

# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

## GAO audit: Key federal safety program found wanting

WASHINGTON — A congressional audit has questioned the effectiveness of a critical federal program designed to assure that rogue motor carriers that been ordered out of service keep their vehicles off the road.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office spent 11 months and what appears to be hundreds of man-

hours investigating the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Performance and Registration Information Systems Management grant program.

PRISM, as it's commonly known, was set up more than a decade ago to, among other things, give states the ability to deny, suspend or revoke vehicle registra-

tions of bus and truck operators that have been ordered off the road for safety violations.

From an enforcement and safety standpoint such a system is vital because of the propensity of rogue truckers and bus operators to be ordered out of service one day and to reappear under a different name and USDOT number a few days later.

The system attempts to keep tabs on these so-called chameleon carriers by tracking the ID numbers of the vehicles owned and operated by the slimeball companies.

So, when the rogue outfits attempt to re-register their vehicles, or they are stopped for roadside or destination inspections, departments of motor vehicles or enforce-

ment officers can check the PRISM database and quickly determine if there is an out-of-service order involving the bus or truck being registered or inspected.

Because the motor carrier industry in the U.S. is so vast, and there are so few safety enforcement officials and resources of

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**Competition Heats Up.** A megabus.com coach pulls into Boston's Back Bay Station as part of the curbside carrier's switch to an all Van Hool double-decker fleet on its Boston-to-New York City route. Meanwhile, BoltBus expands into Baltimore. See story Page 14.

## Security program on chopping block

WASHINGTON — The Obama Administration has proposed eliminating the Intercity Bus Security Grant Program that has resulted in nearly \$72 million in federal taxpayer money going to private bus operators during the past seven years.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security also proposed end-

ing funding for Highway Watch, a security program aimed at making truckers and bus operators roadway watchdogs.

In calling for the elimination of the bus security grant program, the Homeland Security Department said "the awards are not based on risk assessment, and the homeland security investments in intercity

bus security should be evaluated in the context of the risks faced and relative benefits to be gained."

The program was started in the wake of 9/11, during the early days of the Department of Homeland Security Department and the Transportation Security Administration.

Roughly \$10 million was

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## Calif. transit agency scolded

OJAI, Calif. — An attempt by a public transit agency to have a private motorcoach company removed from the federal list of willing-and-able charter bus providers has failed and may even have backfired.

Scott A. Biehl, acting chief counsel of the Federal Transit Administration, has ruled that Heritage Valley Bus Inc. of Santa Paula, Calif., can remain on the list of carriers that transit agencies in the area must notify when they receive a request for charter service.

At the same time, he warned the city-owned Ojai Trolley Service that it must abide by the charter regulation, including providing private carriers with all of the pertinent information when it notifies

them of charters that might be available.

A complaint against Heritage was filed by Ojai Trolley, accusing the small operator of acting in bad faith when it responded to a notification for a charter that was requested in February by an area resort, the Ojai Valley Inn.

Ojai Trolley said it was informed by the resort two months later that it never heard from Heritage.

The Federal Transit Administration requires private operators that express an interest in a charter notice to contact the chartering party, negotiate in good faith and/or provide a proposal. And, they must do it fairly quickly.

In previous decisions, the FTA

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## Transit cooperation in S.C.

DARLINGTON, S.C. — While some public transit agencies continue to look for ways to beat the federal charter service rule, at least one has adopted an entirely different view.

Pee Dee Transportation Authority of Florence, S.C., not only shies away from possibly violating the regulation that limits transit charter work, but it is willing to give up some transportation jobs even when it has the right to do them.

The transit authority turned down an opportunity last month to provide shuttle service for the popular Southern 500 NASCAR race at Darlington Raceway and allowed two private motorcoach operators to handle it.

And, it didn't just give it up — it also helped the companies prepare for the job and then advertised the service on its website.

"We just felt that there was a need for it," said Pee Dee General

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## Calif. assembly passes 'one-strike-you're-out' bus bill

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The California General Assembly has passed two bills aimed at cracking down on rogue motorcoach companies.

The bills, AB 636, which would rescind licenses for motorcoach companies and drivers that fail to comply with safety and licensing laws, and AB 951, which would increase penalties for safety and other violations, now move to the state Senate.

The so-called one-strike-and-you're-out measures would permanently rescind licenses after only one infraction.

(See May 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Both pieces of legislation have the endorsement of the California Bus Association, which has taken a proactive approach to getting slimy operators off California highways.

The bills were prompted by a

crash in October that killed 10 people, including the bus owner, and injured 40 others. Investors say the driver was behind the wheel illegally and the coach had been declared non-operational.

The driver, Quintin Watts, 52, of Stockton, reportedly slept only briefly during the 40 hours leading up to the crash. Several passengers have been quoted as saying they saw Watts fall asleep at the wheel.

He has been charged with 11

counts of vehicular manslaughter and is scheduled to be arraigned June 16 in Colusa County Superior Court.

Assemblyman Dave Jones, D-Sacramento, introduced AB 636. All of those killed in the crash lived in Jones' district.

The other bill was authored by Assemblyman Ted Lieu, D-Torrance, who became involved after learning most of the crash victims were of Asian descent.

Lieu said his bill would increase penalties anywhere from \$1,000 to \$7,500, depending on the violation.

He believes many rogue bus companies target Asian Americans and other minorities.

"I've met with various Asian and Pacific Island groups recently," Lieu said. "It's very important for us to make sure these companies are complying with safety standards."

## Web offers one-stop bus shopping

WASHINGTON — The intercity bus industry now has its own version of Expedia and Orbitz — sort of.

BusJunction.com is a web-based bus ticket search engine created by people who say they were "frustrated by the arduous process of finding the right ticket" on regular-route carriers operating in the East, Northeast and Midwest.

The website is like Expedia or Orbitz in the way it helps travelers sort through a crowded field, but unlike those two popular airfare websites, BusJunction doesn't sell tickets.

Instead, it steers users to the online ticketing on the bus lines' home pages. It's an aggregator of data, like Kayak.com, not a

booking site.

It's a critical difference. BusJunction stays independent from the bus lines, and doesn't favor any company at the expense of customer choice.

"They simply perform a journalistic function; they simply tell you what's available," said one travel expert. "I find it reassuring they have no axe to grind, they get no money out of the sale of their ticket."

BusJunction searches 12 bus lines, including megabus.com, Boltbus, Vamoose, DC2NY, Fung Wah, Peter Pan, Lakefront, Trailways and Greyhound.

According to founder Matthew Keller, the Washington-based company serves 31

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## Jail for Texas driver in fatal crash

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — A Texas bus driver has been sentenced to a year in jail in connection with a fatal crash in 2007 that killed four people.

Shortly after the crash, prosecutors vowed to throw the book at Felix Tapia, 29, of Brownsville, Texas, believing him to be under the influence of drugs and causing the crash. (See Feb. 1, 2008 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Prosecutors initially charged Tapia with four counts of felony negligent homicide, after a police investigation concluded he had been taking amphetamines and didn't have a backup driver on the trip from Chicago to Dallas.

However, police at the scene of the Nov. 25, 2007, crash didn't conduct a field sobriety test on Tapia after the crash, nor could any officer remember him acting strangely.

Prosecutors amended the charges to four felony counts of manslaughter but that case fell apart after discovering Tapia legally purchased the amphetamines while in Mexico.

Tapia pleaded to a single misdemeanor charge of negligent homicide.

A judge sentenced Tapia to one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine. Prosecutor Fletcher Long said it was the maximum sentence they could levy against Tapia because Arkansas

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# THE DOCKET

## Senators may be wary of card check

### But compromise is being sought

WASHINGTON — Federal legislation aimed at making it easier for unions to organize workers may be running into trouble in the Senate.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services subcommittee, told a wire service that the so-called card-check provision in the Employee Free Choice Act may have to be removed from the bill because it lacks majority support among Senate Democrats.

Harkin said he is talking with his colleagues opposed to card check to search for a compromise.

"Compromises are going to be made," Harkin said. "It probably won't be card check because too many people are opposed to it now."

