

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Federal agency says it will require seatbelts on coaches

WASHINGTON — A top administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has officially confirmed his agency plans to issue rules this year that would require seatbelts on motorcoaches.

Ron Medford, acting administrator at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, told the House subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection that NHTSA would propose mandatory seatbelts on over-the-road buses, and finalize the requirement after a period of public comment.

During an appearance before the House committee last month, Medford acknowledged motorcoach safety had not been a priority at his agency but insisted that has changed.

"I think it is true that NHTSA was slow to act," Medford told committee members, adding that commercial bus safety is now a high priority at the agency.

"We are on it," he asserted.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration published a motorcoach safety plan in September 2007 that identified four priority areas: seatbelts for occupants, increased roof strength, emergency egress, and fire safety.

The plan identified steps the agency would take to address each of the issues and a timeline for making decisions.

For seatbelts, in December 2007, NHTSA conducted the first-ever crash test of a motorcoach by the U.S. government.

"That test has given us the needed information to propose a requirement for seatbelts on motorcoaches in 2009," said Medford.

NHTSA plans to conduct a roof crush test this summer to determine whether roof-strength standards for coaches are needed.

"In addition," said Medford, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood has asked all parts of the USDOT involved in motorcoach

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Don Sanders of Louisiana Coaches Trailways and his son, Louis, wanted to be first in their market with seatbelt-equipped coaches, so when they bought two new MCI D450s they got them equipped with Amaya seats with three-point belts.

Greyhound says competitors aren't complying with ADA

DALLAS — Apparently tired of competing with motorcoach companies that don't abide by federal rules for transporting the disabled, Greyhound Lines has launched an effort to even the playing field.

The nation's largest intercity bus carrier filed a formal complaint with the Federal Motor Car-

rier Safety Administration, suggesting that large numbers of operators — that provide fixed-route and curbside service — may not be in compliance with federal Americans with Disabilities Act regulations.

It said it conducted a survey of 40 carriers that provide intercity service on the East and West coasts

and in the Southwest and discovered that 32 of them — 80 percent — had no wheelchair lifts on any of the coaches that were studied and six of them had lifts on only one or two of their buses.

Greyhound, which was joined in the study by its East Coast partner, Peter Pan Bus Lines, noted that federal regulations require

that fixed-route carriers either have to have at least 50 percent of their fleet equipped with lifts or be able to provide disabled passengers with the same service it offers others.

"Clearly, no carrier with few or no lift-equipped vehicles can meet this standard," Greyhound asserts in the complaint it filed May 18.

Greyhound spokeswoman Abby Wambaugh said the company initiated the survey because of concerns there is widespread non-compliance with ADA regulations among carriers in all parts of the country.

What Wambaugh didn't say, but is implied in the Greyhound

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Driver credited with saving life

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — A driver for Virginia Coach Co. in Purcellville, Va., is being credited with possibly saving the life of a fellow coach driver who suffered a stroke.

The managing partner of Spirit Coach in Madison, Ala., credits Lorenzo Moody of Virginia Coach with taking immediate action last month that likely saved one of Spirit's drivers who suffered a medical emergency during a stop with a tour group at Monticello in Charlottesville.

The Spirit driver, who was alone in his bus, collapsed to the floor. Moody, who was nearby in the Monticello parking area, ob-

served the incident and rushed to the driver's aid. He quickly summoned another driver and the two were able to get the Spirit driver into a safe and stationary position and call for emergency medical help.

"I am happy to report that the quick response resulted in drugs being administered (to our driver) by emergency personnel that were apparently 100 percent effective in reversing the effects of the stroke," said Robert Coates Jr., managing partner of Spirit Coach.

The Spirit driver was later released from a hospital and is recuperating.

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Cell phones, net add driver pressure

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. — One of the burdens new motorcoach drivers must learn to cope with is having dozens of backseat drivers.

Now, with the prevalence of camera-equipped cell phones and the ubiquitous internet, the number of backseat critics can grow into the millions.

That's what a driver for Peter Pan Bus Lines Inc. learned this spring.

The driver was suspended after a passenger's video of him appeared on the internet social-networking site YouTube. The video showed the driver using his cell phone (which

is against Peter Pan policy), eating, and tearing passenger tickets while driving.

The incident occurred during a run from Boston to New York City.

According to newspaper accounts, the actions of the driver worried a passenger enough that he used his cell phone to record the infractions. Then he posted his video on YouTube.

He also sent a link to Peter Pan, which launched an investigation and suspended the driver.

Memo to drivers: A few minutes of attention on YouTube may not be the ticket to fame and fortune you're looking for.

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Battle with transit agency rages on for S.D. operator

PIERRE, S.D. — The Federal Transit Administration has sided with the operators of a small bus company here who have been in a long-running feud with the community's public transit agency over charter service.

But the ruling by Acting Chief Counsel Scott A. Biehl isn't expected to settle much of their differences.

Instead, it's likely to heat things up because the transit agency plans to appeal the decision and the bus company is firing back with more complaints.

Biehl, acting on a complaint filed by Forell Limousine and Bus Service, found that River Cities Public Transit violated the federal charter service rule when it provided transportation for a bachelor party last year.

However, because he considered the circumstances of the violation minor and the revenue generated by the trip was \$105, he fined River Cities just \$100.

"Even though the monetary

penalty was only \$100, it makes a statement," said Dawnita Forell, who co-owns the bus company with her husband, Charles. "And, hopefully, they will add another zero the next time."

And there will be a next time, too, she vows, adding that she has already put together four more complaints and plans to file them soon. One of them, she said is a "slam dunk."

Meantime, River Cities will appeal the decision to the FTA administrator in hopes of getting it reversed, according to Ron Baumgart, executive director.

"I disagree with the ruling," he stressed. "We are an on-demand service and that's what we do every day for the people in our community."

Biehl, in his ruling, held that the bachelor party trip to a hunting lodge was a charter because the fare for all of the riders was paid by a single individual.

He said had each passenger

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NYC parking guidelines are revised

NEW YORK CITY — Thanks to the persistence of a Connecticut coach operator and a reporter for one of Manhattan's neighborhood newspapers, New York City has issued revised charter bus parking guidelines.

The updated rules eliminate an onerous layover (parking) time limit of 15 minutes that suddenly and mysteriously appeared in the guidelines earlier this year.

The corrected guidelines also contain the latest and greatest list of authorized bus parking locations in the city.

The newest brouhaha over parking in the Manhattan area of New York City surfaced in April when a neighborhood newspaper, *Chelsea Now*, did a comprehensive analysis of the problems created by motorcoaches trying to find legal parking spaces (primarily) in the popular charter bus destination of Midtown Manhattan.

The article was written by Diane Vacca, a reporter for the newspaper and a political science student at Columbia University. Unlike many reporters who tackle motorcoach industry-related is-

sues, Vacca spent a great deal of time and effort learning the problem from the coach operator and driver perspective.

Her article was reprinted in the May 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

One of the people Vacca quoted was Mike Neustadt, co-president of Coach Tours Ltd. of Brookfield, Conn., and a member of the board of the United Motorcoach Association.

Both Neustadt and Vacca wanted to know why the 15-minute layover

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Parking restricted near history museum

WASHINGTON — Motorcoach parking in front of the National Museum of American History on the Madison Drive (or National Mall) side of the museum has been temporarily eliminated because of construction.

The project is expected to last a few months. Barriers and fencing installed by contractors has blocked museum access from Madison Avenue and resulted in no passenger drop offs at that entrance.

A temporary bus stop on Con-

stitution Ave., between 14th and 12th streets, has been opened; it should allow a handful of coaches to pause to drop off and pick up groups visiting the museum.

The museum is ramped for disabled visitors on the Constitution Avenue side.

