

# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

## New coach sales climb during 2014, led by public sector

Combined private- and public-sector sales of new MCI, Prevost, Setra, Van Hool and Volvo motorcoaches rose last year, paced by a double-digit increase in purchases by public transit agencies.

In a remarkable coincidence, private operators purchased exactly the same number of new coaches last year as they did in 2013. While the aggregate number was the same for both years, the mix of purchases

among the five brands shifted slightly.

Total North American deliveries of 45- and 40-foot monocoque models, including shells, by the five brands totaled 1,818 new motorcoaches last year.

That was an 8.9 percent increase from the 1,670 new 45- and 40-foot coaches, including shells, delivered by the same brands in 2013.

Last year's increase was entire-

ly due to increased buying by public transit agencies.

In 2014, public transit systems purchased 355 new 45- and 40-foot coaches, a 71.5 percent increase over 2013 purchases of 207 new coaches.

Private operators and coach converters purchased 1,463 new 45- and 40-foot models in both 2014 and 2013.

Last year, there were 1,373 new

45-foot coaches purchased privately, compared with 1,402 in 2013. However, twice as many 40-foot coaches — 20 — were purchased privately last year compared with the 10 purchased in 2013.

In addition, there were 70 coach shells sold last year, compared with 51 in 2013, a 37 percent increase.

Still, annual sales of new 45- and 40-foot models remain well below 2,000 units, a seemingly re-

ceding benchmark for the industry.

Sales in 2014 marked the sixth consecutive year new-coach deliveries in the U.S. and Canada have failed to approach 2,000 units. During the past 10 years, sales exceeded 2,000 new coaches during the years 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

The 2014/13 figures were compiled by the American Bus Association Foundation, which took over

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## Busing students on public transit proves a failure

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — Leaders of the contract school transportation industry say the failure of a controversial agreement allowing a public transit agency here to bus students proves that such arrangements are bad for taxpayers.

They say they hope fallout from the unsuccessful arrangement reverberates across the country and stops other federally funded transit agencies from unfairly trying to take school bus business away from the private sector.

"This great plan, this great experiment, crashed," said bus industry consultant Jim Seal. "It can hugely backfire and offers no advantage to anyone. The story here is that there is a real purpose for dedicated school bus service — it protects the children, the parents, the school and the public at large."

After a series of student fights, including a stabbing, the Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority (RGRTA) announced last month that it would not renew its contract with the Rochester City School District beyond the current school year.

The transit authority started busing 9,000 Rochester students in 2006, replacing routes that had been operated by private bus contractor Laidlaw Education Services, now known as First Student. The arrangement was controversial from the start, with private bus contractors arguing that it violated federal law banning taxpayer-funded transit agencies from competing with the private sector.

Seal, on behalf of Laidlaw, attempted to block the contract,

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The public-transit authority in Rochester, N.Y., riled the private school bus industry when it began using feder-

ally funded buses to transport students, an arrangement that eventually failed. See related story on page 17.

## House bill to block increased insurance limits advances

WASHINGTON — A bill that would block federal regulators from increasing the minimum liability insurance coverage required of motor carriers continues to move through the U.S. House of Representatives.

The House Appropriations Committee passed a \$55 billion transportation and housing spending bill that includes the insurance provision after opponents tried unsuccessfully to strip out that provi-

sion through amendments.

The full House is expected to consider the bill in early June.

The bill, which includes funding for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, would prohibit the agency from using any of the funding it receives to implement an increase in the minimum financial responsibility requirements on companies that transport passengers or property.

The FMCSA has proposed at least doubling the current \$5 million insurance limit, and there has been speculation that the limit could be raised to as high as \$20 million per motorcoach. Supporters say the increase is necessary to cover the increasing medical costs incurred by accident victims.

Opponents contend that the increase is unnecessary because only a fraction of insurance claims

have ever reached the current minimum liability amount.

The insurance issue is a primary focus of United Motorcoach Association lobbying efforts and was prominently discussed during the 2015 Capitol Hill Days in March.

UMA officials are encouraging members to contact their representatives because the bill still has to pass the House and the Senate. Opponents are expected to

continue their efforts to strip the insurance language from the bill.

UMA Vice President Ken Presley said that unless motorcoach operators are prepared for needless and substantial insurance premium increases, they should email their congressional representatives and ask them to support the bill.

"Congress is beginning to get a sense of what is actually going on at the FMCSA," Presley said.



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## Software to manage motorcoach companies continues to evolve

The ability to book a motorcoach tour from a mobile device, create customized operations reports, automatically track internal pricing or other changes to charter quotes, or be alerted to scheduled fleet maintenance — they're among capabilities operators increasingly expect from software that helps run their business.

Providers of tour, charter and maintenance software are responding with products and updates they say help motorcoach operators better manage their business.

"Software systems in general probably are going to do the basics

— they're going to allow you to send out a confirmation letter, they're going to allow you to assign vehicles and drivers and maybe even do invoicing and receipts of payments, etcetera — but most of the operators here in North America are looking for full solutions that do a heck of a lot more than that," said Don Greenglass, president of Distinctive Systems Inc., which continually updates its software.

"We're continually implementing newer technology within our core systems and mobile is a great example of that," he said of enhancements made within the last

year to the company's Tour Booking System software. "The customer-facing websites that our clients use for their customers to be able to see on the Web are mobile enhanced" if the operators are using the company's tour product to display tours on their sites. Customers also can book tours from their mobile devices.

### Google maps

Another enhancement has been integrating Google Maps for Work into Distinctive Systems' software. Through the company's Coach Manager system, dispatchers can

use the Google Maps to see live traffic updates, look at street views for roads that may be difficult for buses to navigate and communicate with customers if they see a better pick-up or drop-off location nearby, Greenglass said.

Google Maps also can be used for sales and pricing, he said. A client's itinerary can be loaded into the quoting section of software and Google Maps creates the route, travel times and mileage, both deadhead and loaded.

"Many of our clients are pricing a trip by hours or miles or a combination of the two, or which-

ever is higher," Greenglass said. "So within fractions of a second, I can price this trip for this client in a standardized way."

### Marketing assistance

Motorcoach operators also are interested in the software systems' marketing capabilities and the image their websites present, Greenglass said. Operators, for example, can automatically send pre-departure and follow-up emails to clients, he said, noting a follow-up email could thank the clients for their business and include a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ▶

## Cummins invests in natural-gas system, unveils engine

DALLAS — Cummins Inc. has increased its investment in natural-gas applications despite the recent drop in diesel prices, the engine maker announced during the annual Alternative Clean Transportation Expo here.

Cummins will invest an undisclosed amount in Agility Fuel Systems, which makes natural-gas fuel storage and delivery systems for heavy-duty trucks and buses.

Separately, Cummins West-

port, a joint venture between Cummins and Westport Innovations that makes natural-gas engines, unveiled a new 6.7-liter engine for school and shuttle bus, medium-duty truck and vocational applications.

Cummins and Agility said they will integrate their sales and after-market support and distribution networks.

"Our goal has always been to deliver a diesel-like experience to

the end user, making natural gas-powered vehicles as easy to operate and service as diesel vehicles," Agility CEO Barry Engle said. "By co-developing improved natural-gas solutions and utilizing the breadth of Cummins' service network, we believe we can accelerate the adoption of natural gas as a fuel for more vehicles, including heavy-duty trucks."

The new ISB6.7 G natural-gas engine, which is based on Cum-

mins' ISB6.7 diesel engine platform, is in field trials, with full production expected in mid-2016, Cummins Westport President Rob Neitzke said.

He said the engine will offer customers low emissions with diesel-like performance, reliability and durability, along with the ability to use either compressed or liquefied natural gas. It will be manufactured at Cummins' medium-duty engine plant in

Rocky Mount, N.C.

Neitzke acknowledged that lower diesel prices have caused sales of the company's primary natural-gas engine for heavy-duty trucking applications to remain flat from last year.