However, Sen. Arlen Specter, D-Pa., said the "prospects are pretty good" that a compromise will emerge that will salvage the card-check provision.

The Pennsylvania senator, who switched from the Republican to the Democratic party, said he has been meeting with labor leaders and fellow senators in hopes of coming up with a compromise he could support.

In March, Specter announced he would not vote for the bill, a vow he repeated after he switched parties.

Card check would replace the current system of secret-ballot elections supervised by the National Labor Relations Board for union representation contests, with a count of check-off cards signed by employees in determining whether a union has enough support to represent workers.

Harkin said a possible compromise on labor law could include

tougher penalties against employers who harass, intimidate or fire workers trying to organize a union.

Card check is opposed by many business groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers.

Another controversial provision in the proposed act calls for mandatory arbitration if the two sides fail to reach an agreement within approximately 130 days after a union is newly certified.

"Harkin's comments are certainly welcome news," said Rhonda Bentz, a spokeswoman for the Coalition for a Democratic Workplace, a group of more than 500 organizations that oppose the legislation. "But there's still the binding interest arbitration provision, which is equally as harmful as the card check scheme for both small businesses and workers."

"The fight is definitely not over," Bentz said.

## Truckers seek to demolish Unified Carrier Agreement

WASHINGTON — The American Trucking Associations wants to do away with the two-year-old Unified Carrier Registration Agreement, saying the program is unfair, awkward and an undependable means of raising money for highway safety.

The Unified Carrier Registration Agreement was devised and implemented to replace the old Single State Registration System. (See Jan. 1, May 15, July 1, Sept. 1 and 15, 2007, and March 15, 2009 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Its primary advantage was to be that it extended multi-state vehicle registration coverage to private fleets, like those operated by Walmart and other companies that operate their own commercial vehicles that weren't previously covered by the Single State Registration System.

Because the universe of vehicles covered by the agreement was to be substantially larger than that of the system it replaced, fees for companies previously covered by the Single State Registration System was expected to be reduced.

The new system has been fraught with problems from the get-go. Its adoption by Congress was delayed even as the Single State Registration System expired, meaning states had no revenue from either system for months.

And, in a twist that no one seemingly foresaw or at least warned might happen, few states were prepared to track down the thousands and thousands of companies covered by the new agreement but that didn't voluntarily step forward, register and begin paying fees.

As a result, the Unified Carrier Registration Agreement board voted earlier this year to recommend that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration increase UCRA fees by more than 115 percent on a per-vehicle basis.

The ATA and others were outraged. They wanted the states to step up their enforcement efforts and go after scofflaws that weren't paying the fees rather than increase fees for those who readily complied.

The issue for states is how much effort they can put into going after noncompliant carriers that fail to pay \$39?

So, the ATA has proposed that the Unified Carrier Registration Agreement be scrapped and replaced.

"Although UCRA has not been in effect for long, it has amply demonstrated in its short life that it will never be a satisfactory generator of revenue for the states, but instead (be) a continuing focus of controversy and uncertainty over such collections, both as to timing and adequacy," said ATA President Bill Graves in a letter to the executive director of the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance and state officials involved in the program.

Graves went on to say that UCRA enforcement "will always be burdensome" to states and collections will suffer as a result. "As the UCRA is set up, the temptation will always be for the states simply to ask USDOT to raise the level of fees on compliant carriers rather than to increase their efforts to collect from the noncompliant," he added.

Meanwhile, the morass created by the current system has gotten deeper.

In early April, the UCRA board recommendation that fees be doubled was submitted to the FMCSA. The FMCSA was expected to begin a formal rulemaking to set the fees but, instead, sent back a long list of questions, requesting additional details and justifications for the board's recommendation.

One well-placed member of the UCRA board thinks it will take more than a month for the board to get answers back to FMCSA, and the federal rulemaking will not begin before July at the earliest.

States can't bill for or collect any UCRA fees for 2010 until FMCSA finishes its rulemaking, which easily could be after the first of the year. Nor is it certain the FMCSA will follow the board's recommendation on the level of the fees to be charged.

As an alternative, the ATA's Graves has proposed that the FMCSA Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program, known as MCSAP, be expanded to replace the UCRA.

However, there are those who aren't convinced a revamped MCSAP is the right answer. They

## Oberstar wants USDOT restructured

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the House Transportation Committee, Rep. James Oberstar, D-Minn., is circulating a plan that proposes a major restructuring of the programs within the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The restructuring, if it went forward, would be included in the next federal highway and public transportation reauthorization bill that Congress will grapple with this summer and fall, according to Congressional sources and specialty newsletters.

One two-page outline of Oberstar's proposal provides a glimpse of what he has repeatedly called a "transformational" reauthorization proposal that is expected to be unveiled this month.

Without referring to the outline, Oberstar was quoted by one publication as saying he has received positive feedback on his ideas.

The Democratic caucus is "enthusiastic about the approach that I've taken in restructuring the programs," he told one Washington newsletter.

A spokesman for the USDOT said Oberstar had been in contact with Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood about the congressman's proposed plan.

Because Congress is scheduled to be in recess the last week of June, Oberstar has said he would like a committee markup of his reauthorization proposal the first week of June, with floor consideration the following week.

Under the heading "the future of transportation," the framework seeks to create a new undersecretary or assistant secretary for intermodalism that would meet monthly with all modal administrators.

The outline includes the phrases "national strategic plan" and "mega-projects" in the list of agen-

cies that would take part in the monthly meetings.

It also includes a consolidation of USDOT's 108 programs into four "major formula programs" — critical asset preservation, highway safety improvement, surface transportation, and congestion mitigation and air quality improvement.

According to the document, Oberstar would like the USDOT's management structure to shift "from prescriptive to performance."

Oberstar's outline also addresses transit equity, including a hope to "level decision-making factors between highway and transit choices/projects."

The federal government pays for half of transit projects while it funds 80 percent of highway and bridge work, and transit advocates have been pressing for equal federal treatment.

## USDOT budget rises to \$73 billion

WASHINGTON — The Obama Administration has budgeted \$73.3 billion for the U.S. Department of Transportation for fiscal 2010.

The amount includes \$1 billion for high-speed rail. The fiscal 2010 budget is slightly higher than the

\$71.5 billion enacted for USDOT for fiscal '09.

All federal agencies under USDOT would receive the same or slightly higher budget levels in 2010 compared with 2009 funding, including \$550 million for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Adminis-

tration, the agency that regulates bus and motorcoach safety.

The Office of Management and Budget said the 2010 budget assumes new discretionary appropriations from the General Fund to maintain baseline levels for the Highway Trust Fund.

# 'Mileage tax' system pushed to boost highway money

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee wants federal lawmakers to move forward on a proposal to tax American cars, buses and trucks for every mile they travel.

Rep. James Oberstar, D-Minn., believes Congress should forego

any kind of pilot testing and instead move forward quickly on a vehicle-miles-traveled system.

According to one wire service, Oberstar supports having the legislation ready for the highway and public transportation reauthorization bill he plans to bring to the House floor this month.

"Why do we need a pilot program? Why don't we just phase this in?" he said during a House hearing. "It's going to be done, it's something we have to do. Why not just move it ahead?"

Oberstar's comments were aimed at testimony from Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., who supports creation of pilot programs in every state as a first step toward implementation of nationwide mileage-based taxes. Oregon pilot

tested such a system two years ago (see June 15, 2006 *Bus & Motorcoach News*).

Blumenauer, who once served on Oberstar's committee, said expanded testing could bolster public awareness and ease a transition to a mileage tax framework.

But Oberstar appears to want to move more quickly. "There have been many suggestions it will take five or 10 years," the lawmaker said. "I think it can be done in far

less than that, maybe two years."

Earlier this year, a mileage-tax system received backing from a Congressional blue-ribbon panel created in the last highway authorization. The National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission called for the system to become the dominant funding mechanism for road construction and maintenance by 2020.

The White House, however, has voiced opposition to the idea.