Officials of the Smithsonian Institution are recommending motorcoaches park elsewhere during the day and return to the museum for pickups.

Coaches also may pick up pas-

sengers on the National Mall side of the Natural History Museum (next door to the National Museum of America History) and across the mall at the Smithsonian Castle.

A semi-useful map is available at <http://www.smithsonian.org/visit/infocenter/mallmap.htm>.

Questions may be directed to Katherine Neill Ridgley at the Smithsonian Visitor Information and Associates Reception Center. Call (202) 633-5262.

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THE DOCKET

Senate bill seeks tougher drug-test rules

WASHINGTON — Legislation introduced in the U.S. Senate will help close loopholes that allow drug and alcohol users to slip by motorcoach and trucking company driver hiring checks.

The bill is sponsored by Senators Mark Pryor, D-Ark., Olympia J. Snowe, R-Maine, Ben Nelson, D-Neb., and Roger Wicker, R-Miss.

It was immediately praised by groups that have been pushing for improvements to mandatory drug testing programs for drivers.

The legislation is designed to

prevent drivers from using loopholes when it comes to drug and alcohol reporting. Currently, some drivers do not report past drug testing and some carriers do not finish background checks on employees.

Also, it's easy for drivers to cheat the test.

The proposed Safe Roads Act would establish a database of drug-testing information for commercial drivers. It would cost \$5 million a year to develop and distribute the database, and it would require medical review officers, employers and other service agents to report

positive results to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

Employers would have to check the database before bringing on drivers.

The bill would also provide for privacy protections and employee rights of action.

Said Sen. Pryor: "A national clearinghouse is a cost-effective, feasible solution to weed out bad apples and keep our roads safe."

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration instituted drug-testing requirements 20 years ago. Under the regulations,

motor carriers must conduct a pre-employment drug and alcohol test.

The proposed law is being modeled after Arkansas' Commercial Driver Alcohol and Drug Testing Act.

Current federal regulations allow drivers with a "positive" pre-employment drug test to obtain rehabilitation and gain employment.

In Arkansas, an employer faces a \$5,000 penalty if a driver with a record of a positive drug or alcohol test is hired. And employers face a \$1,000 fine for not checking the state's database.

USDOT medical certification program delayed

LOS ANGELES — Implementation of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration proposed National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners program has been delayed, most likely until spring 2010.

Speaking at a chiropractic convention here last month, Linda Phillips, a program director for the National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners program, said that implementing the plan has proven to be a daunting task as regulators attempt to iron out regu-

latory and statutory issues.

"This has caused some delay in the program and we estimate the final rule will be published in the spring of 2010," said Phillips.

The proposed program will require all medical examiners who wish to perform U.S. Department of Transportation examinations to participate in either online or lecture training, and submit to and pass a federal written examination.

Upon successful completion of the training, examiners will be listed in a national registry available

for trucking, motorcoach and school bus companies to access when looking for USDOT-approved physical exam providers.

The FMCSA estimates it will need 40,000 examiners to implement the program, which is expected to be phased in over a three-year period beginning 60 days after the final rule is published.

Details remain fluid, but the program appears to be shaping up as follows:

- Any doctor of chiropractic, medical doctor, doctor of osteopa-

thy, advanced practice nurse, or physician's assistant will be able to train and be certified as USDOT-certified medical examiners.

- All examiners will be on par with each other since all will have taken the same training and passed the same examination.

- The program provides for disciplinary, appeal and removal procedures from the registry.

- Certification is expected to last six years; update training will be required every three years and retesting required after six years.

Consumer faith makes big jump

NEW YORK CITY — Motorcoach operators looking for a little positive news may have found it last month when the Conference Board announced that consumer confidence rose in May by the widest margin in six years.

The group's monthly index surged to a reading of 54.9, from a revised 40.8 that had originally been reported slightly lower. The gain was the biggest since April 2003.

Economists had forecast the reading would rise to 42.6.

The consumer confidence index is a predictor of consumer spending. When people are feeling less confident about the economy they are less likely to spend money, which generally translates into reduced bus and motorcoach travel of nearly all kinds.

The May jump followed a better-than-expected increase in April as well.

The consumer confidence index jumped to 39.2 in April from an upwardly revised 26.9 in March.

The sharp two-month increase in the expectations index suggests consumers believe the economy is nearing a bottom. However, the index still remains well below levels associated with strong economic growth.

Consumer confidence fell to a record low in January. The index dropped to a 37.7 reading, the lowest since records began in 1967.

N.H. governor plans tax veto

CONCORD, N.H. — New Hampshire Gov. John Lynch says he will veto the state's budget if it includes a 15-cent fuel tax passed by the House and under consideration in the Senate.

State lawmakers disagree with Lynch over how to fund repairs and maintain the state's highways and bridges.

The increase to the tax would be phased in over 10 years for diesel fuel and three years for gasoline under the House's plan. It has received bipartisan legislative support.

Lynch has instead proposed raising vehicle registration fees and increasing tolls and other fees associated with the E-ZPass toll payment system.

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Unified Registration fees being re-examined by board

WASHINGTON — The board of the United Carrier Registration Agreement is expected to begin wrestling this month with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's rejection of a proposal to raise Unified Carrier Registration fees next year. (See June 1 and March 15 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The FMCSA reportedly returned the fee-hike plan to the UCR board out of concern the proposal "would punish the good guys" who were paying the fees voluntarily, rather than attempting to collect fees from companies that were evading them.

Officially, the fee recommendation was "returned to the board for further consideration," a FMCSA spokesman said.

"FMCSA has read between the lines of the board's recommendation and gotten the story straight," Bob Pitcher, vice president of state laws for American Trucking Associations, told *Transport Topics*, a leading trucking publication. The ATA opposes the fee increase.

The proposed fee change has pitted private-sector ground transportation organizations against the states that use the funds generated by the fees to finance safety enforcement activities.

Avelino Gutierrez, chairman of the UCR board and staff counsel for the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission, said the FMCSA was "insisting" states take steps to ensure that all the carriers required to pay the fees are correctly identi-

fied and billed.

"We will try to answer FMCSA's questions to the best of our ability," Gutierrez said.

The UCR board proposed large increases for 2010 because of massive under-collection of the fees. Under the proposal, the fees would be doubled across all categories. The charge for a company with one motorcoach would jump to \$83 from \$39, while the fee for the largest fleets of more than 1,000 buses and coaches would go to nearly \$83,000 from \$37,500.

Congress created the Unified Carrier Registration Agreement — as part of the 2005 highway and public transportation bill — to replace the Single State Registration System.

Under SSRS, for-hire carriers were assessed flat, per-vehicle registration fees. The UCR system changed that to include private fleets and companies like brokers and forwarders.

Pitcher said he thought the fees would be re-approved because there is "a lot of pressure (from the states) on the board." However, he added ATA would likely continue to oppose fee increases.

"There may perhaps be a minority report and then that all goes to FMCSA which will look it over again," he said.

"There is a huge time crunch," said Gutierrez. If FMCSA does not accept the board's recommendation in the next few months the fees may not be in place at the start of the year.

Okla. lawmakers adopt tort-reform legislation

OKLAHOMA CITY — After years of political wrangling, Oklahoma Gov. Brad Henry has signed into law tort reform legislation aimed at curbing frivolous lawsuits and reducing costs associated with the justice system.

Henry said the new law will help improve the legal process without impeding a citizen's access to the courts.

The Democratic governor and Republican Oklahoma lawmakers have often been at odds over the issue of implementing tort reform.

For more than a decade, House and Senate Republicans sought to reform Oklahoma's justice system. They say frivolous lawsuits have hobbled the healthcare industry and encouraged private companies to look to more business-friendly states when considering relocation

or jobs creation.