"There are some fleets that are on the fence with this fuel-price differential," he said. "We had some growth planned for this year, but based on the fuel price, it hasn't materialized."

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# THE DOCKET

## Converting to apportioned plates easy, efficient – for some

DISTRICT HEIGHTS, Md. — Marcia Milton, president and CEO of First Priority Trailways, says registering her vehicles under the International Registration Plan was easier than she thought and is saving her money.

That should come as music to the ears of interstate charter bus operators who must register their vehicles under IRP by Jan. 1.

That's when the 40-year IRP exemption granted to charter bus companies comes to an end and every motorcoach company that crosses state lines as part of its operation will have to purchase apportioned license plates under IRP. (See Feb. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Milton made the switch three

years ago.

"I thought it was relatively easy," Milton said. "I was thinking it was going to be worse than it was."

Her message to colleagues: "Go ahead and do it. Get through the first year and then you'll find out how easy it is."

One reason she made the change early was to ease management of her company's frequent trips into Washington, D.C. The district requires carriers without apportioned plates to buy \$50 trip permits that last about a week, Milton said.

"It was costing a whole lot of money," she said of the constant permit purchases, which she had to add to trip costs. There also was

the added worry that permits were on the buses, or else face a \$500 fine.

With apportioned plates, those hassles, worries and costs are gone.

Under IRP, she uses her International Fuel Tax Association records to calculate mileage traveled per state, sends that to the motor vehicle office in which her buses are registered — in this case Maryland — and taxes are calculated based on IFTA data.

Before Milton transitioned to IRP, she paid for tag renewals whenever they expired for her 17 vehicles, which include 14 motorcoaches and three minibuses.

"So with having so many different vehicles, literally I could do

it every month," she said. "But now with this, you do it all at one time and you don't have to do it again for another year. All your expenses are at one time" for all states.

Milton said she's saving 30 to 40 percent in registration costs per vehicle, per year, under IRP. She said that overall, IRP has been a good change for her.

Under the full reciprocity plan of IRP, a bus and truck operator registering under IRP will automatically be qualified every year — for purposes of vehicle registration — to operate in the 48 contiguous states, the District of Columbia and all Canadian provinces.

Not all operators should anticipate a similar outcome when converting their fleet to apportioned

tags. Depending on an operator's current base state fees and the states they intend to travel in, many, if not most operators will likely see an increase in their license and registration fees.

Operators can find an online calculator to estimate fees at the IRP website, <http://IRPonline.org>. Operators should first consider which vehicles in their fleet require apportioned tags. It is unlikely all vehicles will require apportioned tags as some vehicles will only operate in local or intra-state operations.



Marcia Milton

## Ready or not, Roadcheck 2015 kicks off first week of June

GREENBELT, Md. — This is your final warning: Roadcheck is here.

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

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

Last year, the out-of-service rate for motorcoaches increased

for the first time in seven years. (See Sept. 15, 2014, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

### Fewer inspections

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

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

The out-of-service rate for bus and motorcoach drivers during last year's Roadcheck also moved higher, to 3.9 percent. In 2013, the driver out-of-service rate was 3.1

percent and in 2012 is was 2.5 percent.

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

Experts say the first line of defense during a Roadcheck check is drivers. Drivers should be reminded to keep a keen eye on their paperwork.

### Your papers please...

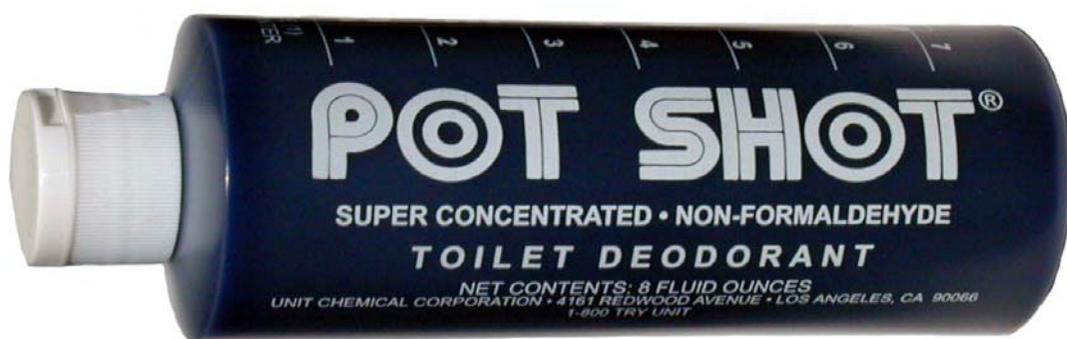
"It's not so much maintenance anymore; they're getting nailed for paperwork," says one safety specialist.

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

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

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

Roadcheck has been around for 27 years.



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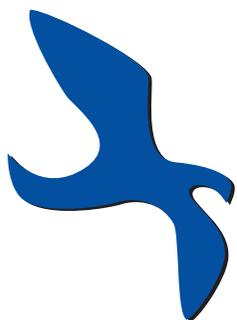
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# DOT to audit FMCSA's oversight of high-risk carriers

WASHINGTON — It seems that barely a week goes by lately without some politician or government agency trying to crack down on the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

This time it is the Department of Transportation's Office of the Inspector General.

Concerns over the timeliness

and effectiveness of the FMCSA's reviews of high-risk carriers led the Inspector General to launch of an audit of the agency.

The audit, announced in a memo from the Inspector General last month, comes two years after a National Transportation Safety Board report found that the FMCSA failed to adequately in-

vestigate four high-risk motor carriers subsequently involved in crashes that resulted in 25 fatalities.

"The investigations revealed that FMCSA conducted safety reviews of these motor carriers prior to their crashes, one carrier only five days before, yet did not uncover or act on certain preexisting safety deficiencies until after the crashes," the memo said.

The memo also cited a motor carrier with a history of violations

that was involved in a fatal crash in Illinois, leading Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., to request that the DOT look into the case.

"The motor carrier had been flagged as high-risk in FMCSA's system, but an investigation was not conducted," the IG memo said. "Following the 2014 crash, Sen. Dick Durbin requested that we audit FMCSA's investigative practices for high-risk motor carriers."

Earlier this year, appropriations legislation also directed the DOT to

review FMCSA's compliance review process.

The Inspector General's memo said that "high-profile crashes and investigations have raised concerns about the timeliness and effectiveness of FMCSA's reviews" of motor carriers that pose a greater crash risk.

"Accordingly, our audit objective is to assess FMCSA's processes for ensuring that reviews of motor carriers flagged for investigation are timely and adequate."

## Agency proposes streamlined diabetes exemption for drivers

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has proposed that drivers with controlled diabetes be permitted to operate interstate commercial motor vehicles without obtaining a medical exemption from the agency.

According to a notice of proposed rulemaking published last month in the *Federal Register*, drivers with insulin-treated diabetes mellitus (ITDM) would be allowed to obtain a Medical Examiner's Certificate at least annually if their treating clinician provides documentation to the medical examiner that the condition is "stable and well-controlled."

Currently, drivers with ITDM

must obtain an FMCSA exemption that has to be renewed every two years.

The FMCSA said the new procedure would "adequately ensure that drivers with ITDM manage the condition so that it is stable and well-controlled, and that such a regulatory provision creates a clearer, equally effective and more consistent framework than a program based entirely on exemptions."

The agency added that its own evidence reports "indicate that drivers with ITDM are as safe as other drivers when their condition is well-controlled."

Comments on the proposed rule can be submitted on or before July 6 at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov).

## Santa Barbara considers curbing tour bus parking

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — This seaside Southern California city is considering limiting parking for tour buses and banning them from using municipal bus stops throughout the city.

Visiting tour buses currently are allowed use the city's bus and shuttle stops, which are created for the Metropolitan Transit District.

But when they use them for parking, particularly along Cabrillo Boulevard next to the beach, it can cause problems when MTD buses and shuttles need to load and unload passen-

gers, transportation engineer Derrick Bailey said during a city Ordinance Committee meeting last month.