## CVSA asks Congress to drop ban on roadside inspections

WASHINGTON — With the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee busy drafting the massive federal highway and public transportation reauthorization bill, the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance has weighed in on a couple of policy and regulatory issues that could impact the motorcoach industry.

The CVSA is the not-for-profit organization comprised of local, state and federal motor carrier safety officials and industry representatives from the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

One of its key missions is to promote commercial motor vehicle safety by pushing policies and regulations in Congress and at federal agencies.

The CVSA has issued a laundry list of recommendations for the nascent highway and public transportation bill, including these:

- The federal prohibition of roadside safety inspections for buses and motorcoaches should be eliminated.

The CVSA contends that where bus safety inspections are performed should not be decided by federal law "which limits the needed flexibility of the states." Instead, the CVSA recommends that guidelines for roadside bus inspections

be included in the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations.

- The CVSA supports the existing limited exemption from federal axle-weight limits for over-the-road and transit buses.

The exemption, which was included in the 2006 USDOT appropriations bill and will expire Sept. 30, should be extended in the next highway bill, says the CVSA.

The alliance also recommended that the hours-of-service exemption for some agricultural carriers and utility services be repealed.

CVSA said that an analysis by the USDOT's Volpe National Transportation Systems Center on the safety effects of these exemptions — granted in last federal highway bill — found that:

- Agricultural carriers operating exclusively within a 100-mile radius had a 19 percent higher crash rate than agricultural carriers operating outside a 100-mile radius between 2005-2007.

- Utility service crash rates jumped by 40 percent during the same period.

The House version of the highway and public transportation bill is expected to be reported out of the transportation committee by late this month or early June.

## Crossing border? Get passport

WASHINGTON — On June 1, all U.S. citizens entering the country by land or sea will have to present a passport or government border-crossing card that shows their name and proof of citizenship.

They also could use an enhanced driver's license, which has extra security features and is available in the states of Washington, New York, Vermont and Michigan. Other border states are working to adopt enhanced driver licenses.

Travelers will no longer be able to use ordinary driver's licenses or birth certificates to get back into the U.S.

Federal officials hope a new education campaign will eliminate confusion at U.S. borders this summer when many more Americans

will be traveling between the U.S. and Canada or Mexico. In recent months, the Homeland Security Department has been stepping up publicity along border towns about the new policy, which aims to keep terrorists out of the country.

Air travelers have had to show a passport to enter the U.S. from Canada or Mexico since January 2007.

"I am concerned" about possible confusion over the change, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said. "So many people live on the border and are used to crossing back and forth informally."

People trying to cross without proper documents "will be handled on a case-by-case basis."

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## Security grants

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awarded annually, starting in fiscal 2002, with upwards of 40 percent of the money every year going to Greyhound Lines.

Each time new grants were announced, the federal bureaucrats in charge of the program fiddled with the rules. In recent years, 55 percent of the money has been earmarked for companies operating more than 250 buses and the remaining 45 percent has gone to smaller operators.

In fiscal 2008, a new wrinkle was added: operators had to come up with a 25 percent match to secure a grant. Other rules changes over the years included requirements that applicants have a formal and functioning security plan, and their coaches had to do most of their traveling inside areas bureaucrats considered high risk.

One year, the rules effectively kept tour-and-charter operators from applying for the money, outraging many in the industry.

Winning a grant was never a cakewalk and generally required the services of an experienced grant writer.

Many operators that applied for and won grants used the money to buy GPS and other communica-

# Obama wants to aid biofuels, limit emissions

The Obama Administration has moved to boost biofuels.

The administration issued a renewable fuel standard proposal aimed at expanding the supply of biofuels and for the first time requiring them to meet emission-reduction targets.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson said the new rule is designed to help promote and provide financial assistance to the biofuels industry and to increase the supply of renewable fuels to 36 billion gallons by 2022.

"As we work towards energy independence, using more home-grown biofuels reduces our vulnerability to oil price spikes that everyone feels at the pump," Jackson said last month during a conference call with Energy Secretary Steven Chu and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

The proposed standard is the latest in a series of EPA rule changes aimed at reducing greenhouse

tions devices for their coaches. For the grant winning operators, it was a no- or low-cost method of upgrading their fleet operations.

The Highway Watch program, which was operated for years by

gas emissions and U.S. dependency on foreign oil. It was accompanied by an announcement that a federal Cabinet-level biofuels working group has been created to assist in the research, development and production of biofuels.

During the conference call, Chu announced plans to provide \$787 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to accelerate advanced biofuels research and development and to fund the construction of commercial biorefinery demonstration projects.

"Developing the next genera-

tion of biofuels is key to our effort to end our dependence on foreign oil and address the climate crisis," Chu said.

EPA said it expects that by 2022, the renewable fuels standard will reduce dependence of foreign oil by more than 297 million barrels a year and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 160 million tons a year.

The proposed rule would establish new volume requirements for cellulosic biofuel, biomass-based diesel, advanced biofuel and total renewable fuel that must be used in

transportation fuels each year.

The proposed rule, to be fashioned to comply with the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, includes new definitions and criteria for both renewable fuels and the feedstocks that produce them.

EPA said the greenhouse gas emission assessments must evaluate the full life-cycle emissions effects of fuel production, including significant emissions from land use changes resulting from reducing corn grown for the world's food supply.

## Minnesota 5 percent biodiesel mandate in effect

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Minnesota has implemented its requirement mandating that all diesel fuel sold in the state contain at least 5 percent biodiesel.

The move, effective last month, was made to jump-start the state's struggling biodiesel industry. The alternate fuel is mostly made from

oil from soybeans, which are grown in Minnesota.

Minnesota was the first state to require biodiesel when a 2 percent mandate took effect in 2005. The current 5 percent mandate will rise to 20 percent by 2015. (See Oct. 15, 2005 and Jan. 1, 2006 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

But healthy profit margins the biodiesel industry enjoyed for a period have disappeared as the cost of soybean oil has risen and the price of biodiesel has declined.

There also continue to be reports of problems with clogged fuel lines in cold weather when using biodiesel.

In any event, the ATA has made getting rid of UCRA one of its priorities for inclusion in the federal highway and public transportation reauthorization bill currently being developed by Congress.

## Truckers

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note that states generally pay little attention to the FMCSA and its under-funded programs.