Now, "the days of Oklahoma being known as a jackpot justice state are over," said House Speaker Chris Benge.

Gov. Henry said the measure "enacts reasonable and responsible reforms that improve the civil justice system without impairing a citizen's constitutional right to have his or her legitimate grievances appropriately addressed in court."

Among other things, the bill caps non-economic damages, eliminates joint and several liability, and caps appeal bonds at \$25 million, while providing consumer safeguards for legitimate claims. Non-economic damages (so-called pain and suffering awards) would be capped at \$400,000 outside of exceptional circumstances.

The law goes into effect Nov. 1.

Bill seeks ban on interstate tolls

WASHINGTON — Legislation introduced by Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, would ban tolls on the National Highway System.

The Freedom from Tolls Act of 2009 (S. 1115) would apply to all untolled National Highway System highways open to traffic on the date of enactment of the proposed law.

"Highway users have paid for these highways through fuel taxes," said one national associa-

tion that supports the measure. "Additional tolling on our National Highway System is nothing more than an ill-conceived quick fix for transportation funding shortfalls."

Conversion of high-occupancy vehicle lanes to toll lanes would be exempted from the prohibition, and states would be allowed to toll newly constructed National Highway System lanes within the confines of existing federal law.

Hutchison said in a release that "as we work to meet our transportation needs, we must think broadly and avoid band-aid solutions, like tolling, that will ultimately exacerbate congestion and divert traffic into residential neighborhoods and onto smaller, less safe roads."

Two years ago, Hutchison successfully fostered legislation that prohibits the tolling of existing federal highways built with taxpayer dollars in Texas.



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Navistar tries courts to block 2010 engine technology

WARRENVILLE, Ill. — Bus, truck and engine manufacturer Navistar Inc. is challenging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's authority to certify heavy-duty diesel engines that use selective catalytic reduction to meet the agency's tougher 2010 emissions standards.

Navistar has asked a federal appeals court to review the EPA's

certification requirements for selective catalytic reduction engines, and whether the agency must go through the lengthy process of amending its 2001 rule setting emissions limits for diesel engines before it certifies engines using selective catalytic reduction.

In the suit, Navistar says that when the USEPA issued its 2001 rule that reduced the amount of

NOx that 2010-model on-highway diesel engines are allowed to produce, the agency "made an express 'infeasibility' determination for (selective catalytic reduction) technology."

Navistar is the only North American diesel engine maker that is not using selective catalytic reduction to meet the 2010 standard of 0.2 grams of NOx per brake-

horsepower hour, and has publicly called for a softening of the deadline to allow fleets to purchase 2007-compliant technology after Jan. 1, 2010. (See May 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Navistar spokesman Roy Wiley was quoted as saying that while Navistar does not comment on pending litigation, the company's exhaust gas recirculation technolo-

gy was "ready" for the 2010 rules. "Bring it on," he said of the '10 EPA standard.

Navistar intends to meet the 2010 requirement by using an advanced EGR system and emissions credits it has accrued during the past decade.

Previously, EPA has said it would not extend or alter the deadline.

Fuel efficiency rules for buses? Love's to have exhaust fluid

WASHINGTON — Last month, when the Obama administration announced tougher requirements for automobile fuel efficiency, and a first-ever national greenhouse gas reduction standard for cars and light trucks, there was speculation similar rules could be proposed for over-the-road buses and trucks within the foreseeable future.

The Obama plan for cars and pickup trucks sold in the U.S. calls for a 30 percent reduction in carbon dioxide and other emissions and an overall auto fuel-efficiency standard equal to an estimated 35.5-miles-per-gallon rating by 2016.

One trucking industry environmental affairs specialist said the proposed auto rules may signal a tougher overall environmental policy by the Obama administration that could include heavy truck and over-the-road bus standards as early as 2016.

However, before that policy could take effect, the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 requires that a heavy vehicle fuel efficiency study be completed by March 2010, and a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration fuel efficiency report be completed by fall 2010.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration could then

begin a rulemaking process for fuel efficiency in heavy commercial vehicles.

However, there is a nascent move afoot to remove fuel efficiency standard setting from the NHTSA and park it in the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection where pollution standards are set. Such a move could accelerate the process and make it tougher on the commercial vehicle industry.

The new mileage and emissions regulations for cars and light trucks would be a joint, or so-called harmonized, effort of EPA and NHTSA, a departure from past practice.

OKLAHOMA CITY — Love's Travel Stops and Country Stores plans to begin installing bulk containers for diesel exhaust fluid, the additive that will be needed for most 2010 motorcoach diesel engines, at 50 of its truck stops starting in the fourth quarter of this year.

All 2010 motorcoaches, except those that have engines built by Navistar Inc., will use selective catalytic reduction to meet 2010 nitrogen oxide emissions standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Diesel exhaust fluid is the catalyst that will be used by the selective catalytic reduction diesel engine makers to convert NOx in the

exhaust to harmless nitrogen and water vapor.

The USEPA has mandated that SCR engine makers build in a series of warnings and decelerations that eventually would stop motorcoaches and trucks from traveling with empty diesel exhaust fluid tanks, making the chemical's availability crucial.

In addition to selling diesel exhaust fluid in bulk at 50 of its stops, Love's also plans to have it available in portable containers at all locations. One-gallon, 2.5-gallon and 5-gallon containers are expected to be available.

Love's has 165 truck stops in about 30 states. The chain has more than 200 travel centers overall.

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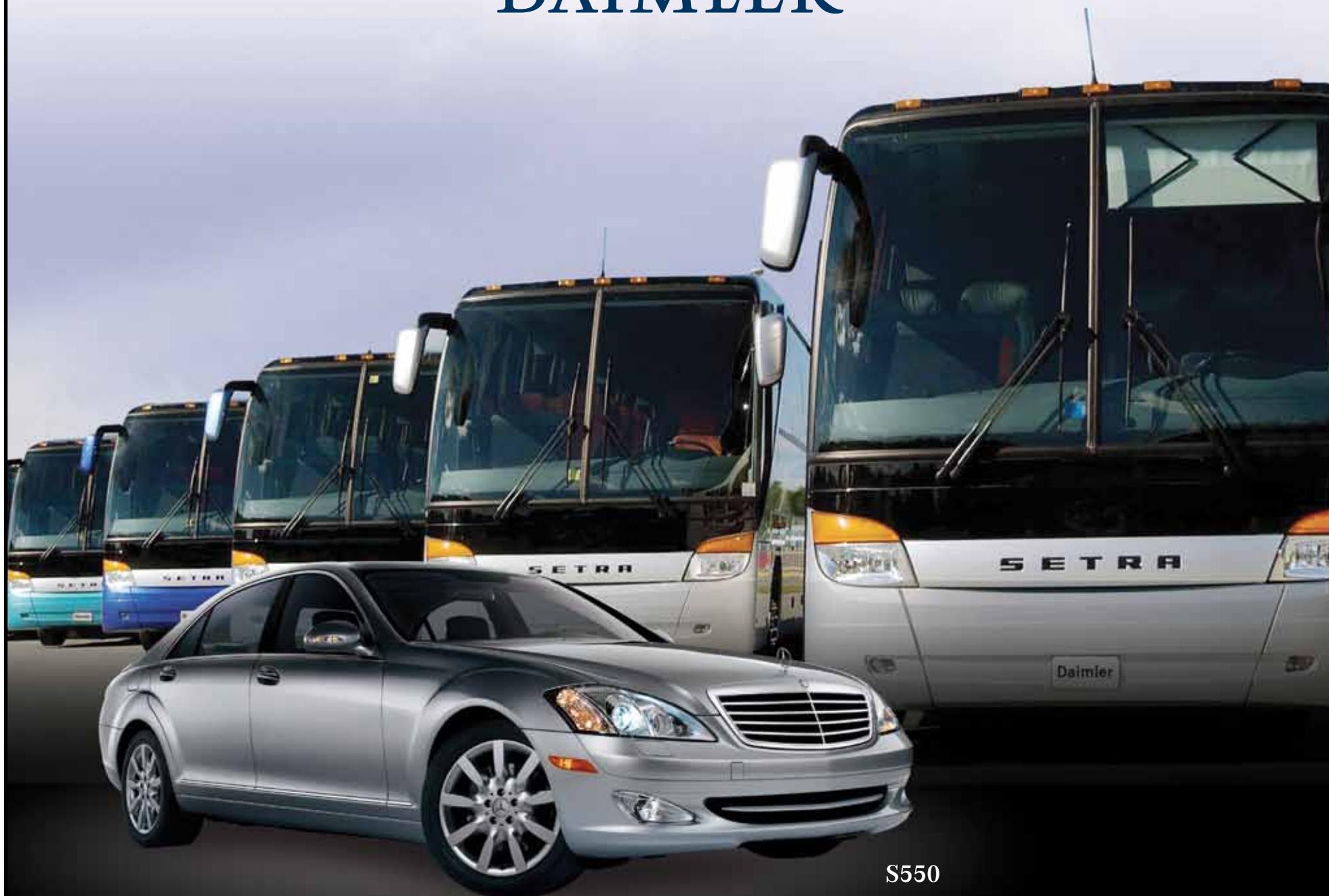
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A scathing assessment of motorcoach safety, regulation