That has led city officials to consider redefining which buses can use the MTD bus and shuttle stops. Bailey said the city would work with commuter companies and local tourism companies to give them parking access.

As part of the proposed ordinance changes, Santa Barbara may put time limits on waterfront tour bus parking, with overflow parking on a nearby street after passengers unload. Bailey said

there is high demand for curb space in the city's Funk Zone, a popular tourist and cultural area that includes artisan shops, art galleries, hip eateries, award-winning microbreweries and a craft distillery.

MTD Executive Director Jerry Estrada said tour bus parking in bus spots can create a problem, and the agency supports the proposed changes.

The Ordinance Committee voted to forward the proposal to the Santa Barbara City Council, which will consider adopting the changes at an upcoming meeting.

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# We can't afford to back down from infrastructure investments

By Rep. Lou Barletta

In Pennsylvania, we have some of the most run-down roads and bridges in the country. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, 22 percent of our state's roads have unacceptable pavement quality and 43 percent of our bridges are functionally obsolete or structurally deficient.

Earlier this month, I visited the Greenfield Bridge, where another bridge had to be built underneath to protect drivers from debris falling from Greenfield's crumbling infrastructure.

Both Republicans and Democrats agree that at the federal level, we have a constitutional responsibility to maintain our national transportation infrastructure system and find a sustainable way to pay for it.

The Highway Trust Fund is es-

timated to go bankrupt this summer, unless Congress acts now. Unfortunately, this is not the first time this fund has almost run dry. Since 2008, we have made six transfers — in total more than \$60 billion — to the Highway Trust Fund from the General Fund, which is paid for by tax dollars and borrowing money from foreign countries such as China.

This is not sustainable or fiscally responsible. We need a better, more affordable solution.

I have been working on leveraging private-sector savings on major infrastructure projects through public-private partnerships. My colleagues in the House and Senate are starting to talk about ideas to shore up the Highway Trust Fund by repatriating funds from overseas, increasing tolls on our highways, increasing taxes on heavy-duty commercial

vehicles, applying the gas tax to alternative fuels, and raising revenue from oil and gas royalties on federal lands.

My constituents sent me to Congress to implement real solutions, not to just talk about ideas. Therefore, I am proud to support Ohio Republican Rep. James B. Renacci's Bridge to Sustainable Infrastructure Act. This common-sense legislation would create a bipartisan, bicameral committee to force Congress to fix the Highway Trust Fund and provide 10 years of investment in our roads and bridges. All options are on the table. If, and only if, Congress fails to develop a solution, the bill requires modifications to the gas and diesel taxes to make up for the shortfalls in the Highway Trust Fund.

The gas and diesel taxes are the sole funding source for the Highway Trust Fund, but they

haven't been adjusted for more than 20 years and are not indexed for inflation. The costs of building and maintaining our roads and bridges have soared, but the funding source for these projects has stayed the same. Since 1993, the number of cars and trucks on our roads has increased and, at the same time, their fuel efficiency improved — meaning more wear and tear, but less money to repair. Clearly, times have changed. With that being said, I have very real concerns that simply increasing the gas tax would be like betting on a dying horse.

Unfortunately, time is ticking. Congress must act now to pay for the infrastructure investment our constituents need. Today, we can ship our goods faster than anyone else anywhere in the world. We need a strong infrastructure system to maintain the competitive trans-

portation advantages that Pennsylvania and our country have over other nations. But those other nations are actively investing in their infrastructure systems to chip away at our competitive advantages. If we don't take immediate steps to prevent our nation's infrastructure system from crumbling, every day Americans will continue to lose money, jobs, and most importantly, their lives. I'm committed to a long-term highway bill to make our highways as safe and efficient as possible.

*Rep. Lou Barletta, R-Pa., chairs the House Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management Subcommittee. This op-ed first ran in Roll Call.*



Rep. Lou Barletta

## Say 'thank you' to good employees with words, not dollars

A recent survey of U.S. employees reveals that employers can be doing more than increasing salaries and providing benefits and professional development opportunities to keep good workers.

Two simple words—"thank you"—could be the difference between a happy employee and one with a foot already out the door, according to The Workforce Institute at Kronos Incorporated, which bases the advice on results of an online survey of more than 850 U.S. employees. The survey was commissioned by the Institute and conducted in February by Harris Poll.

Noting that the intent of the survey was to explore the roots of day-to-day happiness in the workplace, Kronos reports that 61 percent of employees have thought about searching for a new job in the past

year, and 26 percent thought about it within the past week.

Focusing on the 61 percent that contemplated jumping ship in the past year, the survey found that 59 percent of them either "do not feel appreciated" or said they feel "somewhat appreciated" at work. Only 11 percent feel "very appreciated."

### Pay not the answer

According to Kronos, pay raises don't always boost appreciation ratings, and if they do, they're quickly forgotten. Nearly a quarter — 24 percent — of those who ever received a pay raise said it did not improve their motivation or general feelings of appreciation at work. Some 40 percent said a past pay raise improved their motivation or general feelings of appreciation for

six months or less; 30 percent put the effect at a mere month or less.

Contrast those numbers against the power of 'thank you' — or more specifically, a thank you from a direct manager.

When asked what gives them a high sense of satisfaction at work, employees said receiving a "thank you" from their direct manager (55 percent) nearly doubled the impact of public recognition of a job well done (28 percent), even if this recognition is tied to rewards such as a gift card or company award.

Getting positive feedback from fellow employees at all levels gave the highest sense of satisfaction, with 70 percent of employees saying it boosts their level of satisfaction with work. Additional tips:

- Private, one-on-one communication is preferred over receiving

positive recognition with others present or copied on a group email (59 percent vs. 26 percent).

- Sixty-one percent prefer verbal recognition (either privately or in front of a group) over electronic communication such as email (24 percent) when receiving positive feedback.

- While positive performance feedback from direct managers and co-workers both provide satisfaction, only 39 percent of adult workers say positive feedback from their leadership team/executives does the same.

- Co-worker relationships are the No. 1 thing that employees who had a previous job miss most about the most recent job they left (32 percent), beating out company benefits (22 percent), unique perks (20 percent), and relation-

ship with their previous boss (16 percent).

### Feeling appreciated

Joyce Maroney, director of The Workforce Institute at Kronos, offers this advice in a statement about the survey: "Acknowledging employees' efforts motivates and inspires much more than many people realize. It's also easy to do and doesn't cost a thing.

"This employee appreciation study shows that all of us, from part-time workers to senior leaders, play a role in how much our co-workers feel appreciated at work. Fostering a culture of appreciation could be the simple, secret ingredient to higher employee engagement."

*This article was published on March 15 at carriermanagement.com.*

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## Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

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# Bus fires are more like heart attacks than appendicitis

By Dave Millhouser

I was wrong — but that isn't unusual.

On occasion I've likened bus fires to appendectomies. The passengers and the appendix are always extricated dramatically at the last possible moment — disaster narrowly averted — according to whomever is telling the story.

My point was that bus fires weren't as fast, or dangerous, as the breathless media made them appear. Burning buses made great video, and the passengers got to watch comfortably from a safe distance. My concerns had more to do with preventing or mitigating "thermal events" than worrying about injuries.

Other than the tragedy following Hurricane Rita, where a lethal mix of disabled passengers and oxygen tanks turned a brake fire into a catastrophe, I believe the last death in a motorcoach fire was in the 1950's when a gasoline-powered bus was hit head-on and burst into flames.

On May 11 a Great Big Busline coach bound for Boston on the Massachusetts Turnpike caught fire, and then exploded. A passing

car warned the bus driver that the coach was trailing flames, and she managed to pull over and get the passengers off before an explosion in the cabin blew out all the windows and torched the coach.

## Lessons learned

The cause of this explosive fire is unknown at this writing, but already there are a couple of lessons here.

