

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

The parts game: It's going, growing...and competitive

In the half-dozen years since the Great Recession, the motorcoach industry has experienced a general, if uneven, recovery, but sales of new motorcoaches have yet to return to pre-2008 levels.

Bus & Motorcoach News asked the three largest motorcoach manufacturers/distributors — ABC Companies/Van Hool, Motor Coach Industries/Setra and Prevost/Volvo — how parts sales have been

trending.

Among other things, we wanted to learn whether the moderate sales pace of new coaches has meant that operators are spending more on maintenance and replacement parts to keep their coaches running longer.

In other words, with new coach sales lackluster, have parts sales shined?

ABC Companies' director of

marketing, Dan Leo, said the relationship between the two factors may not be that simple.

"Even when new motorcoach sales are doing well, parts are still holding their own," he said. "Whether the economy is good or bad, parts are a great stabilizer that can anchor sales."

First, a little context regarding new motorcoach sales.

A year in which 2,000 new

coaches are sold is generally considered a success. The last time that number was hit by the combined sales of the five most popular manufacturers was 2008.

Still, sales of new coaches have been rising in recent years: 1,366 in 2011 and 1,525 in 2012, according to data reported by *National Bus Trader* magazine. In 2013, the total climbed to 1,639, and rose again in 2014 to 1,818, according to figures

compiled by the American Bus Association Foundation.

ABC Companies

Based in Winter Park, Fla., ABC Companies is the North American distributor of Van Hool motorcoaches, as well as being a leading parts distributor for other makes and models of coach and transit vehicles.

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Discount bus company Fung Wah, which recently was authorized to resume limited service after being shut down two years ago for safety violations, may have to

close permanently unless it can find a new pick-up and drop-off location in Boston. It has a bus stop in New York. See story on Page 3.

Serial bus thief: On the road again in stolen coach?

TOLEDO, Ohio — Was it just a coincidence or could it be that an old industry nemesis has struck again?

Around the middle of last month, a loaner motorcoach was stolen from the MCI Service Center in Des Plaines, Ill.

The circumstances were similar to earlier bus thefts: It was an older model coach stolen after hours, and it wasn't recovered within a few days, as it likely would have been if it had been taken by a joyrider.

Finally, it occurred while serial bus thief Derrick Jones was evading a warrant for his arrest for stealing a coach a year ago.

Jones, a former part-time coach driver, has been questioned, arrest-

ed, charged and convicted multiple times over the past dozen years in connection with stolen buses.

Five years ago, Jones was suspected of stealing a Miller Trailways' coach from the MCI facility. GPS records showed the bus was dropped off at 10 p.m. and by 10:30 it was back on the road in the hands of a miscreant, thought to be Jones.

The bus later was discovered at a truck stop near Toledo, Jones' hometown. Eyewitnesses linked Jones to the theft. (See May 1, 2009, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

In February of this year, Jones was pulled over for speeding in Michigan while driving a bus that had been stolen the previous May

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CARB filter retrofits causing costly maintenance issues

SACRAMENTO — Forcing the exhaust of an old diesel engine through a brand-new filter, like pushing 10 pounds of flour into a five-pound bag, probably will make a mess.

Truck, motorcoach and school bus operators in California say they are facing such a dilemma in running older diesel engines with retrofitted diesel particulate filters (DPF) mandated by the California

Air Resources Board (CARB).

In 1998 the board identified diesel particulate matter as the source of 70 percent of all cancer risk caused by airborne pollutants.

The filters remove soot and ash from engine exhaust to enable diesels to meet modern pollution standards. The particulates created by older engines, which weren't designed to meet such stringent emission limits, often clog the fil-

ters and cause expensive, sometimes highly inconvenient, maintenance issues.

"The older engines were never designed for DPFs. They were never designed to run cleaner," said Robert Jones, maintenance committee chairman for the California Bus Association.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has mandated DPFs on new heavy-duty diesel

vehicles since 2007. "Original equipment and retrofits are two separate issues," said Jones, who is maintenance administrator and shop manager at Discovery Charters in Castroville, Calif. "The original equipment has been a lot better. The retrofits plug up fast."

The California association is hoping, without much optimism, to convince CARB to ease up on the retrofit regulation.

