, which has about 22,000 technicians at its outlets, has set up a web-based training module that it will require all of its technicians to complete.

Besides the web module, one technician from each Detroit Diesel service facility will be required to attend a second level of training.

Starting in 2010, Detroit Diesel engines will only be available in Setra motorcoaches.

Navistar Inc., maker of IC buses and coaches, also is leaning on software to help train field technicians. For 2010, it will have two web-based training programs. One will cover the changes in the 2010 engine, and the second will cover

changes in diagnostics.

While technicians will receive additional training to familiarize them with onboard diagnostics, they will still use the same hardware and software the company already uses to process fault codes.

Navistar is the only engine maker in the North American market that is not using selective catalytic reduction to meet EPA's 2010 emission cuts. However, the company still must comply with the onboard diagnostics' mandate.

The coach industry's other two 2010 engine suppliers, Cummins and Volvo, will be using selective catalytic reduction for their power plants and, of course, must have the onboard diagnostics.

Automobiles have used onboard diagnostic systems since the mid-1990s. Heavy-duty diesel engines will use these systems for the first time in 2010.

As a result, EPA has decided on a gradual phase-in of the diagnostics' mandate. For example, only one engine family per manufacturer will have to use onboard diagnostics in 2010.

By 2019, all engine families from all manufacturers will have to use onboard diagnostics systems.

Pilot Travel Centers plans diesel exhaust fluid rollout

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — Pilot Travel Centers plans to sell bulk quantities of diesel exhaust fluid at about one-third of its truck stops and have packaged quantities available at its remaining stations under a plan announced by the company.

Diesel exhaust fluid will be required for all 2010 diesel engines that use selective catalytic reduction systems to reduce Nox emissions in the exhaust system. The fluid often is called just urea, which is a component in the fluid.

Pilot will roll out 25 bulk dispensing units per quarter, starting in the third quarter of this year, and continuing through the second quarter of next year.

Ultimately, about 100 of Pilot's locations will have bulk dispensing capabilities at the fuel islands where it will be most convenient. All 328 truck stops will have the packaged quantities available.

"Many of our customers will be purchasing SCR-equipped (vehicles) in 2010, so as they began coming to us to learn more about SCR and DEF, we did a lot of investigating," said Patrick Deptula,

director of design and construction for Pilot. "By working with Detroit Diesel and Daimler Trucks North America ... we learned even more about the benefits of those systems."

"We will continually review our rollout plan for bulk dispensing locations to ensure we are meeting the needs of our customers every step of the way," said Deptula. "This includes having convenient pay-at-the-pump transactions that can be simply completed while the driver is also filling up with diesel fuel. Our goal in the process is to make everything as seamless as possible for our customers."

Getting smart on urea

The Oil Price Information Service is conducting a course on "Successful Urea/Diesel Exhaust Fluid Strategies for Fleets & Truckstops" on May 15 at the Loews Vanderbilt Hotel in Nashville, Tenn.

The course will give information. For more info, go to www.opis-net.com/defstrategies/register.html.



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Flu scare

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"Of course, it really helped when the vice president went on TV and said he wouldn't get on an airplane for anything. That was really cool," said Huff sarcastically.

Jim Galusha, CEO of Silverado Stages in San Luis Obispo, Calif., said his company hadn't yet been directly affected by the flu scare "but we expect to have some impact."

Like other operators, Galusha is following news reports carefully, noting there had been confirmed cases of the H1N1 flu south of his Santa Barbara terminal and some school shutdowns.

"We have at our level instituted a disinfectant campaign," says Galusha, including thorough cleansing on a daily basis and providing alcohol-based hand cleaners on Silverado's 70-bus fleet.

"We are just beginning our grad night season for schools. The majority of them take overnight trips. If, and it's a big if, if it spreads, a lot of the schools may rethink their activities. That would have a major impact.

"We are very disappointed about the statements from our vice president," says Galusha. "It's the

biggest news item out there; we have to respond to the conditions in the market place."

B&G Transportation in Hobbs, N.M., also is striving to keep its equipment extra clean and it hasn't seen cancellations either, said President Mike Whitehead. About 75 percent of the company's business is schools, with 36 school buses, seven motorcoaches and two activity buses.

In Brooklyn, A Silhouette Tours & Travel President Antoine Legrant reported no cancellations: "But it could happen at any moment."