There have been a number of coach fires on the Massachusetts Turnpike — remember all the fun we had at the expense of the Chinatown carriers? Maybe it's the road?

Nah. One lesson is that when you're on a highway it can take a long time for help to arrive. When problems turn up, drivers need to assume that they're on their own. Save the customers first, then worry about the fire.

Another consideration is the presence of disabled or infirm passengers. We need to act quickly any time there's a hint of fire. But golly gee whiz, if some of our customers are wheelchair bound or frail, speed (and planning) are crucial.

One unforeseen consequence

of escalating Environmental Protection Agency demands is the fact that modern engine compartments are packed tightly with hot components. Ambient temperatures are up, and there are additional potential sources of ignition.

Fire detection and suppression and tire-monitoring systems need to be maintained, and engines periodically steam cleaned.

The day after the 9/11 attack in New York, a bunch of us were retrieving buses abandoned at the Port Authority Terminal. We got them all running and were about to start through the Lincoln Tunnel when a policeman said, "Don't you think you should check the luggage bays?" Good thinking. Who knew if a bad guy had planted a bomb?

## What are you carrying?

Whether their buses are carrying passenger luggage or freight in the under-floor compartments, companies and drivers bear responsibility for anything that might create or contribute to a fire.

There are regulations about what can be carried, and I'm not sure we pay as much attention as we should.

Bear in mind that stored oxygen tanks contributed to the Rita inferno. Lots of seemingly innocuous items may be hazardous materials.

This recent fire seems to have started in the engine compartment, but a substantial percentage of "thermal events" are caused by brake and tire failures. The drive axle (which conveniently has dual tires and the parking brakes) is right next to the luggage bay. What is stored there does matter.

The most troubling aspect of the video ([www.necn.com/news/new-england/Bus-Catches-Fire-on-Mass-Pike-303326791.html](http://www.necn.com/news/new-england/Bus-Catches-Fire-on-Mass-Pike-303326791.html)) of this fire is that eight or nine minutes after the bus pulled over, there was an explosion that started in the far rear of the passenger cabin and blew orange flame all the way out the entrance door, knocking the side glass to the road. The commentator called it "minor," but best guess is that if you were in the coach you'd have been seriously hurt.

In ye bad olde days we sometimes sprayed "starting ether" in the open window of a Scenicruiser while our buddy was repairing seats. About the time he smelled

the ether, we'd torch it off, and there would be a satisfying "whoomp" accompanied by bright orange flame and creative cursing. A bad idea, and we were lucky we never hurt anyone.

I'm old and have hung around buses for a long time, as the previous paragraph proves. I've done some dumb stuff. I'd always assumed there was a lot that could burn in a bus, but nothing that exploded. I've never seen the interior of a coach blow up like the one on the Masspike. We really need to know what happened.

Until we do, and make sure it doesn't happen again, my opinion has changed dramatically. There's no time for dallying or gathering possessions. Get the passengers off quickly and to a safe place. A bus fire is much more like a heart attack than appendicitis.

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



Dave Millhouser

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# Stanford tour bus program sharply reduces visits

PALO ALTO, Calif. — Stanford University, the academic heart of Silicon Valley and possibly the most-visited university in the western U.S., reports mixed success with the strict tour bus policies it adopted just over a year ago.

The program includes a \$200 per hour bus fee, a mandatory reservation system with an exacting cancellation policy, blackout visitation dates and limits on the number of buses that can arrive hourly.

The policies are believed to be some of the most stringent adopted by a university to control on-campus access by bus tours and large groups.

The Palo Alto institution, renowned as the cradle of Google, Yahoo! and other high-tech companies, adopted the rules following “a dramatic increase” in tour bus visits to the campus.

A study, conducted about two years ago, showed the number of buses bringing visitors to the campus had doubled in 18 months. More than 50 buses per day visited the campus between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., when the census was conducted, with many more arriving in the early morning and evening hours.

On some days, more than 10 buses arrived within a single hour, typically in the morning.

The Stanford Tour Bus Protocol adopted just over a year ago was designed “to accommodate Stanford’s many visitors while assuring that the campus community is able to conduct daily activities without disruption, as well as to ensure traffic safety and the safety

of visitors on Stanford’s private property,” the university Department of Public Safety said when it announced the program.

Under the tour bus program, commercial tour operators and bus companies are required to register with university Parking & Transportation Services within three days of their arrival to receive a confirmation number for a time slot between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. No more than three buses are permitted to arrive per hour.

Initially, the requirements applied to third-party commercial tour operators bringing groups of nine or more tourists to the campus via bus, as well as large tourist vans.

School groups and other groups that have made prior arrangements through Stanford are not required to purchase parking permits. Campus tours specifically for prospective students and their families continue to be operated by the university Visitor Center under a separate program.

Since the tour bus program went into effect, it has been modified to include small vans.

“We have done some fine turning, including removal of the eight-person-or-less exception to the policy,” Lisa Kwiatkowski, marketing manager for Stanford University Parking & Transportation Services, told *Bus & Motorcoach News*. “We now require a charge of \$100 per van per hour regardless of size.”

Asked whether the program was accomplishing the university

goal of reducing (non-prospective student/parent) tour bus traffic, Kwiatkowski said, “We have made significant progress. There is still more we need to do to address tour bus companies that try to circumvent the reservation system to avoid paying the fee.”

Still, the university is meeting its goal of no more than three tour buses per hour arriving on campus, and the average number of tour groups visiting the campus has dropped sharply.

Kwiatkowski said the number of groups varies by season, but she estimates an average of approximately nine to 10 tour groups a day are visiting the campus.

“We see the highest reservations during the summer,” she said. “From June to August, reservations are sold out almost every weekday (three reservations per hour).”

Besides the \$200 reservation fee, the Stanford rules also state:

- Reserving a time slot allows a tour group access to a specific tour parking spot in a staging area.

- Groups arriving outside the reserved time slots will be denied access, may be fined and could jeopardize future access.

- Cancellations must be made two weeks in advance to receive refunds.

In addition, tour buses and small groups are barred from visiting during major university events. This year, they will be prohibited June 11-15 (commencement weekend), September 15-20 (new student orientation), October 22-25

(reunion homecoming), and several Saturdays in October and November (home football games).

“Stanford University is private property and Stanford can establish and enforce rules regarding access to campus and use of campus space by visitors and third-party businesses,” according to the university website.

It states that the institution “reserves the right to take appropriate legal action against those failing to comply with the policy, including actions under civil or criminal trespass laws” and that campus safety officials can ban tour-group and tour-bus operators from the campus for repeated failure to follow such rules as:

- Do not disrupt campus and classroom activities.

- Do not talk loudly or smoke near buildings.

- Do not use amplified sound.

- Do not enter campus buildings. These are private workplaces and classrooms. Visitors should stay 20 feet away from campus buildings and refrain from opening doors or peering into windows.

The only buildings open to large tours without prior arrangements are the Stanford Bookstore and Tresidder Union.

- There are two public restrooms located on each side of Memorial Church. These are the only restrooms open to the public in the Quadrangle area of the campus. Both the Stanford Bookstore and Tresidder Union have restrooms available for public use.

- Commercial photography and filming anywhere on campus is prohibited. Group photography and photography and filming inside classrooms and buildings is prohibited.

- Tour groups must be accompanied at all times by a tour guide or staff member, and members of group tours may not wander the campus unaccompanied.

- Tour groups and buses must have at least one person who speaks English to ensure effective communication.

For more information, go to <http://tourbuses.stanford.edu>; email [tourbuses@stanford.edu](mailto:tourbuses@stanford.edu), or call (650) 498-7882.

## Advantage Funding acquired

NEW YORK — Advantage Funding, which provides equipment financing and leasing to the transportation industry, is being acquired by global banking company Macquarie Group Limited.

Under the agreement, expected to close in the middle of the year, Advantage Funding will become a

fully owned subsidiary of Macquarie’s Corporate and Asset Finance group. Advantage currently is owned by Marubeni America Corp.