The CARB "Truck and Bus Regulation," adopted in 2008, mandated DPFs on trucks and buses over 14,000 pounds of gross vehicle weight. Compliance requires that newer engines meeting model year 2007 standards be equipped with original equipment particulate matter filters. Older engines are required to retrofit a DPF.

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Discount bus operator Fung Wah may be forced to close

BOSTON — Fung Wah, the discount bus operator that was shut down two years ago for safety violations, may close for good after losing its pick-up and drop-off spot in Boston.

The pioneering low-fare operator, which ran buses between Manhattan's Chinatown and Boston for nearly 20 years, was granted federal authority late last year to resume operations. (See Jan. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

However, company officials said Massachusetts regulators have not allowed Fung Wah to reclaim its former pick-up and drop-off location at Boston's South Station.

"If I can't get the Boston stop back, then I'll have to close down for good," Pei Lin Liang, president of Fung Wah Bus Transportation Inc., recently told the Chinese-language newspaper *World Journal*.

Fung Wah has been fighting to get back on the road since it was shut down in March 2013 by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

The shutdown occurred after state safety inspectors in Massachusetts found cracks in the frames of some of its buses and federal

regulators were denied access to company safety records.

Those records, which the FMCSA obtained through a subpoena, revealed shoddy repairs, falsified maintenance records and a failure to monitor drivers' hours of service and screen them for drugs.

Fung Wah applied four times in 2013 to get back its operating authority — in July, October, November and December.

The FMCSA rejected the company request to resume operating in January 2014, noting that Fung Wah had submitted multiple applications "in an apparent attempt to avoid FMCSA's passenger carrier

vetting process."

Fung Wah appealed the rejection, saying the multiple applications stemmed from confusion over the process. The company also argued that inspectors had made mistakes in their inspections of its buses.

Last October, an FMCSA official denied the company bid for reinstatement, but gave it 30 days to submit additional evidence. (See Oct. 15, 2014, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The company and federal regulators finally reached an agreement last November allowing Fung Wah to resume "limited op-

erations to prove they can safely transport passengers and protect the motoring public."

That agreement, announced in December, required Fung Wah to meet several conditions and stressed that the "FMCSA will aggressively and continually monitor Fung Wah's operations and subject its vehicles and drivers to unannounced inspections to ensure that the company fully complies with all federal safety regulations."

Barry Lewis, whose firm was helping to operate Fung Wah, told the *Boston Globe* the company was planning to buy new buses, improve its maintenance and raise

driving standards.

But he complained that Massachusetts regulators were unwilling to allow it to resume operations. "They might as well have just put a target on Fung Wah Bus Transportation's back," he said.

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) spokesman Joe Pesaturo confirmed to NBC News that the MBTA gave one of Fung Wah's two gates at Boston's South Station to Megabus, a competing discount intercity bus company, "because of need and safety reasons."

Pesaturo said the MBTA also signed an agreement with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, which awarded Fung Wah's remaining gate to accommodate several other bus carriers.

Fung Wah has already received approval from New York officials to re-establish its bus stop in Chinatown, and has been searching for other locations in the Boston area.

Liang told NBC that mounting expenses and the lack of a Boston stop could force Fung Wah to close for good.

"Without a stop, there is no way to do (business)," he said.

New Gordie Howe Bridge will link Canada, U.S.

WINDSOR, Ontario — A yet-to-be-built bridge linking Detroit and Windsor will be named after hockey icon Gordie Howe.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder made the announcement in Windsor recently alongside three of Howe's children.

The Gordie Howe International Bridge, a project that will cost \$2.1 billion, will be the second

span in the area linking Canada to the U.S. and is expected to be operational in 2020.

Howe, 87, known as Mr. Hockey for his years with the Detroit Red Wings, has been undergoing treatment after suffering a stroke.

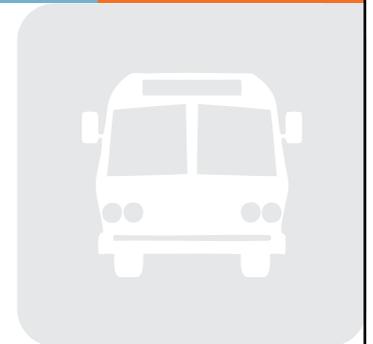
In 2011, Howe's son, Marty Howe, told the *Windsor Star* that he wanted the bridge named after his father.