Canada and the New York area were hit particularly hard by a plunge in travel after the SARS scare in 2003, so there is sensitivity to the possibility of another drop.

The sales department at Grand Island Transit Corp.'s Grand Tours in Lockport, N.Y., reports getting concerned calls from customers and had a senior trip to Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel cancelled.

"In May, we have several student trips. We've had a lot of people thinking ahead, wondering what they should do. I just hope and pray they don't go that way, canceling buses. It was so hard recovering from 9/11 and SARS," said a Grand Tours sales representative who

asked not to be identified.

Border violence already had limited travel into Mexico, so the current flu scare has had a limited impact — so far, says Scott Duncan, general manager of the All Aboard America! terminal in Mesa, Ariz.

"We're keeping an eye out but we haven't seen anything yet," said Duncan. The company also has terminals in Texas and New Mexico.

"It's just a matter of time, obviously, but we're not at this time noticing an impact," said Darci Place, general manager of Black Diamond Limousine & Transportation in Mesa. The company has a lot of end-of-year school trips to California scheduled and, so far, none have been cancelled.

A spokesman for Greyhound Lines, whose Americanos subsidiary makes a dozen round trips daily between Dallas and Mexico, said it was among those operators who have increased sanitizing efforts.

"We use alcohol-based products, ... wiping everything inside the bus because we want to make sure when people get off the bus, and the next group of passengers do get on, they can feel assured they have nothing to worry about," said the spokesperson.

Hurricane committee

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Association and owner of Cardinal Coach in Warsaw, N.C.

The North Carolina association administers the Southeastern Regional Motorcoach Operators Meeting, which this year was held in conjunction with UMA Motorcoach Expo.

Now that the committee has been created it has been charged with addressing issues of driver treatment, hours of service, staging and payment. The committee is called the Southeastern Regional Emergency Evacuation Advisory Committee and it met for the first time by conference call late last month.

Jimmy Kelton of Kelton Tours in Gadsden, was appointed chairman, and Bill Tilton of Southern Transportation in Jacksons Gap, Ala., and Ray Land of Fabulous Coach Lines in Branford, Fla., were appointed vice chairmen.

Committee members identified four areas of concentration and as-

signed members to subcommittees to formulate a plan to address each issue. The four areas are: driver treatment, communications, contracts and representation.

Follow-up subcommittee conference calls and meetings are planned.

A meeting is scheduled for June 8 in Raleigh, N.C., for the committee to complete plans to meet with appropriate individuals in each of the Gulf States and at the federal level to demonstrate that motorcoach operators should be part of the hurricane (or other emergency) evacuation planning process.

In creating the advisory committee, operators hope to show they can make a positive difference in the process and help to improve conditions, expectations and communications.

Here are the members of the Southeastern Regional Emergency Evacuation Advisory Committee:

Alabama: Kelton and Tilton

Florida: Land

Georgia: Jimmy Cantrell of

Daniel's Charters & Tours in Gainesville

North Carolina: Stretch Carpenter of Carolina Charters of Vale (N.C.); Lee Helms of Trolley's Inc. in Charlotte

South Carolina: Bobby Clemmer of Lancaster Trailways of the Carolinas in Lancaster; Pinckney Spencer of Atchison Transportation Services in Spartanburg

South Central states (Miss., La., Texas and Ark.): Raja Chaudhry of Executive Coach Inc. in Irving, Texas; Greg Page of Corinth Charters and Tours in Corinth, Miss.; Jim Pitstick of Tri-City Charter of Bossier City, La.

Tennessee: Cecil Morgan of C & A Charters in Cleveland

Virginia: Morgan Brown of Magic Carpet Tours Bus Service in Richmond; Warren Newton of Newton Bus Service in Gloucester; Harris is an ex-officio member.

To communicate with the committee, call a member or Linda Morris at (800) 376-1660, or e-mail info@ncmotorcoach.org.

California crackdown

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

bus companies in the state that run in disregard of licensing and other legal requirements, posing a threat to public safety.

Last year, the California Public Utilities Commission and partner agencies issued 36 misdemeanor warnings, during the course of

only 10 investigations, to charter bus companies for operating without a valid permit.

"Thus, AB 636 introduces a 'one-strike' approach for the charter bus industry in order to protect passengers and other drivers from these dangerous rogue operators," said assembly member Dave Jones of Sacramento, who introduced the legislation.