“This transaction complements our existing leasing portfolio with a commercial vehicle finance platform in the U.S.,” said Garry Farrell, head of Macquarie’s Corporate and Asset Finance group. “Advantage Funding has a demonstrated track record of client satisfaction and strong operational performance. The acquisition builds on the strong growth of CAF’s global leasing business.”

Advantage Funding CEO Al Damiani said he looks forward to working with Macquarie to provide customers with a broader range of transportation financing solutions and product capacity. “Macquarie’s complementary leasing and financing expertise will help us expand our service in U.S. markets and position us to further support our clients’ continued growth,” Damiani said.

Advantage Funding provides transportation financing and leasing solutions to commercial vehicle operators, dealers and manufacturers for the acquisition of motorcoaches, tow trucks, ambulances, paratransit vehicles, limousines and vocational trucks.

Macquarie, which operates in 28 countries and has more than 14,000 employees, provides banking, financial, advisory, investment and funds management services.



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## Software

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

unique URL for a survey on their experience.

Enhancing motorcoach operators' ability to manage their business includes providing more than standardized reports from data the software collects, he said. It also includes creating user-defined

reports.

"Even though we publish hundreds of reports with our software, we recognize that every one of the operators might want something a little bit different so they can create their own user defined-reports," Greenglass said.

All the reports can be exported to different formats, such as Excel, where operators can filter and sort

information any way they want, he said.

Distinctive Systems also provides a vehicle maintenance software system to track scheduled and unscheduled maintenance.

"It's incredibly important that maintenance is done in a timely fashion and our software will predict when this particular bus needs to come in for its next 5,000-mile

checkup or scheduled service," Greenglass said.

Chris Barown, senior software developer at Relational Bus Systems Inc., said his company in the last few months added the ability to export to Excel spreadsheets.

**Pivot tables**

"That's been huge for our customers because we're getting more

and more requests for data in spreadsheets in a clean format because pivot tables have become a big deal," Barown said. "We're now able to export data in an Excel spreadsheet that's usable to generate pivot tables."

Pivot tables let operators manipulate data in different ways.

RBS also will generate customized data reports, he said.

On its charter software, GoChart, RBS is releasing Version 23 in the fourth quarter with a significantly improved customer management system, Barown said.

It will include the ability to automatically track changes to charter orders. In the past, an operator trying to learn who made the change and when would have to call RBS, which would examine log files for the answer.

"In Version 23, they don't have to call us, they have the ability to look that stuff up themselves," he said.

Also in GoChart, RBS has integrated online quote requests so that when a customer goes to an operator's website, and requests a quote, inputting information about the charter they're requesting, that data gets pushed directly into RBS's system. On the website the customer receives a quote number he or she can reference. The sales people in that company get an email that says the customer requested a charter and provides the quote number in the GoChart system. They can see the customer's information, contact them about specifics and provide a price, Barown said.

**Retyping unnecessary**

"We actually build the charter in the GoChart system from the Web page, so all the customer's information that they typed in is automatically inserted into our system so they don't have to retype it," he said. "It's only been, I'd say, in the recent past that we've had full integration with websites where it's connected directly to the system and puts the quotes in. The old version was more email-based."

Previously, when a customer would seek a quote, an email was sent to sales with that data and sales would have to input the data into GoChart.

"We've evolved to a point where we actually serve up the Web page out of our system that's used to make the quote request," he said.

RBS also has integrated credit card processing into its software so operators can put customers' credit cards into the system, charge those cards, have them authorized at the gateway and have the money deposited in their bank account, Barown said.

In its tour product, GoTour,

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# Three major NYC attractions opened in May

NEW YORK CITY — If New Yorkers don't appreciate tour buses coming into their city, then why do they keep opening mega-attractions that appeal to motorcoach travelers?

Last month, three such attractions, each national in scope, opened in the Big Apple with

splashy local news coverage.

The opening of any one of them would be cause for headlines aplenty but the opening of three in one month resulted in nearly six weeks of celebration.

New attractions for visitors to Manhattan are:

- A new Whitney Museum of

American Art at a location in the Meatpacking District in Lower West Manhattan along the Hudson River. For information, go to [www.whitney.org](http://www.whitney.org), or call (877) 947-5612.

- A completely re-done Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration just off the lower tip of Man-

hattan. (Some New Jersey loyalists insist it's within their state's boundaries.) Go to [www.nps.gov/elis/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/elis/index.htm).

- One of the most talked-about new attractions in the U.S. this year is the World Trade Center Observatory, which was set to open May 29. The observatory is on the

100th, 101st and 102nd levels of new One World Trade Center, the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere.

The attraction provides guests with spectacular panoramic views. The facility has 9,300 square feet of special event space on the 102nd floor.

## Kiosks speed up border crossings

TORONTO, Ontario — As a measure to speed up processing times for bus passengers entering the U.S. at the Rainbow Bridge (Niagara Falls) and Peace Bridge (Buffalo), U.S. Customs and Border Protection is installing document reader kiosks.

The kiosks already are in place at the Rainbow Bridge and they will be installed at the Peace Bridge later this summer. The kiosks are user-friendly and are designed to speed up the inspection process.

There are no immediate plans to install kiosks at the Queenston Lewiston Bridge due to space limitations at that facility. Bus operators should notice an improvement in processing times when the kiosks are used. The passengers disembark the bus and enter the processing facility where they will see the kiosks.

They place their travel document (passport, enhanced drivers license, Nexus card, etc.) on the reader.

The document is then queried by Customs and Border Protection and the results are available to the CBP officer before the passengers present themselves for processing.

## Software

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

RBS rolled out Version 4, which runs off the Amazon cloud and has an improved interface, Barown said. A navigation tree was added to make it easier to move around in the system.

"We've added the ability to email documents directly out of the GoTour system to customers instead of having to save the PDF and then email it to the customer through whatever mail client you use," he said.

Customers who book a seat on a carrier's tour are emailed a receipt directly out of the Version 4 system, which is new in the last year.

RBS also is developing for release later this year online booking for operators to list tours on their websites, from which customers can book and pay for the tours.



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# ABC refurbishing double-deckers, offering open-top design

FARIBAULT, Minn. — ABC Companies has launched a new program to refurbish used Van Hool TD925 double-deck buses. The company plans to offer three design options, including converting the coaches to open-top sightseeing buses.

ABC said it would market the refurbished coaches to traditional tour and charter operators, day-tour and sightseeing businesses, corporate users, professional sports teams and conversion enthusiasts.

The 81-seat TD925 double-deck buses entered the U.S. market in 2008 (Van Hool's newer double-deck model is called the TDX), and many used TD925s are still in service.

Roman Cornell, ABC executive vice president and head of the company's Specialty Vehicles Division, said customer response to the refurbishing program has been positive.

"These units are proven performers offering all the durability of a true double-deck bus, plus many exciting features for the sightseeing market segment," Cornell said. "Why not extend the life-cycle of a viable market leader and offer a product that can still provide years of dependable revenue service?"



ABC Companies is refurbishing used Van Hool TD925 double-deck buses. The company plans to offer three

design options, including converting the coaches to open-top sightseeing buses.

He said ABC plans to offer three design options:

- A traditional charter fleet option that offers a refurbished TD925 unit that has undergone a rigorous multi-point inspection for mechanical and engineering components

- The TD925 Sky Deck option that converts the coach to an open-top sightseeing bus with an 85-passenger capacity, 15 more seats than standard open-top competitors

- A refurbished coach featuring both a second open deck and a third "race deck" designed to appeal to corporate customers, professional sports teams and high-

end tailgaters

ABC said the TD925 Sky Deck model offers a true double-deck design with a robust suspension system designed and built to carry two levels of flooring, seating and passenger safely.

The conversion involves removing the roof and taking the top deck down to its original wall frame structure and composite flooring. New perimeter wall panels and deck drains are installed to allow water to escape from the top deck area while keeping the lower level out of the elements.