"It would be a nice honor to

have the new bridge named after Gordie as he was born in Canada," Marty said. "He crossed the bridge on his way to Detroit to start his long-lasting hockey career."

Authorities want to build the bridge to alleviate congestion along the privately owned Ambassador Bridge and Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, which is too tight for large commercial vehicles and is impeding trade.

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THE DOCKET

Congress to resume work on long-term highway funding

WASHINGTON — Now that Congress has passed a two-month extension of highway funding authority, lawmakers say they will resume efforts this month to pass a long-term plan to reauthorize the Highway Trust Fund.

The House and Senate had been talking for months about developing a six-year trust fund bill but couldn't agree on how it would be funded. With funding authority scheduled to expire May 31 and no consensus on a long-term plan, they rushed through a two-month patch before adjourning for the Memorial Day recess.

Sens. James Inhofe, R-Okla.,

and Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., chairman and ranking member, respectively, of the Environment and Public Works panel, issued a statement calling for work to resume on a long-term fix.

"With the two-month extension of the Highway Trust Fund, Congress prevented many critical road, bridge and transit projects from coming to a grinding halt," the statement said.

Six-year plan

"But it's time we end this costly uncertainty with the Highway Trust Fund. The only solution to fixing this problem is to enact a

consensus-based, bipartisan, six-year surface transportation bill that will provide states and local communities the funding and the certainty they need to plan and construct multiyear projects to modernize our infrastructure."

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials expressed disappointment with the short-term patch, saying the failure of Congress to pass a long-term surface transportation bill has caused uncertainty among state transportation officials.

"State DOTs are already postponing construction projects this year because they can't count on

federal funds to be there," the association said. "Millions of dollars that should be flowing into communities, creating jobs and paying for projects to improve safety and mobility aren't being funded. Congress must find the political will to pass a long-term bill and put these short-term patches aside."

Since 2008, Congress has approved more than \$65 billion in transfers to prevent the fund's collapse.

Fuel tax increase

Many transportation stakeholders, including trucking industry leaders, support raising fuel

taxes as a way to pay for infrastructure projects, but that hasn't received much support in Congress or from President Obama.

Transportation officials also are opposed to "devolution" — the concept of shifting transportation funding and authority to the states. Supporters of the concept are expected to try and include devolution in any long-term plan.

The Congressional Budget Office has indicated that a six-year bill would need about \$100 billion in new revenue. So far, however, congressional leaders have been unable to agree on a source for those funds.

New York inspection program gets appeals process

ALBANY, N.Y. — The New York State Department of Transportation, which operates one of the most aggressive bus and motorcoach inspection programs in the U.S., has set up a two-step process for appealing an out-of-service determination by its inspectors.

The new procedures were posted on the department website last month in the section titled: *Office of Modal Safety & Security, Bus & Passenger Carrier Safety,*

Bus Inspection Program.

Under New York law, all vehicles subject to inspection by the NYSDOT — and that includes motorcoaches and school buses — are required to be inspected at least every six months.

The department has its own extensive out-of-service criteria, as opposed to the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance criteria used by most everyone else. The New York out-of-service criteria includes a

whopping 395 inspection items.

In unveiling its out-of-service appeals process, the New York DOT said that "occasionally, there may be instances when a bus operator...believes that a vehicle has been placed out-of-service in error.

"The purpose of this procedure is to describe the actions the operator may take to appeal a cited defect, which resulted in an out-of-service determination.

"For the purposes of this appeal

process, only 'A' defects are defined as out-of-service defects. However, questions concerning non-out-of-service defects ('B' and 'C') should be directed to the inspector or the inspector's supervisor for clarification or possible informal review," said the state DOT.

Most are 'A' items

Of the 395 bus out-of-service criteria items, 311 are of the "A" variety. These range from a miss-

ing Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard tag, to an accelerator pedal that binds, to a windshield crack or "bruise" that's larger than a half-inch in diameter on the driver's side wiper area, to a missing bumper, plus 307 more.

The out-of-service determination appeals process consists of two steps. The first is called the "supervisor review."

The operator is to immediately notify the inspector that there is a disagreement concerning an "A" out-of-service defect cited on the inspection form.

The inspector is to "clearly explain the basis for the out-of-service determination" as the condition relates to the NYSDOT out-of-service criteria.