Jones and fellow Democratic Assemblyman Ted Lieu of Torrance say today's penalties aren't enough to deter some motorcoach companies that put profits ahead of passenger safety. Jones' bill would give bus companies no second chance if they knowingly use improperly licensed drivers or buses.

The bill has no opposition and passage seems certain.

Upscale Operators

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

many more corporations in his area to keep his business steady. "We've been working with large companies to park (their) planes and go with the buses," said Middaugh. "A quote for an executive coach always beats a quote for a personal jet."

In New Mexico, Merhab has worked to boost awareness of his services through the Albuquerque and Santa Fe convention and visitor bureaus, as well as getting involved with more affordable destinations, allowing him to offer greater value for his conference traffic. This has helped him sustain his business on par with previous years.

The keystone to keeping the executive coach and limo bus business from falling apart in this economy seems to be to broaden consumer awareness of the operators, their vehicles and their capabilities.

For instance, a partnership with 11 nearby churches has allowed Middaugh to book his coaches for funeral processions, in lieu of a string of cars.

Kevin Wall of Corporate Mo-

torcoach Service in Afton, Minn., has been marketing his coaches as portable offices.

"Transportation can be used as a tool for your business," Wall tells his clients.

He talks of a group that was able to identify and solve an engineering problem while in transit to a meeting where a brainstorming session was scheduled to consider the issue. "There needs to be a new attitude and a new marketing approach to keep customers aware of how cost effective chartering can be," said Wall.

Monroe is seeking to reach out to another very important group: Other motorcoach operators.

He's asking coach companies to remember their local struggling executive coach provider if and when they come across potential customers looking for that type of service.

In the view of Monroe and others, the current economy demands that all operators use their imagination to foster new business through expanded partnerships and new uses for their fleets.

Vande Bunte is eCommerce Coordinator at BusRates.com. Contact him at alex.vandebunte@busrates.com.

Coach sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

more than 41 percent.

Second, sales of coach conversion shells fell a dramatic 78 percent as the luxury RV market continued gasping for air. Only 14 conversion shells were sold during the quarter, the worst performance since Plachno began keeping figures on a quarterly basis.

Finally, not all was dismal.

Plachno pointed out that each of the coach manufacturers he tracks had at least one model that posted a sales increase from the first quarter of 2008. In all, six different models showed a gain.

Also, imported coaches — Van Hool, Setra and Temsa — represented more than 19 percent of total first-quarter sales, compared to under 16 percent for the first quarter of last year.

Plachno's '09 first-quarter figures include one new model — the Volvo 9700 that is being sold by Prevost Car, whose parent company is Volvo.

There was shuffling among the best selling coaches during the first quarter of the year, with three MCI models — J4500, D4500 and D4505 — taking the top sales spots.

Following those three were the Prevost X3-45, the Van Hool C2045, the Prevost H3-45 and the Setra S417.

MCI, boosted by large orders from Coach USA and Coach America, captured just over 60 percent of the market during the quarter.

Nearly 93 percent of the coaches sold during the quarter were 45-footers, with just under 6 percent 40-41 feet in length, and 1.3 percent represented by the TS-35 model from Temsa, which recorded its first sales in the U.S. during the fourth quarter.

Roughly 24 percent of the coaches sold in the first quarter were equipped with semi-automatic transmissions, either the ZF AS-tronic or the Volvo I-Shift. Allison's were in 76 percent of the new models.

Calendar

JUNE 2009

5-6 Museum of Bus Transportation annual Spring Fling, Bus Show and Flea Market, Museum Memorial Annex, Hershey, Pa. Info: Go to www.buseum.org.

16-19 Pennsylvania Bus Association Annual Meeting/Sales Retreat, Split Rock Resort and Golf Club, Lake Harmony, Pa. Info: Go to www.pabus.org.

21 United Motorcoach Association Mid-Year Board Meeting, Alexandria, Va. Info: Call (800) 424-8262.

Derby Shuttle

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Papa John's Cardinal Stadium at the University of Louisville, and 30 school buses for the Kentucky Exposition Center parking lot route. The buses ran every few minutes on all three routes.

Miller charged \$20 roundtrip from downtown and the expo center and \$15 from Papa John's stadium, which was \$5 to \$10 more than last year, when Transit Authority of River City shuttled 8,200 people to the Oaks and 12,000 to the Derby.

The transit authority was able to charge less because it gets federal (tax) subsidies, Miller spokesman John Owen told the *Courier-Journal*.