Seat tracks are installed to re-

ceive 61 new weatherproof seats that feature standard seatbelts, which are not typically offered in an open-top sightseeing bus. Next, the interior walls and deck of the upper level are prepped for installation of a weatherproof two-part hybrid modified polyurea seamless coating system and slip-resistant floor. Finally a stainless steel perimeter safety railing is installed.

Standard features on the coach include A/C on the lower level, restroom, PA system, low-floor ADA accessibility, aluminum wheels and paint and graphic design.

This isn't the first time Van

Hool TD925 double-deck coaches have been converted to open-top sightseeing buses. Three years ago Coach USA chopped the tops off six of its used coaches and converted them to open-air, hop on-hop off sightseeing buses for its Chicago Trolley & Double Decker Co. subsidiary. (See June 1, 2012, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

ABC is taking that conversion a step further with its race deck design, which offers customers custom build-outs in a limousine-type interior that features all the comforts of home. Features include a living space with a full kitchen, dinette with seating for six and powder room facilities.

Passengers can relax and enjoy sporting or corporate events from a custom race deck that features a collapsible roof railing or from an open deck that includes round-table seating for six and stairs to the lower-deck level.

Indoor accommodations include a master bedroom with front windshield view, a full-size bath and two additional bunks. The race deck can be custom-configured to any customer preference. ABC plans on building a demo unit that will be available for testing and inspection later this year.

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# Motorcoach destinations: The latest news about where to go

LOS ANGELES — Two of the nation's most-expensive vacation cities are popular motorcoach destinations, while two of the most-affordable cities also are well liked by motorcoach travelers.

GOBankingRates has ranked the 50 most- and least-affordable cities for travelers. The rankings are based on factors that impact travelers' budgets the most: hotel prices, food and drink costs, and transportation expenses.

Not surprisingly, New York City and San Francisco, which are perennially popular motorcoach destinations, are two of the most expensive vacation destinations, while more motorcoach friendly Las Vegas and Orlando are among the cheapest, according to the 2015 GOBankingRates study.

Here are the top 10 cities for affordable vacations: 1. Las Vegas; 2. Jacksonville, Fla.; 3. Orlando; 4. Kansas City, Mo.; 5. Detroit; 6. Albuquerque, N.M.; 7. Grand Rapids, Mich.; 8. Salt Lake City; 9. Memphis, Tenn., and 10. Denver.

The top 10 cities for most-expensive vacations are: 1. New York City; 2. Santa Barbara, Calif.; 3. San Francisco; 4. Jersey City; 5. Honolulu; 6. Charleston, S.C.; 7. Boston; 8. Los Angeles; 9. Miami, and 10. Houston.

Find the complete GoBankingRates list at [www.gobankingrates.com/personal-finance/10-worst-best-vacation-cities](http://www.gobankingrates.com/personal-finance/10-worst-best-vacation-cities).

## Firefighter theme

BRANSON, Mo. — Silver Dollar City, the sprawling theme park here, has opened a firefighter-themed attraction.

Fireman's Landing is an \$8 million addition with 10 family adventures, modeled after a community fair of a century ago and showcasing mock training activities of volunteer firefighters.

The storyline for the area is aimed at creating an atmosphere of the rides serving as "training" adventures for recruits for the Silver Dollar City Fire Brigade.

More information at [www.silverdollarcity.com](http://www.silverdollarcity.com).

## John Wayne museum

WINTERSET, Iowa — This small southwestern Iowa community (population 3,700-plus) opened the John Wayne Birthplace Museum last month.

Local officials say more than a million people have visited the area to tour the four-room home where the legendary movie star of the 1930s, 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s spent his formative years. Wayne died in 1979.

Now officials hope the new 6,100-square-foot museum will provide added appeal to the mil-

lions who remember the actor who specialized in roles that offered him up as a tall, strong hero.

It is the only museum dedicated to Wayne.

The facility features a movie theater and the largest diversified exhibit of John Wayne artifacts, including movie posters, film ward-

robe, scripts, letters, artwork and sculpture, plus one of his customized automobiles.

For information, go to <http://johnwaynebirthplace.museum>, or call (515) 462-1044.

## For sedentary travelers

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — The

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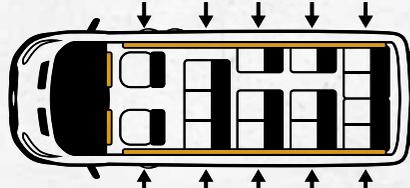
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## Rochester transit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and in 2007 the Federal Transit Administration ruled that the transit authority was providing illegal service for the school district by replacing Laidlaw's fleet with buses that had been subsidized with federal tax dollars.

An FTA administrator ruled that the RGRTA operated more than 100 routes that were designed for students and only incidentally served the public. Like the federal charter service rule, the school service rule prevents public transit agencies from using taxpayer-funded equipment to compete for contracts with private businesses that pay some of those taxes.

However, U.S. District Judge David Larimer later struck down the FTA's ruling, allowing the agreement to go forward. The judge stated that the RGRTA had structured its service so it hypothetically qualified under FTA regulations as "tripper" service that could be utilized by the general public.

In response, the FTA undertook a rule-making procedure to close this loophole. The result was a 17-page document that "clarifies its policy with respect to its interpretation of 'tripper service' and

'school bus operations' under federal law."

Under the regulations, it is permissible for a public transit agency to carry students in "tripper service, which is defined as regularly scheduled public transportation that is open to the public and designed or modified to meet the travel needs of school students and personnel using various fare collection or subsidy systems."

The service must be designed so there is no signage or "any other indication that the bus may not be open to the general public." All stops "must be accessible to the public and must be clearly marked as public stops."

### New transit center

Last November, the RGRTA opened a \$50 million transit center in downtown Rochester. Buses crossing the system drive into the building so 20,000 passengers each day can transfer in a climate-controlled environment. The FTA provided 80 percent of funding for the center, which has 30 bays and can handle 100 buses hourly.

The transit center provided more opportunities for high school students to mingle with classmates and rivals from other schools. It also led to a series of student fights

that exposed the downside to the Rochester blend of student and public bus travel.

"Several student-related incidents at the transit center have fostered a perception among customers of all ages and across our community that the transit center is not a safe environment," system Chief Executive Officer Bill Carpenter said in a statement.

"Because of our concern for the well-being of everyone we serve, (we) will no longer provide transportation to the Rochester City School District after the current school year ends in June. Our current model, customized to serve large volumes of students, no longer works. (We) cannot sustain the operational, safety, financial, customer service and reputational impacts resulting from these incidents."

Carpenter added that the transit center is not the cause of conflict among the students, "but it has become a popular destination for the few disruptive individuals who choose to engage in poor behaviors."

RGRTA Chairman James Redmond said, "People have a right to move safely through our system, and we are here to serve our customers."

According to the *Rochester*

*Democrat and Chronicle*, "Carpenter said no single incident triggered the authority's decision, but two recent incidents at the transit center were particularly significant — a fight in which a bystander was knocked down and a stabbing two days earlier."

At a May meeting, the transit authority's board heard a report on surveys that showed declines in satisfaction among both passengers and employees, which Carpenter attributed largely to fights at the transit center.

The decision to end the contract will cost the transit authority \$11 million of its \$90 million annual budget and force it to cut 144 jobs. The school district is faced with the possibly insurmountable challenge of securing contracted bus transportation for the next school year.

### Inappropriate arrangement

"The bottom line is, transit operations are inappropriate for transporting students to and from school, and illegal in every part of the country with the exception being Rochester," said Ken Presley, vice president of industry relations and COO of the United Motorcoach Association. "With the withdrawal of RGRTA, FTA has

an opportunity to insure they do not reenter the business and that taxpayer funds are not wasted on unintended services."