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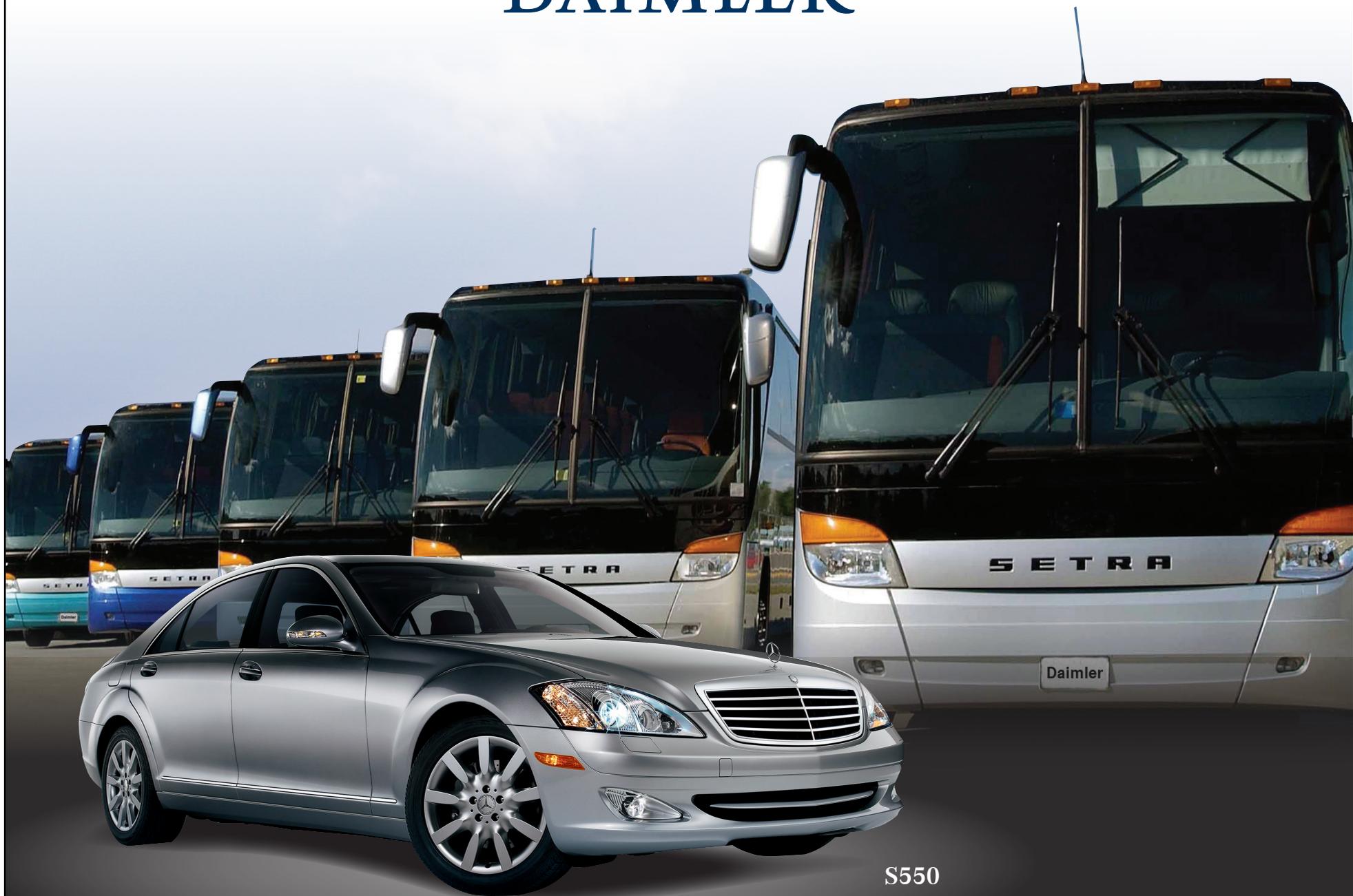
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# Obama Administration plays games with train strategy

By Wendell Cox

WASHINGTON — The Obama Administration appears to have established the development of high-speed rail as the most important plank of its transportation strategy.

The effort may be popular with the media and planners, but it's being promoted largely on the basis of overstatement and even misinformation.

I have had considerable experience evaluating high-speed rail projects. Most recently, Joe Vranich (a former colleague on the Amtrak Reform Council) and I teamed to produce an extensive report on the subject, California High Speed Rail: A Due Diligence Report. The findings, based on information provided by high-speed rail promoters reveal the claims of the administration to be highly questionable.

## Financing

It begins with understanding transportation financing in the United States. The administration notes that far more money has been spent on highways and airports than on intercity rail. This is not in question.

However, virtually all of the money spent to build the nation's highway system and its major airports has been paid for by users of the system. Highway users have paid for intercity highways with their state and federal fuel taxes.

Airport users have paid for the airports and the air traffic control system with taxes on their tickets. Put directly, if you don't use the highway or airport system, you don't pay.

Passenger rail finance is another matter. Generally, users pay less than one-half the total costs of passenger rail. The rest comes from taxpayers. If passenger rail were financed the same way as highways and airports, it would be largely paid for — both capital and operating costs — by fares and by taxes on tickets. Of course that would not work because passenger rail is far more costly than the highway and airport competition.

Today, Amtrak fares per passenger mile are more than double that of the airlines per

passenger mile, and that is before the heavy subsidies received by Amtrak.

Indeed, the most recent data provided by the U.S. Department of Transportation indicates that the federal government made a profit of \$1 per 1,000 passenger miles on the highway program while subsidizing passenger rail cost \$210 and transit \$159 per 1,000 passenger miles.

## Ridership/relieving congestion

High-speed rail is also being promoted by the administration as a way to reduce traffic congestion. This claim is fraught with difficulty.

First, highway traffic congestion is almost exclusively within urban areas, not between the urban areas that high-speed rail would serve. Data from the California promoters indicates that traffic levels would rise nearly as much with high-speed rail as without it.

High-speed rail is projected to reduce traffic by less than 3 percent once the system is complete. Without high-speed rail, traffic volumes would increase 52 percent and without high-speed rail traffic volumes would increase 49 percent above 2000 levels.

In either case, things would be far worse in the future than they are today. And if high-speed rail can make so little difference in congested California, it will surely do less in other parts of the country.

In France and Japan, where travel is far more concentrated due to the linear location of major urban areas and the smaller number of large metropolitan centers, markets that are well served by high-speed rail still have significant airline traffic (Tokyo to Osaka, and Paris to Marseille).

Also worth noting, both nations boasted pre-existing rail ridership levels that account for much of the high-speed rail volumes. There is no such foundation in the United States.

The ridership issue is particularly important because of the miserable record of transportation ridership projections both in

the U.S. and around the world. A most recent example is the Taiwan high-speed rail system, which according to the early projections of promoters was to carry 180,000 passengers per day in its early operations.

Yet, in its second year of operation (2008), the average daily ridership was less than one-half that projection (84,000, calculated from Taiwan government data). This is telling in a country with notoriously congested traffic and very few major urban centers.

This strategy of exaggerating ridership claims (and grossly under-estimating costs) is widespread in rail projects and has been extensively documented in Megaprojects and Risks: An Analysis of Ambition, by international scholars Bent Flyvbjerg, Nils Bruzelius and Werner Rothengatter. The Taiwan and other international experiences suggest a major high-speed rail investment would cost the taxpayers many additional billions and could bankrupt any private investors.

## Greenhouse emissions

But perhaps the most misleading claims are related to greenhouse gas emissions. It starts with the marketing. The administration's press release indicates that building all of its routes would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by "six billion pounds" annually. This sounds like a big number. It is akin to my characterizing my weight as nearly 100,000 grams, instead of the pounds (200 in my case) that is customary in talking about weight.

In greenhouse gas emissions, we do not talk about pounds, we talk about metric tons. Six billion pounds is only 2.7 million metric tons (2,205 pounds), which is an infinitesimal share of the greenhouse gas emissions from the nation's passenger transportation.

Indeed, given the propensity of the consultants to produce ridership projections less accurate than "Vietnam body counts," the figure is probably less.

The administration falls into the usual trap of assuming that theoretical differences

in greenhouse gas emissions can be turned into radical changes in travel patterns and behavior. The greenhouse gas emissions per passenger mile may be less (at least before the coming improvements in vehicle technology) but that does not mean that enough passenger miles can be moved from cars (and planes) to make a material difference. Our experience in high-cost urban rail projects should have taught us this.

Moreover, a mere reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is not sufficient to justify adoption of a strategy. Strategies must be prioritized based upon their effectiveness, and that is measured by cost.

On this score, the California high-speed rail system fails to a degree that is incomprehensible. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has indicated that the cost of greenhouse gas emission reduction should be no more than from \$20 to \$50 per ton. Even that may be too high.

For example, Al Gore, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi studiously buy carbon offsets for the tons of greenhouse gas they produce flying around the country. The current market rate for such offsets is under \$15.

Using California High Speed Rail Authority and California Air Resources Board assumptions, we found that the cost per ton of greenhouse gas emission removal for the California high speed rail system would be nearly \$2,000, or 40 times the maximum figure used by the IPCC.

To illustrate how extravagant a figure that is, if the nation were to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent (as proposed by the Obama Administration) at the same rate, the annual cost would be more than 75 percent of the gross domestic product.

*Excerpted from NewGeography.com. Wendell Cox is a visiting professor, Conservatoire National des Arts et Metiers, Paris. He was appointed to three terms on the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission by Mayor Tom Bradley. He is the author of War on the Dream: How Anti-Sprawl Policy Threatens the Quality of Life.*

## How to contact us

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

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# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

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# Record first-quarter earnings at National Interstate

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Corporation has reported sharply higher net income for the first quarter of this year in spite of a double-digit decline in premium income resulting from motorcoach operators insuring fewer vehicles and rates remaining flat.