The newspaper reported that some riders "grumbled" about the price hike over last year, and others said the school buses didn't provide the same comfort as the city transit buses used in the past.

"I was like, whoa, a school bus? And for more money?" said Timothy Beals of New York, who rode a bus from Papa John's Cardinal Stadium. "But, hey, it's Derby, so who cares."

Riders who came from downtown praised Miller's motorcoaches.

"These are better than the city buses," rider Jen Williams told a *Courier-Journal* reporter.

Lt. Doug Sweeney of the Louisville Metro Police traffic division said Miller's operation hewed pretty closely to the routes and routines previously used by the Transit Authority of River City.

According to Presley, Miller was very diligent about anticipating the needs of disabled persons and able to defuse a potentially difficult situation "before anyone could start going in the wrong direction." Miller provided everyone with a detailed explanation of the service and how individuals with disabilities would be handled.

Miller's plan was blessed by the Kentucky ADA coordinator, the Federal Transit Administration Office of Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice.

Critical to making the shuttle happen, according to Presley, was the respect for the charter rule exhibited by the Federal Transit Administration Office of Chief Counsel.

"We are exceptionally proud of John Miller. Everyone from the mayor of Louisville to the local newspaper were obstacles and John never lost his cool, stayed professional, and focused on the task at hand," said Presley.

Stagecoach eyes results; hedging costly

PERTH, Scotland — Stagecoach Group, parent company of Coach USA and megabus.com, said its fiscal 2009 pre-tax profit will be in line with management expectations.

Stagecoach will release preliminary financial results for the year ending April 30, on June 24.

For the first 11 months of fiscal '09, revenue at Coach USA, Coach Canada and megabus.com was up 7.3 percent from the same period in fiscal '08. Other units of Stagecoach Group posted revenue gains ranging from 0.5 percent to 9.7 percent.

Meanwhile, the British press reported that Stagecoach Group and FirstGroup, parent company of Greyhound Lines and Laidlaw, lost a combined \$295 million in fiscal 2009 on their fuel hedging operations. The companies suffered because they fixed much of their fuel costs at around \$115 per barrel, well above current levels.

According to the Sunday Herald, the companies locked in large quantities of their fuel purchases for this year and next year at a time last year when there were fears the price of oil could hit \$200 a barrel.

However, oil peaked at \$147 a

barrel last summer, fell to under \$40 and is currently around \$52, making the "lock-ins look extremely expensive," the newspaper reported.

FirstGroup, has been considerably harder hit, having paid about \$221 million over the odds for its bus and train fuel with hedges at between \$111 and \$116 a barrel.

Stagecoach overpaid by about \$74 million.

FirstGroup and Stagecoach are in good company, however. Southwest Airlines' fuel hedging cost it \$117 million in the fourth quarter of '08.

Q'Straint training offered in California

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Q'Straint, makers of wheelchair restraint systems, is presenting a series of training sessions in June and July throughout California.

The training will focus on wheelchair securement and occupant training and is designed for operators transporting wheelchairs or mobility devices.

The sessions will cover:

- Review of equipment, function, maintenance and the like
- Proper securement with vari-

ous types of wheelchairs

- Increasing driver/operator/trainer proficiency

There will be six sessions presented by Q'Straint's Larry Bronowski:

- June 23: Metropolitan Transit System, 100 16th St., San Diego
- June 24: L.A. County Metro, 900 Lyon St., Los Angeles
- June 25: Omnitrans, 1700 Fifth St., San Bernardino
- July 7: Paratransit Inc., 2501 Florin Rd., Sacramento

- July 7: San Joaquin RTD, 421 E. Weber Ave., Stockton

- July 8: Central Contra Costa Transit Authority, 2477 Arnold Industrial Way, Concord

- July 9: Monterey-Salinas Transit, One Ryan Ranch Rd., Monterey

The training will last two to three hours.

To register, go to www.calact.org. There is no fee for the training. For additional information, contact Meg Desmond at (916) 920-8018.

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Legendary 'Nevada Bus Man' Bob Burrowes dies at 89

YERINGTON, Nev. — For Robert Burrowes, the bus business was more than an industry or career choice, much more. It was a lifetime passion.

Beginning in his teens and later, after a career of operating small private bus companies and managing public transit agencies, Mr. Burrowes became one of the western bus industry's best known advocates, photographers and historians. His photo collection, with images dating back to the 1920s,

was legendary.