Seal, who now works on federal school bus regulation issues for the National School Transportation Association (NSTA), said the failure of the arrangement was inevitable. "We couldn't put this in our complaints, but we predicted this could happen," he said. "When you are not providing direct home-to-school service, students can get out of the bus anywhere they want to and come in the transit center."

"The Rochester transit system had a problem — their regular route ridership was declining precipitously. It is interesting that the transit agency was so overwhelmed with complaints they had to cancel their own service. They don't want their \$50 million transit center to sit empty because the rest of the public is going to vacate the system," he said.

Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren asked the transportation authority to stop transferring students at the transit center. "Logic dictates that you stop creating these congregations" of students, she said.

She ordered the city police department to boost its presence in the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ►

## Bus sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

reporting of industry sales figures two years ago. Previously, the numbers had been assembled by *National Bus Trader* magazine.

Missing from the ABA Founda-

tion report are sales of Temsa and CAIO coaches.

During the final three months of last year, 631 new 45- and 40-foot MCI, Prevost, Setra, Van Hool and Volvo coaches, including shells, were delivered to public and private operators, making the

fourth quarter of 2014 by far the strongest sales period of the year and 9.5 percent ahead of 2013's final quarter.

By comparison, 497 new 45- and 40-foot models, including shells, were sold by the five brands during the second quarter of last

year, with 412 coaches delivered in third quarter and 280 in the first quarter, typically the slowest sales period of the year.

During the final three months of 2013, 576 new 45- and 40-foot MCI, Prevost, Setra, Van Hool and Volvo coaches, including shells,

were delivered. Second-quarter 2013 sales totaled 426 new 45- and 40-foot models by the five brands, with fewer than 350 coaches delivered in both the first and third quarters of 2013.

In 2013, it was private-sector bus operators that significantly stepped up their purchases of new coaches, increasing buying by 20 percent.

Cummins continued to be the dominant engine in new motorcoaches delivered last year, going into 820 new models sold by MCI and ABC/Van Hool. Cummins' share of the engine market was 45.1 percent in 2014. That was down, however, from 2013 when Cummins' share of the motorcoach sector was 47.1 percent.

By comparison, 548 Prevost and Volvo coaches were delivered last year with Volvo engines, which are only available in those brands. That meant Volvo engines went into 30.1 percent of the coaches sold in 2014. In 2013, the Volvo engine share was 29.5 percent.

Detroit and Mercedes engines, which are essentially power-plant twins, went into 450 new MCI, Setra or Van Hool coaches in 2014, or 24.75 percent of the market. That compares with a Detroit/Mercedes engine market share of 23.2 percent in 2013.

Allison was again the dominant transmission, accounting for 94 percent of the market.

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**VDO**

# Coach operators and school districts make a perfect match

They met in the aisle of a yellow school bus. Friends say they were made for each other.

School districts and private transportation companies recently have found much in common. School administrators need to pinch pennies wherever possible but maintain the high standards that parents expect in student transportation.

Bus and motorcoach executives are knocking on school doors bearing candy, flowers and a wealth of experience in running safe, efficient road transportation systems.

“An explosion of privatization” was described in a recently released study conducted by The Mackinac Center for Public Policy. Fewer than 4 percent of Michigan school districts contracted for transportation services in 2003. Now 24 percent of the state’s school districts (131 in all) contract out bus services, according to the center’s Michigan School Privatization Survey 2014. The total grew by 24 districts in the past year.

“Districts have largely been propelled to contract out for these services based on a desire to save money,” the survey explained. “The more efficiently districts can provide these non-instructional services, the more resources they can devote to their core function — providing educational opportunities to students.”

## More expertise

“I believe the contractor can, over time, do a better job at a slightly lower cost than what the school can do, mainly because we have expertise in driver training, bus maintenance and safety,” said Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City.

In 2005 he added yellow buses to his fleet of Van Hools by opening Student Transportation Specialist in McKinney, Texas.

“Good small- and medium-duty companies can do a good job with school districts and save them substantial money,” said Dale Krapf of Krapf’s Coaches of West Chester, Pa., which operates 2,600 school buses in five states. “We have been the proud recipients of some of that change-over.”

Krapf’s Coaches recently took over transportation for a Virginia school district that had never outsourced. “It was not very well run... We saved them \$750,000 during the first year of operation,” he said.



A growing number of school districts are looking to contract out student transportation to private

companies, which can be a steady source of income for coach operators looking to diversify.

“After 9/11 I decided it was time to find something steadier and more recession-proof,” Polzien said. After deciding there was no market for scheduled commuter service in his region, he looked into school transportation. He now operates about 400 school buses for nine districts in New Mexico, Texas and Louisiana.

“It is a steady income,” Polzien said. “You take out some of the risks of a downturn in the economy and other things that can affect the charter business.”

Polzien finds it rewarding to improve transportation services for his customers. “School administrators spend their careers learning how to teach kids, not how to run a bus shop. When we come in we find significant problems with maintenance and driver training.”

Woodlawn Motor Coach in Baltimore was founded in 1929 as a family-owned school bus service. It now fields 158 school buses for two public school districts and a number of private schools, said Barbara Bayer, the company’s general manager.

“It has been a very good business for us,” she said. “We know we are running five days a week. From the bus transportation, we do a lot of charters and sports teams, then day camps and recreation centers in the summer. It is steady income at least 10 months of the year.”

Contracting student transportation is a good deal for schools, Bayer said. “Private companies can do it more efficiently than the government. It should be a savings to them.”

While many motorcoach companies have diversified into school transportation, Woodlawn expanded the opposite way, adding coaches to its fleet in 1984.

“We have 13 motorcoaches and three minicoaches,” Bayer said. “We keep charter tags on all of our school buses. The good thing about having both is that if a group calls and can’t afford a motorcoach, they possibly can afford a school bus.”

Krapf’s Coaches was founded as a school bus operator in 1942. It now works for school districts in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, Illinois and Minnesota. In 1982 the company started running charters and now has a fleet of 18 motorcoaches in addition to 50 transit buses and 85 paratransit vehicles.

## Diversification

School transportation is “absolutely” a good means of diversification for a motorcoach operator, Krapf said. “I think the motorcoach business is in a little bit of a downswing at the moment. It is my impression that it is more seasonal than it once was. It makes good sense not to have all of your eggs in one basket.”

“There are a lot of synergies. We are still turning wheels. We have all the building blocks — training, safety, maintenance, the back room, HR. We have the template in place and that can be translated into cost savings. When a school district is worried about training drivers all the time, safety and record checks and all the things they don’t normally do, it is quite a mine field for them to navigate.”

Dean Transportation of Lansing, Mich., became a school bus contractor in 1969 and added motorcoaches to its fleet in 1994. Initially the coaches were needed to carry special needs students on longer trips from Michigan’s Upper Peninsula to the Michigan School for the Blind in Lansing

and the Michigan School for the Deaf in Flint.

The motorcoach operation grew into Dean Trailways. Dean Transportation, meanwhile, has grown to 1,500 school buses under ownership or management across Michigan. Those buses carry about 60,000 students daily for more than 80 school districts.

“We provide transportation industry expertise so the districts can focus on the classrooms and not have to worry about the buses,” said Patrick Dean, president of Dean Transportation and a second-generation member of the family business. “In Michigan in the last decade we have seen a steady increase in contracting for transportation due to the inability of our districts to replace equipment and invest in the technology and expertise that contractors are available to provide.”

## Hurdles to clear

“The school bus industry is a great industry. It provides a standard schedule in terms of keeping the buses moving down the road,” Dean said. “The biggest hurdle people find is the significant regulations that play into operating school buses, even more so than motorcoaches.”

While endorsing school transportation as a good way for a motorcoach operation to diversify, these experts warn that it is tough to win those first contracts — especially the very first contract. A school district is reluctant to trust its kids to a carrier that has no track record in caring for other districts’ kids.

“We do see requests for proposal that require a minimum of five years of experience in school transportation,” Dean said.