The parent company of leading motorcoach industry insurer, National Interstate Insurance, said its earned \$12.6 million, or 65 cents per diluted share, during the first three months of this year, compared to net income of \$9.5 million, or 49 cents per diluted share, for the same quarter of last year.

The record 2009 first-period earnings primarily reflect more favorable claims results and flat expenses. The company's loss ratio was five percentage points better in this year's first quarter compared to last year.

Net investment income was slightly lower in this year's first quarter, reflecting today's generally lower yields.

Gross premiums written during the first quarter of this year were \$117.4 million, down 11.9 percent from the \$133.3 million reported for the first quarter of 2008.

The revenue slide occurred in three business units.

The alternative risk transfer component produced less premium

## ABA board selects chairman, vice chair

WASHINGTON — Three months after Craig Lentzsch resigned as chairman of the American Bus Association, the ABA board has elected Jim Jalbert to succeed him.

At the same time, board member Tom JeBran was elected vice chairman.

Both will serve two-year terms.

Lentzsch resigned barely more than a month after being elected chairman when he no longer met bylaw requirements for the post.

Jalbert, who was elected vice chairman when Lentzsch moved to chairman, became acting chairman when Lentzsch stepped aside. Jalbert is president of C&J in Portsmouth, N.H.

With Jalbert taking over as chairman, ABA needed a new vice chairman and the ABA board picked JeBran, president of Trans-Bridge Lines in Bethlehem, Pa.

The ABA board also elected George Maney, president of Coach America in Dallas, to the board, as well as Dan Eisentrager, vice president of Coach America's western region, to a non-voting seat.

income "due to a combination of fewer insured vehicles, reflecting the current economic conditions and rate decreases reflecting favorable claims for these customers," said National Interstate.

The company's "transportation" and Hawaii and Alaska units also saw decreases in premiums because of the impact of the current U.S.

economic downturn on the company's commercial customers, "primarily through lack of growth relative to vehicle counts and the effects of pricing and risk selection initiatives specific to a few of the products, including smaller charter operations that were put in place in the third quarter of 2008."

At the same time, the compa-

ny's specialty personal lines saw a 5 percent increase in gross premiums during the first quarter.

"We are extremely pleased with the 2009 first-quarter operating profits," said National Interstate President and CEO Dave Michelson. "Our underwriting approach is to price our products to achieve an underwriting profit even if we forgo

volume in the short run as a result."

The National Interstate board approved a seven cents per share dividend, payable June 12, to shareholders of record May 29.

The book value of National Interstate shares increased to \$11.65 at the end of the first quarter, compared to \$11.20 a year earlier.

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## Jail for driver

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

law caps the jail time and fines on misdemeanor convictions.

During police interviews, Tapia told officers the drugs they found were diet pills. Tapia claimed he lost consciousness and fell to the floor before the crash after taking a sip of soda.

Laboratory testing identified the pills, but they were not on the federal list of controlled or illegal drugs, Long said.

The bus was carrying 47 people when the crash occurred along rain-slick Interstate 40. The coach crossed the median and slammed into a pickup truck and a tractor trailer.

After the crash, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration ordered Tornado to cease operations. The federal agency later allowed Tornado to resume operations.

## Truck driver involved in fatal bus crash convicted

MADISON, Wis. — A federal jury has convicted an Indiana over-the-road truck driver involved in a fatal bus crash in western Wisconsin in 2005 with falsifying his driver's log.

The jury found Michael Ko-

## Tour booking system offers website feature

EAST WINDSOR, N.J. — Paradigm Technology Consulting says the Distinctive Systems' Tour Booking System it distributes includes a feature that automatically creates a data-drive website for coach operators using the software.

"This allows operators to create and maintain a professional website without the expense of employing a specialist web-design company and without having to know anything about how websites work," said Paradigm.

The website is capable of handling online bookings from both travel agents and direct clients.

Paradigm says the Tour Booking System is a complete management solution for individual passenger reservations on organized tours and sightseeing trips.

Against every tour in Tour Booking System, and in addition to the areas relating to dates and prices needed by the in-house reservation system, there is an area where operators can enter the details they

would like to present to clients on their website.

This information essentially mirrors the details that would go into a printed brochure, a day-by-day itinerary, another information area and a selection of pictures. Since this data is intended to be presented on a website, it also includes an area for useful links to other websites such as the destination hotel or visitor site.

The online booking facility allows clients to create an account,

enter passenger names, select their seats, choose pick-up points, select their preferred accommodations, accept or decline insurance and pay either a deposit or in full as appropriate.

Tour Booking System is fully integrated with the Coach Manager System which is in turn integrated with the Vehicle Maintenance System workshop management package.

For information, e-mail [info@ptcllc.com](mailto:info@ptcllc.com).

## TranSched Systems is upgrading CoachWorks software

Toronto — TranSched Systems says it is expanding the capabilities of its CoachWorks software to include fleet dispatch.

"You will be able to dispatch your entire fleet via CoachWorks dispatch," said TranSched Systems in announcing the new feature. "This will accommodate the line-haul or other scheduled-service business you may offer."

For more than 25 years, TranSched Systems has been offering

technology solutions designed specifically for solving and supporting the changing complexities of private transportation industries.

"Our success with (operators) of all sizes across North America is a testament to our ability to deliver high-quality results to our customers as well as the communities they serve," said TranSched's Bradley Cameron.

TranSched Systems' CoachWorks is a motorcoach manage-

ment software package designed to improve all aspects of a charter bus business, from sales to dispatch to accounts receivables.

CoachWorks is configured to increase staff productivity by providing multiple functions in one program and by automating manual processes. Key features include:

- Single or multiple trip schedule entry
- Automated pricing/yield management and driver/vehicle

utilization

• E-mail functions designed to reduce the need of printed products

• Automated fuel surcharges

• Extensive reporting features and dashboards

• Installation on a Windows server or web hosting

TranSched says it holds weekly CoachWorks' webinars.

For information, e-mail [sales@transched.com](mailto:sales@transched.com).

zowski of Schererville, Ind., guilty of 20 counts of making false entries in his log. Each conviction carries a maximum penalty of five

years in federal prison. He will be sentenced July 24.

Kozlowski's attorney says he will appeal the convictions.

Prosecutors say Kozlowski, 26, was driving his truck when his log claimed he was sleeping.

Five people were killed and 28

were injured when a bus owned by Chippewa Trails hit Kozlowski's semi after it overturned on Interstate 94 near Osseo, Wis.

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# Tour and charter software: Pretty astounding stuff

By Dave Millhouser

It was 1971, and I was talking to my boss on a truck-stop pay phone in Grand Island, Neb., when he said "in a few minutes bus number 33 will pull in."

He followed with instructions for switching drivers, destinations and such.

Twenty minutes later, an Eagle bearing No. 33 pulled in. This was before cell phones, GPS or computers, but Joe could track 23 buses across 48 states — in his head. In many ways he was an early, organic computer. He always seemed to know precisely where we were.

For the past 30 years, computers have assumed an ever increasing role in the transportation business. Trucking companies discovered, early on, the wonders of what they could do in tracking vehicles and loads.

Some got buried, though, when they failed to understand the need for backup systems or processes, and the software's limitations.

An early lesson was the need to introduce technology carefully, and run the old methods parallel, until the new ones had the bugs worked out. Still, adventurous coach operators soon discovered the joys of computers and began using generic software to track sales, charters, maintenance and accounting.

As time passed, the programs for each of

these disciplines improved dramatically, and the next step was integrating them.

Software companies combined as many of the functions as possible into packages that shared data from a single input. Your computer knew what kind of bus was needed for a charter and it tracked miles for tax and maintenance purposes.

One of the charms of technology is that its cost drops as more folks use it, and this sort of efficiency then becomes available to smaller companies. The days of the gigundous wall calendar, with scribbled notes, seem numbered.

The next wave is upon us. You can get software packages today that price charters, track your coach in real time. It'll also book tours, and assign seats.