His dedication to the industry was such that for the past 20-plus years he adopted the sobriquet of "Nevada Bus Man," running a one-man industry advocacy organization, the Nevada Bus Association, and producing a periodic newsletter.

It may be hard for some to imagine, but he made the regional bus industry seem dynamic and engaging.

Mr. Burrowes died at the Re-

nown Medical Center in Reno late last month. He was 89.

During the mid-20th century, Mr. Burrowes operated two bus companies in Northern California, one called Lincoln Transit Lines that operated in Stockton and ran to Sacramento, and another, Moraga Valley Stages, that ran from St. Mary's College of California in Moraga to Alameda.

He helped found other bus companies and worked at one time for Gray Line, Greyhound and Key System in the San Francisco Bay area. He also was employed by public transit agencies in Southern California.

He retired in 1985 as executive director of Humbolt Transit Authority in Eureka, Calif.

Mr. Burrowes was born in Bozeman, Mont., the day after Christmas 1919. He liked to say his in-

terest in buses and street cars began from birth because a trolley had passed by the moment he was born.

He had lived in Yerington for more than 20 years where he was involved in civic and social organizations, including the Senior Center and on the board of the local cemetery.

But it was the bus industry that inspired and imprisoned him, in the words of one of his sons.

He advocated for the industry before the state legislature as a lobbyist, he wrote about the business, he collected artifacts and took more than 20,000 bus photos, and he helped record the industry's history.

He was particularly interested in a company well known to the California bus industry, the Key System and its predecessors, that

beginning in the 1860s operated horse-drawn rail cars, then electric streetcars, buses and ferries. Key eventually devolved into AC Transit, California's third-largest public bus system.

Mr. Burrowes recently donated many of his archives to the Pacific Bus Museum, with more materials slated to go to other institutions or organizations.

He is survived by his sons, Harold of Fremont, Calif., and James of Bristol, Va., and his sister, Elizabeth Vierra of Salt Lake City, Utah.



Robert Burrowes

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People

ABC Companies of Faribault, Minn., announced it has filled sales vacancies in its northeastern region.

Mike Laffan, an ABC veteran, returns to the northeastern region as senior account executive after spending the past two years in ABC's western region. He will be responsible for sales and customer support in New Jersey, New York City, and Long Island, NY.

Laffan began his career with ABC Companies nearly 10 years ago as the account executive for the New England territory. In 2003, he joined DATTCO where he worked as sales manager for the school and commercial bus division, returning to ABC in 2007.

"I am excited to have the opportunity to return to the East Coast and base out of ABC's New Jersey location again," said Laffan.

ABC also announced the appointment of Jerry Siconolfi as account executive for the New England territory.

Siconolfi has been with ABC for three years as a territory manager for ABC Parts Source. Prior to



Mike Laffan



Jerry Siconolfi



John J. Manzi

joining ABC, he was director of maintenance for Rochester Genesee Regional Transit Authority in Rochester, NY.

Daimler Buses North America of Greensboro, N.C., announced the appointment of John J. Manzi as the northeast regional sales manager for pre-owned motorcoaches.

Manzi, a native of Long Island, is based in New York with coach inventory at Daimler Buses New York Metro Service Center in Secaucus, N.J.

He joins Daimler Buses with more than 20 years of sales and management experience in the bus and transportation industry.

He can be contacted at (845) 598-8091 or by e-mail at john.manzi@dcbusna.com.

Seattle Mariners

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

issue," said Hale. "A small number of people contacted us about it before the season started but they have dropped off since."

She noted, though, that complaints are likely to be heard from time-to-time throughout the season as people attending their first game realize the shuttle service is no longer available as it had been in the past.

Random complaints have turned up on Mariners' fan websites.

Meanwhile, Gillis said that during this year's meeting with the Mariners she suggested that the ball club sell advertising on the bus video system that could be played while fans were being driven to and from the games.

The advertising, she said, possibly could have produced enough revenue to offset the cost of the shuttle service.

"You have a very captive audience there, and I

think it would have worked out well for them," she added.

Gillis also suggested that pickup locations be moved further from the downtown ballpark, which would help reduce traffic congestion and automobile emissions in the area, as well as limit the number of motorists on the road who drank alcohol during the game. The sites could have been at shopping malls, restaurants or other retailers that were interested in having increased traffic before and after games, she suggested.