Note: Last month, Joan Claybrook of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety testified before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection. During her remarks she strongly criticized U.S. motorcoach safety and federal safety regulators. Here are excerpts from her presentation

Motorcoaches are the over-the-road regional passenger airliners of America's highways, carrying up to 59 occupants on board for a given trip. (The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration) reports that 3,700 interstate motorcoach companies are registered with the agency and are operating more than 34,000 motorcoaches. Many thousands of other motorcoaches operate wholly in intrastate commerce.

Passenger ridership is projected to substantially expand in the near future given expected increases in the cost of commercial airline travel and increasing flight delays.

Motorcoach crashes can easily result in many deaths and severe injuries. Despite these harrowing losses, the U.S. Department of Transportation does not require that motorcoaches have the same basic occupant protection safety features that are routinely designed into passenger motor vehicles.

Few safety standards

There are fewer (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) safety standards for motorcoaches than for any other motor vehicles regulated by the agency.

Motorcoaches lack critical safety features such as seatbelts; passenger seat strength standards; occupant interior impact protection; anti-ejection measures such as advanced glazing; adequate roof

strength standards; rollover prevention requirements; automatic fire suppression systems; adequate on-board firefighting equipment, and interior emergency illumination of safe evacuation paths.

Yet, seatbelts are now required on European, Japanese and Australian motorcoaches. Australia responded to the need to restrain motorcoach occupants and keep them in their seats and prevent their ejection by mandating seatbelts 15 years ago. Since that mandate was issued, not a single death or disabling injury has occurred in an Australian motorcoach crash for any belted occupant.

Australia also produced a much safer and less expensive motorcoach seat design despite the protests of the industry that it was impossible to improve the safety of motorcoach seats without adding lots of extra weight that would cost the industry fuel and payload penalties.

Rollovers are the most common type of severe motorcoach crash and produce the most severe occupant trauma. These crashes are often catastrophic, with roof failures that can even involve complete roof separation, as occurred in a crash and rollover in which nine passengers were killed near Mexican Hat, Utah, on Jan. 7, 2008, and 51 of 53 passengers were ejected.

Rollovers and fires

According to a recent research report from (the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration), more than half the deaths in motorcoach crashes are the result of occupant ejection from the vehicle, and ejection is the reason for 70 percent of occupant deaths in motorcoach rollovers.

Motorcoach fires have grown both in numbers and severity in recent years. There are daily media reports of motorcoach fires occurring somewhere in the U.S. Fires on motorcoaches, especially in wheel wells, engine compartments, and heating/cooling systems are an especially severe and prevalent safety problem whose proportions just became known as the result of a Volpe Transportation Center study whose findings were presented at the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (Bus) Safety Summit in March 2009. (See April 1 and April 15 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

CVSA convened the safety summit because of the rapidly growing concern over the ongoing deterioration of motorcoach safety in the U.S. The Volpe study found that there was an average of more than one fire every day on a motorcoach in the U.S.

Current standards for combating the ignition and spread of fires on motorcoaches are wholly inadequate.

The deplorable state of motorcoach safety standards has been documented by the National Transportation Safety Board in nearly 70 motorcoach investigations over a span of 40 years that resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries and numerous recommendations to USDOT that have been ignored. In some of these incidents more than 20 people on board were killed in a single crash or fire.

Recommendations ignored

NTSB has issued dozens of recommendations over the years addressing all aspects of motorcoach safety, including crash protection of occupants, crash avoidance ca-

pability especially regarding catastrophic single-vehicle events involving rollovers, resistance to fire propagation and spread, and many other issues touching on motorcoach safety design, performance, and operation.

NTSB recommendations have either been closed out because of unsatisfactory responses, incomplete responses or no responses from USDOT agencies.

In recent years, Congress has held a series of hearings on motorcoach safety issues and the lack of action by USDOT to improve motorcoach safety because of its rapidly growing concern that motorcoach safety in the U.S. was adrift and that the agencies of jurisdiction were not doing their job to dramatically improve occupant safety.

(The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) has embarked on a program of research and testing to respond to the sense of urgency about dramatically improving motorcoach safety that NHTSA has emphasized in its recommendations to the agency.

To date, the agency has filed in its motorcoach safety research docket several reports on how well motorcoaches respond to a rollover test, a roof crush test, and a frontal barrier test. Advocates (for Highway and Auto Safety) strongly supports the test and findings of NHTSA's frontal crash test, which is quite stringent because it definitively shows that traditional motorcoach industry claims that passengers are safe because they are "compartmentalized" and protected like eggs in an eggcrate, are just not true.

Unbelted test dummies were thrown from their seats in the frontal crash test and ended up either in

a jumbled pile in the central motorcoach aisle, or were propelled into or over the seatbacks in front of them. Dummies with two-point seatbelts suffered what were recorded as severe injuries. But dummies with three-point belts (including shoulder straps) were properly restrained in their seats and suffered low injury forces.

The other two tests conducted by NHTSA, however, are weak and not acceptable. One of the tests is how a motorcoach suffers structural damage in a rollover. The test is an adaptation of the current (European Union) test that simply topples a motorcoach from a one-meter high platform onto the ground. The test results show levels of damage that are far milder than those often suffered by motorcoaches in real-world catastrophic rollover crashes.

Artificial tests?

NHTSA says it will separately test how glazing performs with a component test using a lateral impactor, but this is not a real-world demonstration of how a motorcoach roof and sides distort to facilitate glazing failure that results in large, open portals allowing passengers to be ejected.

Once again, as with passenger vehicle rollover, NHTSA chooses to artificially separate the tests of crucially important safety features that in the real world perform in a complex, interactive manner in actual rollover crashes.

This rollover test approach, and the agency's use of a component test for motorcoach side window glazing, can lead to weak safety standards that will not adequately protect motorcoach occupants in rollover crashes.

How to contact us

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

E-mail: bsankey@busandmotorcoachnews.com
 Fax: (405) 942-6201
 Mail: 3108 NW 54th Street
 Oklahoma City, OK 73112
 Call: (866) 930-8421

To subscribe or inquire about your subscription:

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Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

ISSUE NO. 148

A PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION

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Tire systems prove their worth, but aren't idiot proof

By Dave Millhouser

Big Bob was ticked.

The red glow on the dash was irritating and he still had 500 miles to go.