The software will slap you if you try to dispatch a coach due for maintenance, or a driver who is out of hours. The bus can call home when it's lost, behind schedule or broken. Your driver can call too, but may be too flustered.

Some operators resist depending on machines to make decisions where intuition or experience is a major element. The latest software can be tweaked to charge specific customers extra because they are demanding, or request their favorite driver. Many of the decisions that seem subjective can now be pumped into your program.

All these tasks can be done with mini-

mal effort, with data diligently trekking to all of the places where it is useful. Reports, audits and such become simpler, and a clever operator can use compiled data to confirm, contradict or refine their instincts.

Software can be trained to understand not only the bus business — but YOUR bus business.

If you're considering either beginning, or upgrading, your computer capabilities here are some things to consider.

Work with a company that has good support and training (often this means one that has been around a while). It doesn't matter how good the software is, if you don't know how to use it. Keep doing what you've been successful with, alongside the new, until you're sure your folks have the hang of it.

Buy value, not price. In addition to support, you're looking for a supplier who is looking at the future, and is writing software in a way that can be updated with new applications. There's stuff on the horizon that we can't imagine, and you want to work with someone who sees possibilities, and helps you access them without changing your whole system.

Get a package that understands, and talks to, other generic programs, so you can commune with businesses and agencies.

Work with someone who knows the coach business, and takes the time to understand your particular niche and business

philosophy.

Some facets of our business don't easily mesh with computers. Years ago a line carrier developed airline-style software to reserve seats. It was a disaster because the computer refused to release a seat, even if the passenger left the bus. Coaches cruised the highway with empty seats, while customers were denied boarding. The computer couldn't be overridden, and refused to sell them a ticket.

The human element, and common sense, should be built in, or allowed.

A serious concern, working with Joe, was that he'd fall asleep. He often worked 72 hours straight, and slept for 24. Heaven help us if we needed guidance while he snoozed.

The BIGGEST fear was that he'd suffer a blow to the head, and forget everything. We had no backup. YOU should plan for crashes.

One untimely whack on Joe's skull, and I might still be waiting for a relief driver at a truck stop in Guymon, Okla. My wife often hums "If I had a hammer..."

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



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## GAO audit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

state vehicle registration departments are so limited, the PRISM system was developed to give officials a leg up.

### Tough to measure

But as the GAO audit found, the program's effectiveness is difficult to measure, and appears to be accomplishing its goals only on a limited basis. PRISM, it seems, is like many FMCSA initiatives: under funded, under utilized and underwhelming.

The problems and challenges — identified by the GAO audit — to making the program more effective are numerous and in some cases complex.

For example, the program currently is voluntary. As a result, only half the states have implemented PRISM to the point where they can automatically identify out-of-service operators and then deny, suspend or revoke their vehicle registrations.

Consequently, PRISM's success is undercut because the other 25 states aren't fully utilizing the system and these states include those that have the highest number of registered commercial vehicles.

According to some experts, there is anecdotal evidence that rogue operators game the system by registering in those states, plus the District of Columbia, that aren't using PRISM. There is a belief that some of these states have become refuges for out-service carriers.

### Benefits/drawbacks

The audit said there would be benefits to making the system mandatory for states. For example, it could lead to speedier national implementation. However, there also are draw backs. It could cost zillions of dollars for some states to adapt their information systems to make PRISM work.

Implementation, generally, has been a critical issue slowing the adoption of PRISM. It costs money for states to get on board, and PRISM is funded at around \$5 million annually — not much for a potentially 50-state program.

On average, it takes states more than three years to implement PRISM. In some states it has taken seven years and frequently legislation must be written and passed to allow PRISM, plus contractors hired to help with the program's technical components. Like most things involving the federal government, nothing is easy.

Meanwhile, GAO said the FMCSA should measure the program's effectiveness after enough

## Agency scolded

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

has determined that operators that fail to contact chartering parties and offer service have acted in bad faith and removed them from the Registered Charter Provider list (for up to three years).

Operators removed from the Registered Charter Provider list not only cease receiving charter notices, they no longer have standing with the FTA and are precluded from seeking advisory opinions from the FTA or filing charter service complaints.

"We recommend operators contact the chartering parties in these notices immediately," said Ken Presley, UMA vice president of industry relations, "It is also wise to document every attempt, every conversation and retain proposals.

"It appears at least a few transits are just waiting for an operator to make a mistake so they can have them eliminated from the list," said Presley.

Under the federal charter service rule, a private company has to notify a potential customer and provide it with a contract at least 14 business days before the date of the planned charter. If it fails to do so, the public transit agency can

seek an exception and possibly provide the service.

Heritage maintained it was unable to contact the resort because Ojai Trolley provided an incorrect telephone number in its charter notice and did not include the firm's e-mail address, the last name of the person who requested the charter, or a full street address for the resort.

It said the telephone number Ojai Trolley provided was answered by a recording with the name of an individual and that a message left on the line was never returned.

In his ruling, Biehl found the transit agency did, in fact, provide the carrier with erroneous and incomplete information, and he cleared Heritage of the complaint. "Because the charter request form was incomplete, FTA cannot find bad faith," he said.

Heritage owner Rob Jefferson welcomed the decision, saying he hopes it will lead to Ojai Trolley giving up what he says has been a long-time practice of providing shuttle services without following the charter rule.

"They seem to think they are above the law and can do whatever they want," he said.

Jefferson pointed out that the transit agency, which advertises

charter services on its website, has six trolleys to operate a route system that requires only two. "Now what does that tell you?" he asked.

Additionally, he charged in his response to the bad-faith complaint that the lack of information provided by Ojai Trolley in the resort incident was nothing new, that the transit agency had done it before on other occasions.

Jefferson said the practice was "a coordinated effort between Ojai and several clients to rid the area of transportation that is not owned, operated or subsidized by the taxpayer as the rates charged by Ojai are far below market rates charged by the private sector."

To back up his claims, he said when he finally was able to speak with representatives of the resort, he was told they were not going to change vendors and were not interested in doing business with him.

However, just days after the FTA ruling was issued, he said they contacted him and indicated he might be able to do charter work for them in the future.

"Now I'm looking for a trolley to buy for our business," he said.

Ojai Trolley operations supervisor Drew Lurie, who acknowledged he mistakenly listed some wrong and incomplete informa-

tion on the charter notice for the resort charter, said the long-time dispute over his community's use of trolleys for charter work has been a blow to everyone involved.

"It has been a triple loss," he asserted, adding that his agency has lost revenue, private carriers that wanted to do the charters have not gotten any new business because the customers have not hired them, and the customers have not been able to hire any trolleys for their activities.

The use of trolleys by public transit agencies has long been a red flag for private carriers because they generally are more suited for charters, such as parties, weddings, business outings and sports events, than regular-route service.

Ken Presley, vice president of the United Motorcoach Association, said their use on regular transit routes appears to be declining throughout the country, although they still are used in a few communities like Key West, Fla., and Mobile, Ala., as well as Ojai.

"While we certainly do not want any further issues with the City of Ojai Transit, we are considering reviewing the (agency's) grant applications to make certain the service was properly represented to the FTA," he said.

## Transit cooperation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Manager Janice M. Baroody.

She said her decision was triggered by a mistake the raceway made in its fan magazine published ahead of the May 9 race. In it, track officials announced that Pee Dee would be providing hotel shuttles for the race at a cost of \$5 for a one-way trip.

"I don't know where they got the information, but it was wrong," she said.

The announcement caught the eye of Bob Garrett, owner of Sunshine Travel Express in nearby Lancaster, who had been looking for a way to possibly take over the service that Pee Dee had been providing in recent years.

He complained to Ken Presley, vice president of the United Motorcoach Association, who promptly telephoned Baroody and learned that the announcement in the magazine was wrong.

Baroody explained that Pee

Dee provided the service in the past by simply extending the operating hours of an existing route that included most of the hotels and the race track, opening it up to everyone and charging its regular \$3 fare.

Under the charter rule, transit agencies legally may extend regular routes for such service as long as it is an open-door operation and the fare is not increased.