To open the door, an operator

may need to buy a company already in school transportation. Another avenue is hiring people with expertise that will satisfy school administrators. “I found some people who had those resumes and hired them to get started,” Polzien said.

It might be possible to ease into school transportation by seeking charter work, such as field and sports trips, that builds relationships and trust, Dean said.

There is no sure way to get the first school contract, said Krapf, also a second-generation operator. “It is all over the place. If a motorcoach operator is well known in his area as a good operator and the school district decided to put their contract out for bid, I think that contractor would have as good an opportunity as anybody to win that contract. His biggest obstacle would be knowing how to cost it out.”

Krapf once picked up a contract from a school district that thought long and hard about outsourcing its transportation. “I worked on that nine years before it happened. It depends on the stars lining up.”

## National competition

The motorcoach suitor seeking its first date with a school district may be squared off against one of three national school transportation providers.

First Student Inc. of Cincinnati, according to its website, operates 49,000 school buses for 1,350 school districts in 38 states and eight Canadian provinces. Durham School Services of Warrenville, Ill., fields 17,000 buses for 400 districts in 32 states. Student Transportation Inc. of Wall Township, N.J., claims more than 12,000 buses serving 360 school districts in 20 states.

An operator with a good reputation in its region can handle this competition. “We sit across the table and compete with them regularly,” said an operator who asked not to be identified. “Our quality of service is much better.”

He said a “Big 3” company sometimes might submit a bid that is cut to the bone in order to buy market share. “They can bid a contract cheaper than what it is going to cost to provide the service.”

Another operator said the national carriers are as good as their managers in the field. “In my area (one of the nationals) runs a very good operation. I hear rumors that is not the case everywhere they operate.”

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**Rochester transit**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

transit center but said, "Providing this level of special service within the transit center is not the responsibility of the police department. These patrols represent an unfair imposition on city taxpayers and deprive other areas of the city with the police resources they deserve."

Two weeks ago about 300 friends and members of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 282 protested at RGRTA headquarters, carrying signs that read, "Fire Bill." Jacques Chapman, president of the local, said the agency should fire Bill Carpenter for administrative actions leading to the loss of the 144 jobs.

Chapman told reporters that the transit authority should pursue other options, such as arranging routes that would avoid dropping off students at the transit center.

**Rock and a hard place**

However, Agency Chairman Redmond said the RGRTA could not do that because, ironically, federal school bus rules "allow the transit system to serve students only with public routes accessible to all passengers."

Carpenter said in mid-May that the RGRTA agreed to continue student busing for the Rochester summer school sessions at a cost of \$350,000.

School Superintendent Bolgen Vargas told WROC-TV that he continued to seek a new contract with the transit authority. The district has little choice because no other company can ramp up by the fall to serve 9,000 middle and high school students.

"This is a huge story that needs to get out," Seal said. "This whole model failed."

Public transit agencies and school districts across the country continue to pursue similar arrangements, however. School districts are trying to cut expenses and transit agencies are seeking the extra income.

"It is expanding," said Ron Kinney, also a consultant to NSTA. "Right now in Iowa a number of urban areas are considering this."

More than half of students attending public schools in the U.S. — about 26 million — ride each

day on about 480,000 yellow buses, according to the American School Bus Council. About a third of those buses are owned by private contractors, reports the magazine *School Bus Fleet*.

Since the Rochester complaint was filed in 2006, the FTA has issued four rulings that blocked other attempts by federally funded transit agencies to contract with school districts.

The Pekin Municipal Bus Service was found in violation of federal regulations in 2007 following a complaint from the Illinois School Transportation Association.

**Co-mingling operations**

The association complained that Pekin Bus was bidding against private contractors for school transportation work. The bus service claimed it maintained separate vehicles, parts, labor, garages and equipment for its municipal transit and school transit operations. However, the FTA found that both operations were maintained on city property and overseen by the same manager.

The 2007 Rochester-Genesee federal court ruling was cited by the Bay Area Transportation Authority of Traverse and Leelanau counties in Michigan, which claimed that its "Sutton Bay Flex Routes," using former school buses painted white, qualified as "tripper service."

While Bay Area Transportation claimed that this service was open to the public as well as students, the FTA noted in 2013 that a private investigator who boarded one of the buses was told by the driver that he was "the first adult person to ride on this particular Flex Route alone." After the investigator's trip, school district personnel called the sheriff's office with a complaint that a suspicious person was riding the bus, out of concern for the children.

The FTA, citing its regulatory clarification that followed the Rochester-Genesee federal case, found that the Flex Routes "appeared to have been designed specifically to meet the needs of students" and were not operated in a manner to solicit riders from the general public. Bay Area Transportation was given 90 days to end the service.

In March, the Roscommon County Transit Authority of Michigan was found in violation when it contended that it was operating a "demand-response" service using former school buses painted white. This differentiated them from the authority's other vehicles, the FTA noted.

Roscommon's white buses are generally filled in advance with student bookings, making it difficult for public riders to schedule transportation. The FTA said that "a reasonable person could conclude that these bus routes are primarily designed to accommodate students and school personnel."

On May 5, the FTA told the Northeast Colorado Association of Local Governments that it was violating the federal school bus rule by operating a "demand-response" bus service. The association uses a "full-sized, unmarked school bus" to pick up about 40 children a trip, taking them directly from their private property to their schools.

"No member of the general public has been denied service," the FTA noted, but "a reasonable person could believe" the service "exclusively transports students."

**Honesty and candor**

The FTA recognized the Colorado association's "honesty and candor" for requesting the opinion on its own, but found the organization "currently in violation" and advised it to end or modify the service by the beginning of the next school year.

While the FTA ruled against transit agencies in all of these cases, it could be more pro-active in enforcement of the school bus regulation, Seal said.

"The way FTA is set up, they have performance reviews where the transit agency signs an agreement that they will not do charter service or school bus service. It is up to the consultants that FTA hires to go into the records to find if they are running illegal service. It doesn't happen. They never find anything illegal," he said.

"The burden of proof is on those that are harmed by the school bus rule to file a complaint, gather the information and go to FTA. Depending on how big the agency is, like Rochester they could take it to the courts."

**Calendar****June 2015**

**25-28** New England Bus Association Annual Conference, Mountain View Grand Resort & Spa, Whitefield, N.H. Info: [www.newenglandbus.org](http://www.newenglandbus.org).

**August 2015**

**8-12** Georgia, Alabama and

South Central Motorcoach Associations Regional Meeting, Lake Lanier Islands, Ga. Info: [www.alabamamotorcoach.org](http://www.alabamamotorcoach.org).

**10-11** 2015 Midwest Bus & Motorcoach Assoc. Convention, Hotel Fort Wayne, Fort Wayne, Ind. Info: [www.mbmca.org](http://www.mbmca.org).

**20-23** Motorcoach Associations of South Carolina, North

Carolina and Virginia Regional Meeting, Doubletree by Hilton, Columbia, S.C. Info: [www.scmotorcoach.org](http://www.scmotorcoach.org).

**October 2015**

**17-20** 42nd Annual California Bus Association Convention and Trade Show, Tenaya Lodge at Yosemite, Fish Camp, Calif. Info: [www.cbabus.com](http://www.cbabus.com).



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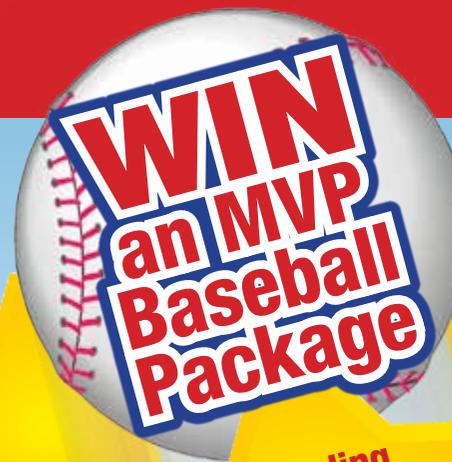
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