His solution was simple, yet effective. A dab of black tape covered the lens and he cruised back to home base.

Sadly, it was a "hot engine" light, and instead of him replenishing his oil...we had to replace his engine. There's a reason they're called "idiot lights."

Tire wear (and reliability) has long been one of the coach industry's most significant costs. New technology, in the form of tire monitors with dash displays, has become a major tool in improving tire life and reliability, as well as offering fuel savings.

Some large trucking firms report such systems extend tire life and give a 2 percent improvement in fuel economy, which, over time, pays for the system.

One major coach company thinks they save money, but the big deal for them is that they avoid tire fires and inconveniencing passen-

gers. Good stuff, unless you've got Big Bob at the helm ignoring that nasty warning light.

The systems in large vehicles come in two forms. Some measure air pressure, while others measure pressure and temperature. The problem with sensing only pressure is that your system is only speaking truth before you start rolling.

On the road, when one tire on a dual suffers from low pressure, it runs hotter, and heat expands the air until the pressure in both tires is the same.

Sadly, in return for its extra effort, the hot tire wears faster and is more likely to fail catastrophically.

Heat also can be the result of hanging brakes or a failing wheel bearing, each a bad thing. The sooner your driver knows about them the better.

Many coach builders are offering monitoring systems as standard equipment, or installing them on stock buses. This has the effect of putting them in the hands of operators who didn't necessarily choose to have them. Not a bad

thing but as one major carrier's bus guru says: "These things are only as good as the folks who calibrate, maintain and monitor them."

Therein lies the rub.

A miscreant bus salesman once told of driving a demonstrator coach with the tire monitor signaling distress. His reaction was to rip the unit off the dash.

One manufacturer's tech rep had a bus driver beg him to disconnect the gizmo because it had been driving him crazy for days.

The key to using the systems seems to be training. That same tech rep said the systems are reliable, provided the drivers understand them, and technicians install, calibrate and maintain them correctly.

Almost all of the problems the rep dealt with were failures of understanding, not of equipment.

The monitors will continue to improve and add features. There currently are systems available for semi trailers that pump air into tires when needed. At some point it's likely we'll see such systems for coaches.

The key to making them work,

and taking advantage of all they have to offer, is for operators to "buy in" to the concept. Whether you ordered or inherited a tire monitoring system, it makes sense to teach your drivers and mechanics how it works and how it should be maintained, and take advantage of what it can do for you.

Several modern systems can commune directly with your coach's multiplexed electrical system, opening up a number of intriguing possibilities.

The neatest one, so far, literally notifies your facility when tire temperature or pressure reaches pre-set parameters. This way you can call Big Bob and tell him to look at his dash and pull off the road. At this point, the tire billy can become a training aid, fine tuning Bob with a couple of well placed smacks.

A number of carriers have retrofitted systems to existing coaches, after cleverly figuring out that one road call can cost as much as installing the monitor. Whether installed in a new coach, or retrofitted, the key to these jewels helping out is having your staff understand



Dave Millhouser

and use them.

Last year, an operator had a new coach burn to the frame in the middle of a charter, 500 miles from home. No one was hurt (unless you count the insurance company).

Several times before the disaster, the driver called dispatch to report the tire monitor was making nasty sounds. He eventually was told the thing had never worked right and to disconnect it.

You guessed it -- a tire fire took out the coach.

(We bus sophisticates refer to such events as thermal incidents.)

Big Bob lives on.

Dave Millhouser is a bus industry marketing consultant and freelance writer. Contact him at: dave_millhouser@hotmail.com.



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Fax: (011.52.55) 53.17.41.11
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Fax: (419) 892.26.55
Email: darnis1@aol.com

George Farrell
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Fax: (214) 495.99.78
Email: gfarr007@aol.com

www.amaya-astron.com.mx

Customers can get 'smart' at Daimler service centers

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Beginning this month, Daimler Buses is providing complimentary two-seater smart cars for customers to use while their coaches and buses are being serviced at any of its three repair centers in the U.S.

Daimler Buses said its smart-car program is unique in the industry and supports the company customer service philosophy. Daimler has service centers in Florida, North Carolina and New Jersey.

"smart is a brand by Daimler, and we are excited about leveraging it to support our Setra and Sprinter customers," said Patrick Scully,

chief commercial officer for Daimler Buses North America. "We pride ourselves on our commitment to customer service and offering the smart car to our customers, while they have service work being performed on their coaches, allows them greater flexibility and convenience during visits to our service centers."

The Daimler smart fortwo car is an ultra-low-emissions auto that's rated at 41 mpg in highway driving. While it's less than nine feet long and roughly five feet wide, it's equipped with many functional and safety features found in luxury autos.



"Loaners," which have largely disappeared from auto dealer service departments, are making a comeback at Daimler service centers with the addition of smart fortwo cars for customers' use.

Daimler Buses also announced it has upgraded its Customer Assistance Network technical support hotline by assuring the toll-free telephone line is answered around

the clock to assist customers.

"Our Setra and Sprinter operators expect assistance regardless of the time of day, and we cannot agree more," said Paul Conover, director of product support for Daim-

ler Buses North America. "Having a live person ready to assist you in a time of need maintains our commitment to our customers."

The number for the technical support service is (800) 882-8054.

National Interstate marks 20th anniversary

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Corporation, and its principal subsidiary, National Interstate Insurance Company, are celebrating their 20th year of providing transportation industry insurance.

National Interstate says it has enjoyed significant growth since its founding in 1989, by offering a broad array of insurance programs and services.

National Interstate specializes in passenger transportation insurance, but also offers more than 30 specialty products. It insures everything from school buses, motorcoaches, trucks, limousines and non-emergency medical transportation to recreational vehicles and commercial vehicles used by small business owners.

It is the leading writer of transportation captive insurance, which

represents more than half of its gross premiums.

"We attribute our success in alternative risk transfer programs to the partnership philosophy it fosters," said Dave Michelson, president and chief executive of National Interstate.

The company has more than 350 employees, with offices in Ohio, Hawaii, Pennsylvania and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Michelin expands retread program

GREENVILLE, S.C. — Michelin North America continues to expand the number of tire retreaders and retailers in its Michelin Retread Technologies franchisee program.

Colony Tire of Edenton, N.C., with 20 commercial locations, has adopted the Michelin retreading process.

"Michelin is pleased to have

such an excellent retread provider and industry-leading dealer like Colony Tire join our expanding network of MRT franchises," said Tom Brennan, vice president and director of Michelin Retread Technologies.

Michelin says its retreads are built with proprietary compounds and tread patterns to mirror the performance of new Michelin truck and bus tires.

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No-stop safety inspections are on the way for coaches

Roadside safety inspections for motorcoaches can be time consuming, inconvenient and disturbing to passengers.

Someday, not too far off, many of them could be trouble free, over within seconds and not even noticed by people on the coach.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration says wireless roadside inspections carried out while the coaches are rolling along the highway are on the horizon.

The agency, which has been researching the idea for years, is gearing up to begin testing a variety of technologies that could be used to carry out the “no-stop” safety inspections for both buses and commercial trucks, according to Jeff Loftus of the FMCSA technology division.

He said testing is scheduled to get under way by next March with a handful of yet-to-be solicited volunteer motorcoach and trucking companies in Kentucky, Tennessee and New York. And, if all goes well, then a much broader and more extensive pilot program would be started sometime in 2012.

Although the wireless inspections would produce much of the

same information obtained during physical roadside examinations, they would not replace them.

Physical inspections still would be needed because the wireless technology would be unable to detect critical vehicle safety issues such as cracked tires, worn brake lines or leaking hoses and oil or fuel lines.