Although Baroody was planning to again provide the same service for this year's race, she had second thoughts because of the announcement of the \$5 shuttle rides.

"I didn't want someone to file a charter complaint against us so I figured it would be better for us not to do it," she said, noting that it was never much of a money maker because her drivers had to be paid overtime.

Although race day was less than two weeks away, Garrett jumped at the opportunity and brought in friendly competitor Sandra Haigler of Lancaster Trail-

ways to help.

Baroody pitched in, too. She arranged for a supervisor to give the two private operators a personal tour of the 13-mile shuttle route to the race track, posted a notice of the service on the Pee Dee website and had her staff forward all public inquires about the service to the private companies.

"It's our community and we wanted to help provide service to our community," she emphasized.

The service also got an assist from the Florence Convention and Visitors Bureau, which helped set up a shuttle stop at the city's convention center parking lot and made sure the hotels and their guests were aware of the new shuttle service.

The two private operators said the assistance they received — especially from Pee Dee — was key to the success of the operation, which ran smoothly and drew more than 800 riders.

"Without their help we would have had a very difficult time with

the transition," noted Garrett.

Haigler singled out Baroody for her cooperation, pointing out that she and her team went above and beyond in helping make the shuttle service a success.

"This is a prime example of how a transit authority and the private sector can and should be willing to help one another," she said.

Baroody said she enjoyed working with the two private operators and is hopeful she can send more business their way in the future.

Meantime, Garrett and Haigler already are looking forward to next year's race when they will have much more time to prepare. In their sights are expanding the service to other hotels that were not on the route this year and adjusting the price upward from the \$5 that they agreed to charge this year because of the erroneous announcement made by the raceway.

"If we have the opportunity to do it again next year, we'll tweak it here and there," said Haigler.

states have implemented the program to the point where they can keep out-of-service carriers off the road.

### No fix soon

Should FMCSA follow that

recommendation, it likely will mean years and years will roll by before the program achieves any sort of meaningful effectiveness and hundreds of rogue motor carriers will continue operating unchallenged.

That is probably not what members of Congress had in mind when they asked for the audit.

A little perspective: The FMCSA/USDOT has 716,000 interstate carriers registered and 80 percent of these carriers operate

one to six vehicles.

In fiscal 2008, the agency ordered 6,707 carriers out of service. Those out-of-service orders largely resulted from compliance reviews on just over 2.5 percent of carriers, or 18,400, in fiscal '08.

# Bus and Coach Int'l being sold to Vancouver merchant bank

VANCOUVER, B.C. — Skana Capital Corp., a Vancouver-based merchant bank, is acquiring Bus and Coach International, which produces and sells BCI Falcon motorcoaches, in a share deal with an announced value of roughly \$13.3 million.

The sale appears designed to give BCI access to additional capital, as well as restructure its debt.

Under the transaction, Skana will issue roughly 51.2 million shares in exchange for 100 percent ownership of BCI, which is based in Jennings, Kan., and has sales/service outlets in Las Vegas, Orlando and Southern California.

BCI was formed earlier in this decade by brothers Phillip and David Oldridge, and a group of investors, to build and sell full-size motorcoaches.

Phillip Oldridge, a former motorcoach operator, is BCI's chief executive and president, and holds 52 percent of the outstanding stock.

GY General Holdings LLC, a Nevada investment company holds 40 percent of the shares of BCI. GY is managed by Pronaia Capital Partners, a private equity management firm founded and headed by David M. Senior and headquartered in Salt Lake City. Senior is chairman of BCI.

David Oldridge is BCI's technical guru and the man largely

responsible for developing the BCI Falcon 45, the first U.S. coach to offer passenger seat belts and collision avoidance radar as standard equipment.

Following completion of the deal, BCI will get two seats on the seven-member Skana board. Phillip Oldridge and Senior have been nominated to fill seats being vacated by two Skana directors.

For Skana, the BCI deal marks a significant diversification. Previously, most of its activities focused on investing in "undervalued opportunities" in natural resource- and energy-based enterprises.

Skana said the addition of Oldridge and Senior will strengthen its board "with appropriate expertise, recognizing the diversification of its portfolio through the BCI

investment."

Management of BCI remains unchanged. The deal will increase the number of Skana shares to 103 million and give BCI a 49.5 percent stake in Skana.

On closing, BCI will have debt of not more than \$21.5 million (U.S.) held by Phillip Oldridge, GY, and their associates. The deal calls for \$9.5 million of the debt to

be exchanged for promissory notes of SKANA, secured by inventory and work in progress. The remaining \$12 million in debt is to be paid down by Skana.

Trading in Skana's shares has been halted since a few days before the deal was announced. The company's 52-week high is 85 cents and its 52-week low is 11 cents per share.

## Network event set for W.Va.

HARPERS FERRY, W.Va. — West Virginia will play host to the 26th annual Network Invitational 100 of the National Motorcoach Network.

The event will be July 30-Aug. 2 at the Quality Hotel and Conference Center in Harpers Ferry.

This year's gathering marks the first time the network has held a meeting in West Virginia. Harpers Ferry is centrally located and the host property is 30 minutes from Washington's Dulles International Airport.

This year, Harpers Ferry is marking the Sesquicentennial (150 years) Commemoration of John Brown's Raid — on the community's old federal arsenal — in an attempt to free slaves.

The National Motorcoach Network Invitational 100 is limited to 100 participants, and provides an opportunity for travel industry and associate suppliers to meet informally with motorcoach charter-and-tour operators.

For registration information, call (888) 733-5287 or go to [www.motorcoach.com](http://www.motorcoach.com). E-mail registration requests to [nnm@motorcoach.com](mailto:nnm@motorcoach.com).

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# Competition among curbside operators heats up in NE, East

BOSTON — The competition among curbside and conventional intercity coach operators in the East and Northeast got a little hairier last month with megabus.com switching to an all double-decker fleet for its Boston to New York City runs and BoltBus expanding into Baltimore.

megabus.com, a division of CoachUSA, announced at a mid-month news conference here that its Boston-to-New York line will exclusively use Van Hool TD925 double-deck coaches out of Bos-

ton's Back Bay Station. It currently has 11 daily New York City arrivals and departures.

Additionally, megabus revealed it will convert its entire fleet to double-decker coaches.

Since inaugurating the Boston-New York City service a year ago, megabus says it has transported more than 400,000 passengers between the cities, and growing demand necessitated switching to the 81-seat coaches.

Dale Moser, CEO of megabus, told a Boston newspaper the dou-

ble-decker buses make sense both economically and environmentally. The coaches carry 25 more people than a conventional bus, meaning the company can handle more passengers without running more buses or hiring more drivers. Switching to an all double-decker fleet for the Boston-NYC runs means megabus added 275 more seats with the same number of coaches.

At the same time, megabus moved its Boston base to Back Bay Station because the 13-foot double-deck coaches were too high to use Boston's South Station, where most Boston-area line-run companies congregate.

However, megabus executives say Back Bay Station shares many of South Station's advantages, such as access to Massachusetts Bay

Transit Authority buses, Amtrak and commuter rail, with the added benefit of proximity to the large Boston-area student population that makes up a significant part of megabus' clientele.

Dennis Lyons, vice president of DATCO Inc, the New England-based carrier that partners with megabus.com on the Boston/New York route, said "we could never have done this without the help of the MBTA.

"It's a textbook example of what can be done when the public and private sectors work together to serve the public.

"Mark Boyle (MBTA assistant general manager for development) and his people helped us make this an extraordinarily convenient intermodal terminal," Lyons added.

Meanwhile, BoltBus, which is

owned by Greyhound Lines and Peter Pan Bus Lines, is selling out all its seats between New York and Boston, Peter Pan executive vice president Robert J. Schwarz told a Boston publication.

"I don't think we've even come close to tapping out the market," he said.

Earlier last month, BoltBus expanded service to Baltimore, challenging the dominance of megabus' 38 trips a day between Baltimore and New York City.