Although Starline missed out on operating the shuttles for the Mariners games, Gillis isn't giving up. "We'll give it a go again next season," she said.

Also, she plans to operate shuttles for the University of Washington football games this fall and will be meeting soon with the Seattle Seahawks football team in hopes of running its shuttles this year, too.

Last year, Starline took over the university shuttle service from King County Metro and shared it with the transit agency for the Seahawks.

Usage of BusRates.com grows among UMA operator members

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Bus operator members of the United Motorcoach Association are shunning traditional marketing tools in favor of internet marketing through BusRate.com, a new survey shows.

In fact, UMA members utilizing BusRates.com as a marketing channel almost doubled during the past year, the association's latest industry assessment reveals.

BusRates.com and UMA formed a strategic partnership early last year to help private coach operators reach more customers via the internet.

"Our members' reliance on other traditional marketing channels, like the Yellow Pages, has fallen during the past year," said UMA President and CEO Victor Parra.

At the same time, "use of more modern marketing vehicles, like BusRates.com, has increased dramatically during this time. With more customers looking on the internet to find charter-and-tour bus companies, it is even more important that our members find a way to get their companies in front of

them, and BusRates.com is the perfect vehicle to achieve this."

Data from UMA's assessment showed the association's membership is increasing its reliance on internet marketing channels at a much higher rate, while usage of more traditional marketing vehicles like telephone directories, radio and newspaper advertising have dropped.

There are more than 810 subscribing bus and motorcoach companies listed on the BusRates.com website, allowing for users to find coach companies across the country.

"I am thrilled that more UMA members are utilizing BusRates.com as a marketing outlet," said Mark Greer, BusRates.com founder and chief operating officer.

"We provide private motorcoach companies with a cost-effective marketing tool that generates results, and the recent increase in subscriptions from UMA members reinforces that. This is especially positive because the more companies we have on BusRates.com the more visitors the site receives."

Former Blue Bird plant auctioned

FORT VALLEY, Ga. — There apparently was a successful bidder late last month at the public auction of the former Blue Bird CoachWorks and Wanderlodge plant and equipment here.

However, the name of the last man standing when the gavel came down was not announced, pending various approvals and sales agreements.

An individual who was at the sales site said there appeared to be seven attendees at the auction, but only four individuals who put up the \$100,000 needed to qualify to participate in the sale.

Two of those individuals were interviewed as they came out of the sale and they both said the plant inventory, which included shop and garage equipment; parts and supplies; dies and fixtures; drawings, computers and intellectual property; a handful of diesel engines and transmissions; four Wanderlodge

BusRates.com is a web-based directory for the charter bus industry.

Listings on the website are categorized by nine bus types: minibuses, school buses, entertainer

RVs, two of them 2009 models, and four late-model service vehicles sold for a total of \$750,000.

The pre-auction valuation — put out by the auctioneers — of the material had been between \$7 million and \$10 million.

In addition, the 250,000-square-foot Blue Bird Express coach/Wanderlodge manufacturing facility and surrounding 32 acres, that included an RV park, known as the Bird's Nest, was sold to the same individual for \$2 million.

The sale was ordered by creditors of CoachWorks Holdings, which bought the complex from Cerberus Capital Management about two years ago. The business had been foreclosed on by creditors. (See April 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

A spokesman for the auction firm that conducted the sale said it might be 30-45 days, or longer, before the sale is completed.

coaches, executive coaches, limousine buses, trolleys, double-decker buses, vans and deluxe motorcoaches.

Furthermore, all listings on BusRates.com post detailed fleet

Meanwhile, Blue Bird Corporation, the school bus manufacturer whose plant is essentially located across the street from the former Blue Bird CoachWorks, issued a statement from Greg Bennett, president and CEO, regarding the financial strength of the company.

"We have been made aware of market rumors regarding the potential shutdown or liquidation of the company's former coach division. Blue Bird Corporation sold the business unit in 2007 to focus our efforts on growing our school bus unit and catering solely to the needs of the school bus industry.

"As a result, we no longer have a financial connection with this unrelated business entity as it is a completely separate company.

"Blue Bird Corporation is as strong as ever and in excellent financial shape. ... We continue to be confident in our growth prospects," Bennett said.

information, reviews and provide an internet link to the USDOT SAFER System.

More information about BusRates.com products and services can be found at www.busrates.com.

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