However, Loftus said the wireless inspections would allow regulators to dramatically increase the number of inspections they could do each year, which likely would reduce accidents by getting more bad drivers, dangerous buses and il-

legal carriers off the road.

The testing program will involve simple electronic equipment that can identify license and U.S. Department of Transportation numbers off passing vehicles, as well as much more sophisticated software that can read and transmit data from electronic driver log books, on-board recorders and fleet management equipment devices that carriers now use to monitor various vehicle components and functions.

The Kentucky sites will test the license and USDOT number readers, the Tennessee sites will study cellular technology, and the New

York sites will examine transponders.

The information will be collected from the company and from its vehicles as they pass staffed and un-staffed stations located at various sites along the highway and then transmitted to federal and state regulators for evaluation. The results of each electronic inspection would then be sent to state roadside inspectors and the motor carriers that own or operate the vehicles.

“We will want the information to be transparent to the bus and truck companies so they know what is going on,” emphasized Loftus.

State and federal regulators would evaluate the data to determine whether the driver has a valid commercial license and is not violating the hours of service regulations, whether the vehicle is properly registered and licensed and had not been ordered out of service, and whether the carrier is operating legally and had not been shut down by authorities.

If a serious violation — that requires immediate action — is spotted, law enforcement authorities could be alerted and if they are patrolling in the area they could be asked to stop the vehicle for a traditional roadside inspection. For less immediate problems, regulators would notify the company by mail, telephone or a personal visit.

Loftus said a critical part of the program will be to reduce accidents by zeroing in on the drivers because recent bus and truck crash causation studies have shown that most accidents are linked to driver-related causes.

“The ability to identify the driver and how long they have been driving, while the vehicle is moving, is the unique aspect and key focus of this research program,” he noted.

National Motorcoach Network revises logo

MOUNT JACKSON, Va. — The National Motorcoach Network has revamped its logo as part of an effort to demonstrate that its members value safety, quality and service, as well as operate energy efficient vehicles.

It is the first revision to the nationwide marketing organization’s logo in more than 25 years.

The revised logo uses new logotype that surrounds the existing logo with a message designed to be easily understood by consumers

who board coaches operated by network members.

“We looked at a number of industry logos, including our own, and asked what message they conveyed to the end user, the consumer. And the answer was, quite honestly, very little,” said network President Stephen M. Kirchner.

By adding the words safety, quality, service and energy efficient vehicles, “we have created a message that is instantly understandable,” said Kirchner.



For information about the network, go to www.motorcoach.com.

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Greyhound

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

complaint, is the company thinks federal regulators are largely ignoring the situation and failing to enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act rules uniformly and throughout the industry.

"We welcome competition from both new and existing companies, but it is only fair that the competition be on a level playing field," Wambaugh asserted.

She said the company has the same concerns about motorcoach operators complying with federal safety and security standards as well.

Upstart companies that provide curbside bus service between major East Coast cities have come under fire in the past from established intercity carriers that claim many of the drivers and vehicles of the newcomers have safety issues.

FMCSA, which has the authority to suspend or revoke the operating authority of coach operators that violate ADA requirements, acknowledged the agency has received the complaint.

"I can confirm we have received the complaint letter from Greyhound," said spokesman Duane DeBruyne. "I can also confirm we are looking into the matter and that this has been relayed to Greyhound officials."

Although he would not discuss specifics of the complaint, he noted that smaller fixed-route carriers, including those offering curbside service, can be ADA compliant if they can provide accessible bus service within 48 hours of a request.

"The observation method of wheelchair-accessible buses in service by smaller fixed-route and curbside carriers is purposeless," he added.

Filing of the Greyhound complaint comes just weeks after the FMCSA initiated an extensive ADA review of fixed-route carriers throughout the country, following an agreement it signed with the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice.

"Since March 2009, FMCSA

Cadec unveils software-based, remote-engine shutdown tool

MANCHESTER, N.H. — Cadec Global, a provider of fleet management solutions, announced it has launched what it says is the first software-based, remote-engine shutdown technology for motorcoaches and trucks.

Part of a new line of optional safety modules for its PowerVue platform called ProTecht, Cadec's remote engine-shutdown module already has been deployed in a nationwide transportation company's fleet comprised of hundreds of vehicles, the company said.

That fleet is widely believed to be Greyhound Lines.

PowerVue automatically collects data on driver behavior and vehicle location and speed, helping fleets optimize performance and efficiency, while other built-in features are designed to help maximize safety.

ProTecht is a line of optional add-on modules for PowerVue. ProTecht applications are designed primarily for motorcoach fleets and fuel/hazmat haulers and offer

features for protecting human or hazardous cargo.

The latest addition is designed to prevent hijacking and cargo theft through a patent-pending remote engine shutdown module. Cadec says it is the first company to provide a "non-invasive, software-based approach" to remote engine shutdown.

Hardware approaches, says Cadec, tend to force an abrupt stop. By contrast, Cadec software slows and then stops a vehicle remotely in a safe, controlled manner. The shutdown is supervised and monitored by authorized security personnel.

The remote engine shutdown module includes onboard driver authentication to prevent unauthorized parties from starting or operating a vehicle.

CEO Michael Baney said Cadec's remote engine shutdown technology "is very compelling and a huge competitive advantage for Cadec. No other vendor in our space can offer anything like it."

has been conducting ADA reviews on the 40 or so largest fixed-route companies that account for approximately 85 percent of the passengers being carried," DeBruyne said. "By the end of May 2009, FMCSA expects to have completed 16 ADA reviews."

He said the agency plans to critique the reviews before extending the study to smaller fixed-route carriers.

In its complaint, Greyhound noted that the over-the-road bus industry has changed and expanded dramatically in recent years with the advent of curbside, fixed-route bus operators and bus operators that provide fixed-route service from the Mexican border to locations throughout the United States.

"Greyhound believes the vast majority of these operators will fully ignore the (ADA) regulations because they believe there is no

enforcement of those regulations," the company contends in its complaint.

The company maintains that the results of its study, which was conducted between April 14 and May 7, verify its claims.

Greyhound said the study involved looking at 363 coaches, including 189 in the Northeast corridor, 142 in Texas and Arizona, and 32 in California. Of those, just 26 were equipped with wheelchair lifts.

By comparison, Greyhound said that at last count, 740 of its buses — or more than 52 percent of its fleet — have wheelchair lifts. It noted that it had recently purchased 140 new buses and all of them have lifts.

The Dallas-based company also said it maintains a special section of its website devoted to ADA issues and a staff that works on requests for ADA services.

Forell filed 11 formal complaints against River Cities during that period, including nine under the old charter rule and two under the new rule that took effect a year ago.

The company was successful on three of the nine older complaints under the old rules and split the two newer ones.

"It's pretty hard to get a decision from the FTA," Forell said,

adding that her company does not have the resources to continually investigate possible violations by River Cities that it hears about. "They seem to do whatever they want and a lot of people don't want to get involved."

However, she said if she can win a few more and the fines grow, then people might start paying attention.

NYC Parking

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

limit had suddenly appeared in the city's charter bus parking guidelines and whether it could be removed so drivers wouldn't be forced to drive in circles for hours while they waited for their passengers to attend Broadway shows, finish shopping excursions or complete other activities.

Eventually, the pair discovered that buried within the city bureaucracy is an Office of Bus Stop Management, and an official admitted the 15-minute limit had been a mistake, and said the guidelines would be corrected.

That happened last month, and the revised guidelines no longer mention any limitation other than those that apply to traditional loading and unloading zones.

Operators sending coaches to Manhattan, and their drivers, would be smart to familiarize themselves with the city Department of Transportation Charter Bus Parking Guidelines, which are available via the internet. The guidelines' website contains a link to the list of authorized bus layover locations.