Boltbus kicked off its Baltimore service with \$1 fares for four days on all seats on the seven daily round trips between the two cities..

megabus plans to convert its entire fleet, which serves the Midwest, Northeast and East, to the Van Hool double-deckers by September.

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## Ruling in infamous '99 crash upheld

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. Supreme Court has let stand a New Orleans judge's ruling that the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development shares half the blame for the 1999 Mother's Day bus crash that killed 22 senior citizens and injured 19 others on their way to a Mississippi Gulf Coast casino.

The high court denied the state agency's request to review and overturn Civil District Judge Rosemary Ledet's apportionment of fault for the infamous crash.

The bus, owned by Custom Bus Charters, ran off the road on

Interstate 610 near New Orleans, plowed through a guardrail and landed nose-first against an embankment.

Early in 2007, Judge Ledet concluded that because the I-610 guardrails were inadequate, the highway department was as much to blame for the fatal accident as driver Frank Bedell, whom she found negligent.

Bedell, 46, a drug user in chronically poor health, died of a heart-related ailment three months after the crash.

Attorneys for the state highway department went to the federal

court after the Louisiana 4th Circuit Court of Appeal last summer upheld Ledet's decision, and in November the Louisiana Supreme Court declined to weigh in on the matter. (See Aug. 1 and Dec. 1, 2008 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Attorney Daniel Becnel, one of the plaintiff attorneys, said the U.S. Supreme Court action settles the question of liability in the case, which now returns to Ledet to determine how much money should be awarded from the state and its insurers in each of 38 lawsuits filed in connection with the crash.

## Setra links promotion to Mercedes

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Looking to boost spring and summer sales, Daimler Buses North America announced it's offering a two-year lease on a Mercedes-Benz auto to purchasers of new and used Setra S 417 motorcoaches.

The 2009 Spring/Summer Sales Promotion will provide customers purchasing at least five new or pre-owned Setra S 417 motorcoaches the opportunity to receive a complimentary 24-month lease on a Mercedes S550 sedan.

"In these economic conditions we feel it is important to remind operators that Setra is part of the

broader Daimler family," said Tom Chezem, vice president of motorcoach sales for Daimler Buses North America. "We want customers to understand that Setra is not only part of the world's leader in bus and coach production, but also part of the leading luxury car brand in the market."

The promotion runs through July 31. All deliveries must take place by August 31. Details and restrictions are available from Setra sales executives.

Separately, Daimler Buses North America announced it has sold its first three Sprinter shuttle

buses in Canada.

Charter Bus Lines of British Columbia purchased the Sprinters during the shuttle's official Canadian launch during the 2009 Ontario Transportation Expo in Toronto.

"Not every group or tour is the right fit for a 56-passenger motorcoach and this is where the Sprinter shuttle bus meets their needs," said Sheldon Eggen, president of Charter Bus Lines.

Delta, B.C.-based Charter Bus Lines is the largest independent, privately-owned motorcoach operator in British Columbia and has been in operation for 60 years.

## BusJunction

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

cities and will find users an average ticket price of \$25. The most popular destinations are Washington, Philadelphia, New York City and Boston.

Before buying tickets, users can see which routes have amenities

like Wi-Fi and power outlets.

The company is steering clear of lesser-known mom-and-pop operations that might not offer reliable service, said Keller. Still, the companies it does track offer upwards of 30,000 travel possibilities.

"We wanted to get the bus lines that offer the most amenities, so that's the ones we're focusing on,"

said Keller. "There are a handful of (lines) that offer no amenities. There are certain bus lines that have questionable reputations. We're trying to steer our passengers away from those lines just to serve them better."

Given the economy, BusJunction has come along at an appropriate time.

# Revenue dips at Greyhound but profitability sustained

ABERDEEN, Scotland — The volatile national economy wasn't kind to Greyhound Lines during the six months ended March 31, reducing revenue and forcing a number of cost-cutting measures, including job eliminations, cutbacks in service and consolidation of offices and functions.

Aberdeen-based FirstGroup PLC, which owns Greyhound, along with First Student and First Transit in the U.S. and Canada, reported last month that Greyhound had total revenue of \$1.11 billion for the year ended March 31, and operating profit of \$91.7 million.

Comparable figures for fiscal 2008 are not available because of the timing of FirstGroup's purchase of Greyhound and its then-parent company, Laidlaw International.

However, FirstGroup said Greyhound revenues began slumping during the third quarter of last year as the national recession deepened. To mitigate the impact on Greyhound profitability, company managers reduced Greyhound mileage in the U.S. by 7.6 percent and by 3.5 percent in Canada where regulatory approval is required before routes can be changed or cut.

"These cost actions have maintained revenue per mile and further reductions are planned as appropriate," FirstGroup said as it released its corporate financial results for fiscal 2009.

In addition to the route cutbacks, a number of Greyhound support operations are being moved from its headquarters in Dallas to Cincinnati, where FirstGroup maintains its North American base.

"As a result of the Greyhound merger with FirstGroup America, several of our departments have been consolidated in order to maximize efficiency and reduce costs," a Greyhound spokesman said.

## People

Mark Stenz has been appointed Midwest sales manager for Sprinter shuttle buses. "Mark brings a tremendous level of experience and professionalism to our sales team," said Patrick Scully, chief commercial officer for Daimler Buses North America.



Mark Stenz

Stenz joins Daimler Buses with more 30 years in the coach and bus industry. Most recently he was with Prevost Car. E-mail him at [mark.stenz@dcbusna.com](mailto:mark.stenz@dcbusna.com).

Greyhound is moving units that handle information technology, risk management and legal issues, with the possibility of accounting functions also going to Cincinnati, the spokesman said.

Greyhound employs more than 600 people at its downtown Dallas headquarters. The spokesman said the company remains "committed to remaining in Dallas at this time."

"We don't know at this time exactly how many employees will be going to Cincinnati because details of that plan are still being finalized," said another spokesperson.

Companywide, 1,100 Greyhound personnel are being let go as a result of the cost reduction program.

Additionally, efforts are being made to cut indirect costs and to

reduce agency commissions on ticket sales.

Meanwhile, FirstGroup said it was encouraged by the results of BoltBus, the curbside intercity service that Greyhound initiated last year.

After ordering 140 Prevost coaches in '08 to upgrade the Greyhound fleet and provide additional buses for Boltbus, FirstGroup said

it is "delaying any major capital expenditure programs while the economy remains weak."

FirstGroup's other U.S. units, First Student and First Transit, reported strong gains for fiscal 2008.

Corporatewide, FirstGroup revenue was up 31 percent during fiscal '09, while adjusted operating profit was 38 percent higher than fiscal '08.

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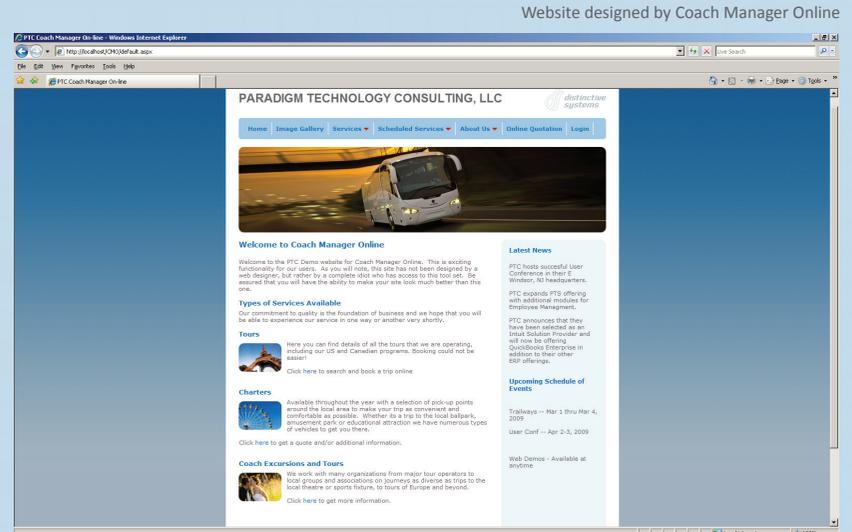
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