The list should be used carefully. Motorcoaches visiting New York City can only park in those layover spots that are designated

for charter buses. Do not park in a location designated for tour buses. Tour bus parking is for companies that have a special relationship with the city, such as the double-decker sightseeing buses operated by Coach USA and others.

The list of authorized layover spots also is a little confusing because it appears to contain a number of duplicate listings. That's because some blocks in the city have more than one layover location and that's the way the bureaucrats chose to acknowledge the multiple parking spots.

To find the charter bus parking guidelines and layover list, go to <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/ferrybus/charterbus.shtml>. To contact the Office of Bus Stop Management, call (718) 894-2785.

While the updated guidelines and layover list clear up two vexing issues they do not resolve the more widespread and fundamental problem — the overwhelming shortage of bus parking spaces in the city.

Nor do they deal with the widespread problem of police and other city employees, who hold thousands of passes, from parking in spaces designated for charter buses.

Place those items under the "some-problems-defy-solution" category.

Seatbelts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

safety issues to develop a Departmental Motorcoach Safety Action Plan that coordinates and integrates the activities. "We will deliver that plan to him by July 15, 2009," Medford said.

A string of crashes during the past two years has significantly raised the visibility of motorcoach safety in Congress, at the USDOT and the National Transportation Safety board, and among various safety groups. (See related article on Page 7.)

During the past 10 years, the NTSB has investigated 33 motorcoach accidents, involving the ejection of 255 passengers, and it has repeatedly called on NHTSA to improve protections for bus passengers.

In an interview after the hearing, Medford said his agency is only planning to require safety belts on motorcoaches — not school buses.

Life saver

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In a letter to Betty Jo Counselman of Virginia Coach Co., Coates thanked Wood as well as commending Counselman "for hiring and training drivers who are able to think clearly and act responsi-

Congress currently is considering reauthorization of the multi-year federal highway and public transportation bill — a law that typically includes major auto safety requirements. New motorcoach safety rules are seen as likely being thrown into that mix.

Legislation already pending before Congress, introduced by Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchinson, R-Texas, in response to the 2007 fatal crash involving the Bluffton University baseball team, would require motorcoaches to have lap/shoulder belts, stouter seats, anti-ejection glazing, stronger roofs, improved fire protection, and electronic on-board recorders with real-time capabilities.

The United Motorcoach and American Bus associations favor a separate measure proposed by Rep. Bill Schuster, R-Pa., which would bring a more scientific approach to many of the same standards called for by Sens. Brown and Hutchinson.

bility under stressful conditions. Drivers like Lorenzo (Moody) are truly a blessing to our industry," said Coates.

Counselman said Moody is an exemplary driver who has provided years of professional service to Virginia Coach. "I'd like to clone him," she said.

Transit battle

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

made their own arrangements with the transit agency and paid as they boarded the bus, it might not have been a violation of the charter rule.

The conflict between the Forrells and the transit agency managed by Baumgart stretches back about five years and involves numerous complaints.

N.Y. emissions crackdown bypasses buses

Calif. idling rule confuses officers

ALBANY, N.Y. — There are many, many more smoking-belching commercial trucks in New York than there are motorcoaches.

That's the assessment of the state Department of Environmental Conservation as it continues a crackdown on diesel-powered trucks and buses that violate state emissions and idling regulations.

Police who have conducted more than a dozen random enforcement operations in heavily populated areas of the state say that al-

though a breakdown of tickets by vehicle type has not been kept, the vast majority of the citations have gone to trucks.

"We haven't seen a lot of problems with buses," noted Major Timothy Duff of the law enforcement division of the DEC.

The state launched the program in Nassau and Suffolk counties in February, following a pilot project in New York City that it hailed as a big success. About 20 percent of the vehicles stopped by officers turned out to be spewing excessive emissions.

The state DEC says the program is aimed at reducing vehicle

pollutants in neighborhoods that have been disproportionately impacted by truck and bus emissions, which in turn will ease the health impact on residents, especially those suffering from asthma and other serious breathing problems.

Despite the good fortune that motorcoaches have experienced so far, DEC spokesman Yancey Roy cautioned that the campaign is ongoing and officers will ticket both bus and truck drivers whose vehicles are smoking excessively or sitting too long with their engines running.

State regulations allow buses to idle for no more than five minutes.

Meantime, motorcoach drivers who make trips to California might want to consider carrying a copy of that state's idling regulations in their buses.

Jim Stange, owner of American Tour Club in Gladwin, Mich., said he was on a charter in California recently when a police officer ordered him to shut down his engine after he had idled for about five minutes with passengers on the bus.

Later, he said he discovered the state has an exemption to its five-minute idling regulation for buses that allows them to idle for up to 10 minutes prior to passenger

boarding or when passengers are on board.

"I shut it down and was surprised to find out later that he apparently didn't know any thing about the exemption for buses," said Stange.

The officer could have thought the rules for trucks applied to buses.

Stange, who was spared a ticket by following the officer's order, suggests that operators provide their drivers with a copy of the state idling regulation so they, too, can avoid a ticket if they run into an enforcement officer who is not aware of the exemption.

"Showing them the paper if they are going to give you a ticket for having it run nine minutes is worth the \$300 savings in fines and the endless time of getting the record cleared," he added.

A copy of the regulation suitable for printing can be found at <http://www.arb.ca.gov/msprog/truck-idling/2485.pdf>.

The California Air Resources Board said the issue probably was a simple mistake.

"It may have been someone who had not done this type of enforcement before," said board spokeswoman Karen Ceaser.

CoachCrafters, PowerUp offer bus repowers

TAVARES, Fla. — CoachCrafters Inc. and PowerUp Inc. have jointly developed what they say is a cost-effective and time-efficient process of repowering transit-type buses.

Their procedure drastically cuts "off-road" time, the companies add.

CoachCrafters President Wayne Wolf says his company has been able to streamline the process of repowering transit buses by designing kits expressly for the vari-

ous makes and models of transit buses in service today.

These kits are being provided by PowerUp Inc., and include all required components, including a new engine, exhaust system, cooling equipment and related parts. "By using repower kits, the shop time required for an average repower has been significantly reduced," says Wolf. "This returns the unit into the revenue stream

faster and lessens labor costs."

PowerUp President Paul Wilhelm noted that with Detroit Diesel no longer supplying engines to most bus builders, "many operators of transit-type buses are facing a serious problem trying to keep their Series 50 engines on the road.

"By partnering with Cummins and CoachCrafters, we can offer an economic solution to this situation. With the use of our kits, a newly

built Cummins ISL 280 engine can be installed in your buses with relative ease and guaranteed success."

Adds Wolf: "Repowering... using a pre-developed kit and experienced installers saves time and money while increasing performance and extending the life of a transit fleet. Additionally it is environmentally friendly in that it provides greater energy efficiency and reduces emissions."

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ABC-marketed midsize coach completes tough testing

FARIBAULT, Minn. — ABC Companies and General Coach of America announced that the GCA 3035RE midsize coach, which is marketed by ABC, has completed the Federal Transit Administration's

Altoona bus testing program.

The Altoona test, as the program is known, is designed to evaluate a bus's ability to perform, under real world conditions, over its projected lifetime. The 3035RE

completed testing for a 12-year/500,000-mile life cycle.

Performed by the vehicle systems and safety program staff at the Altoona Bus Research and Testing Center in Altoona, Pa., the test is required of all bus models before they can be purchased using federal money.

In addition to selling the GCA 3035RE as a midsize motorcoach, ABC plans to market the 3035RE as a commuter bus to public transit agencies. It fully complies with FTA "Buy America" requirements.

The 3035RE was jointly developed by the GCA division of Thor Industries and ABC Companies to produce a midsize bus with motorcoach-like qualities.

The program combined GCA's engineering and manufacturing expertise with ABC's knowledge of coach-operator needs to come up with what ABC says is the best-selling midsize coach in the U.S.



A GCA 3035RE coach, similar to this one purchased by Vandalia Bus Lines of Caseyville, Ill., underwent more than five months of rigorous testing.

"We are proud of the performance of the 3035RE in the challenging conditions created by the test track at Altoona," said John Resnik, president of General Coach of America. "The design of the 3035RE is solid and these results are a good validation of that design."

The 3035RE is built on a Freightliner XB chassis and equipped with a Cummins ISB en-

gine. The coach comes standard with an Allison transmission, although the one tested at Altoona had a ZF transmission. Other components are familiar to coach operators, including Amaya seats, Ricon wheelchair lift, and Carrier O5G A/C compressor.

The Altoona test results can be found at <http://146.186.225.57/pti/pdf/0813.pdf>.

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Driver has tips for group leaders

Note: Bob Bergey is a driver for Hagey Coach Inc. in Franconia, Pa. He has come up with a list of tips for "Group Leaders on Motorcoach Trips." Bergey's complete list is posted on a website he maintains called EightWheels.com.

Have you chartered a motorcoach for your group's trip? Great — smart move! Here are tips for you, the group leader, from my perspective as your driver for your charter trip.

1) Introduce yourself, as the person in charge, to your driver. You'd be amazed how often we have to guess or ask around the group to find out who's in charge of things like letting us know when you're ready to depart, confirm destinations and time schedules, letting us know that all passengers have boarded, etc. Sometimes our paperwork tells us who's in charge and we can find you, but just as often the person listed on our paperwork is the person who booked the coach for the trip, not the person who's actually in charge on trip day.

2) Ride Bus No. 1, and sit in the front of the coach. If you've booked multiple coaches for your group, the overall group leader should ride on the first coach in the group. Sometimes last minute "executive decisions" need to be made en route, and it's difficult to do that when there's no one in charge on the first coach. Sit up front where the driver can talk to you if/when necessary, or at least be prepared to move to the front

quickly when needed.

3) Make sure your group understands that you're in charge. Introduce yourself to your group (or other bus captains) as the "go-to" person if there's a problem or a decision that needs to be made on behalf of the group. Don't put the driver(s) in the position of having to navigate between passengers, group leaders and previously arranged trip plans. The group leader is the contact person between the driver and the group.

4) Allow time to review trip plans with the driver before you depart the pickup point. Drivers are usually pretty good at double checking trip plans with the group leader, including things like selection of the route, plans for rest stops along the way, etc. But sometimes trips are less well organized and the group leader is so rushed, we're on the road before we've confirmed the details.

If things have changed since the original itinerary was given to the driver, it can make it difficult for the driver to make adjustments en route. Also, give the driver the overall picture for the day if it's not clear from the itinerary. We like to research things like directions and bus parking ahead of time when possible.

5) Remember, the driver likes to eat, too. Too often groups will try and make up time by eating meals on the bus. That's not a problem, as long as the group hasn't already been traveling all day and the driver has had time for a meal. Expecting the driver to eat while driv-

ing, or to skip meals altogether, is definitely not a good idea.

Make sure your driver has time off — 30 minutes, at least — to get a meal and eat before he has to continue driving at meal times.

6) Allow adequate time for rest stops along the way. Yes, the coach has a bathroom. But it's not really designed to handle everyone on the bus using it multiple times during the day — it's there for emergency use for those who just can't wait until the next rest stop. With a full bus, you need to allow a minimum of 10 to 15 minutes every 2-3 hours for a bathroom break. Even those who don't need the bathroom break will enjoy being able to get off the coach and stretch their legs.

7) Exchange cell phone numbers with the driver. This will usually be initiated by the driver, but don't hesitate to ask if he/she forgets. You may not need to use the phone numbers, but just in case — things do change — you want to be able to communicate with your driver. He/she needs your number, just as you need theirs.

But, don't give the driver's cell phone number to the rest of the passengers, especially if it's his personal cell phone number — give them yours, instead.

Your motorcoach driver is a professional and can help make your trip a success. We want it to be a great experience for everyone, including you, the group leader. Just a little time, planning and good communication are all it takes.

Your comments or questions are welcome.

Thinking about a wash system? Supplier offers thoughts

BEAMSVILLE, Ont. — A veteran motorcoach industry supplier has some advice for operators considering investing in a mechanized wash system for their buses.

“It’s very important that operators thoroughly research the industry and its products,” says Martin C. van Tol, owner and president of ACC International Inc.

“We recommend talking to as many people as possible. This not only includes vendors and suppliers but, more importantly, (other operators). Your colleagues will be able to offer first-hand knowledge and experience,” says van Tol, whose Beamsville-based company has been supplying powered mobile bus wash systems for nearly 20 years.

“When considering any type of equipment, it’s important to look at all facets of the project, including all initial costs (are there any hidden costs, such as shipping, construction, setup and the like?), operating costs, general maintenance, and parts and service availability,” says van Tol.

“You must analyze your existing facility and operation. How much space is available? What are (the) true operating costs of your existing wash system/program, factoring in both direct and indirect labor costs,

as well as water and shampoo consumption and disposal costs?”

And don’t forget the details, suggests van Tol, “such as how many vehicles a day/week/year do you clean now? How many would you like to clean? What is your budget?”

van Tol’s firm offers power brush systems that range in price from \$13,000 to \$20,000, depending on the configuration.

He says a bus washer using an

ACC Eco-Power Brush, for example, can clean a motorcoach in six to nine minutes, using about 25 gallons of water and minimal shampoo.

Compared to hand washing, the power brush reduces labor, water and shampoo costs by 50 to 80 percent, says van Tol. “With a proven life expectancy of 10 to 20 years, this adds up to significant savings, far exceeding your initial investment.”

He also notes that power wash-

ing systems are environmentally friendly, using roughly 25 gallons of water and minimal shampoo per vehicle. Hand washing a motorcoach, he says, uses upwards of 60 to 100 gallons of water and a significant amount of shampoo for each vehicle cleaned.

van Tol also contends it is important that coach operators keep their vehicles clean. “Often, all that your existing and potential custom-

ers see of your organization is your motorcoach and your driver. Their perception of your image is based on these two factors.

“Additionally, keeping your fleet clean lowers maintenance and repair costs and results in longer lasting vehicles with higher resale values,” he adds.

For information about ACC International, or to contact van Tol, go to www.accint.ca.

Calendar

JUNE 2009

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

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

JULY 2009

7-8 Florida Motorcoach Association Coach Rodeo, Ramada Orlando Celebration Resort & Conv. Center, Kissimmee, Fla. Info: www.floridamotorcoach.org



McFarlane

Walser

Laffan

Morrison

People

John McFarlane has been named vice president and sales manager for **ABC Companies** in Canada.

McFarlane began his career at ABC in 2001, as Midwest account executive and two years ago was appointed the company’s first Canadian account executive. In his

expanded role, McFarlane will be responsible for sales of Van Hool coaches and ABC’s midsize buses throughout Canada. In addition, he will continue as account executive for his Midwestern territory.

Born in Scotland and raised in Toronto, McFarlane worked in Calgary, Alberta, prior to coming to the U.S.

ABC’s Canadian sales and service facility is in Kitchener,

Ontario.

Separately, ABC announced that for the first time two individuals tied for first place as ABC’s top sales performer. *Charlie Walser*, a 23-year veteran with ABC, whose territory encompasses Southern California, and *Mike Laffan*, who rejoined ABC Companies two years ago in its Western region, were recognized for their achievements in sales and customer service.

“We felt it only fitting to acknowledge them equally for their commitment to their customers and support of our industry,” said Roman Cornell, vice president of national sales.

Jim Morrison, a 12-year veteran whose territory includes Florida and Alabama, was awarded third place.

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