If the operator isn't satisfied with the inspector's explanation and it doesn't resolve the disagreement, the operator has three business days to contact the inspector's supervisor in writing, preferably via email, so the supervisor can review the issue and seek further explanation or clarification for the issuance of the defect.

In the event the inspector's supervisor is not available, the inspector will provide the operator with the name of an alternate supervisor.

Sufficient reasoning

"It is the operator's responsibility to set forth clear and concise reasoning as to why the inspector cited the defect(s) in error. Challenges that fail to provide sufficient

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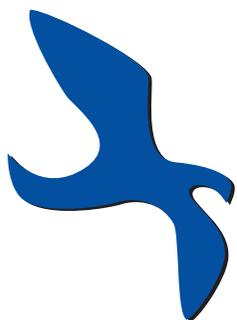
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Committee recommends entry-level driver training rules

WASHINGTON — A federal advisory committee has recommended that new bus and truck drivers be required to complete at least 30 hours of behind-the-wheel instruction in addition to classroom time.

The Entry-Level Driver Training Advisory Committee — an appointed group of 26 stakeholders

in transportation, safety and education — met over the past few months to develop recommendations for a new driver-training rule to present to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration this month.

Committee member Ken Presley, the United Motorcoach Association's vice president of industry

relations and COO, said the panel's work was only the beginning.

"The hard part starts now," Presley said. "FMCSA staff has the challenge of taking all the pieces and writing a coherent proposed rule for public consideration."

Among the committee's tasks was to develop rules concerning

the number of behind-the-wheel training hours and the creation of a new national registry for driver trainers.

Among the committee's recommendations was a list of stringent classroom requirements in addition to the 30 hours of on-road instruction for Class A commercial driver license training. That

training could be split to include a minimum of 10 hours on the range and at least 10 hours on the road. The remaining 10 hours could be broken up between the range and the road.

The recommendations will serve as a framework for the FMCSA in developing a final rule sometime next year.

New York

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

reasoning may be dismissed without further review.

"If, after a discussion with the supervisor, the matter cannot be resolved, the operator may request an on-site review to examine the component(s) on the vehicle in its/their current state. The request to the supervisor shall be in writing.

"The operator shall make...the vehicle available to allow the supervisor to conduct an on-site review within three business days... If the supervisor does not conduct the on-site review within the three business days, the defect(s) shall be removed from the department's inspection records.

"The component(s) in question shall not be touched or worked on

in any way until the supervisor concludes the on-site review. Altering the condition of the component(s) in any way before the supervisor has a chance to examine it (them), (even if the operator decides to correct, repair or remove the defective component(s) in order to present the vehicle for re-inspection) shall be sufficient grounds for the supervisor to dismiss the challenge, unless a mutual arrangement is made to preserve/document the component(s) until the supervisor can conduct the review.

"The operator shall be apprised of the supervisor's determination in writing within five business days from the first business day when the supervisor received the written challenge by the operator, if no on-site review is requested."

Operators also are to be told of

the supervisor's determination in writing within five business days after the date of an on-site review.

In both cases, if a decision is not made within the five business days the defect(s) "shall be removed from the department's inspection record, unless otherwise authorized by the inspection program director."

If the supervisor determines the defect(s) was (were) written in error, changes are to be made to the department's inspection records regarding the defect(s) and the NYSDOT main office notified such a change has been made.

Step two

If the operator is still not satisfied with the results of the supervisor's determination, the operator is then eligible to use step two of the

process, called Main Office Appeal.

Under this procedure, the operator is to submit an appeal to the NYSDOT Passenger Carrier Safety Bureau in Albany using the email link on the NYSDOT website (passengersafety@dot.ny.gov), or submit the appeal in writing within 10 business days to the bureau.

The appeal is to say why the supervisor's decision was in error, and provide specific, detailed information supporting the appeal.

The director of the Passenger Carrier Safety Bureau is to make a final determination within 30 days. There is no further appeal process under the procedures.

If the appeal is upheld, the specific defects are to be removed or adjusted on the operator's inspec-

tion record.

No frivolous appeals

There is no limit as to the number of challenges or appeals that can be filed except when an operator "repeatedly abuses the appeal process by filing challenges or appeals that are repeatedly frivolous or unreasonable as determined by the director."

Such operators will be ineligible to participate in the appeal process for a minimum of 12 months.

For information about the NYSDOT Bus Inspection Program, go to <https://www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/operating/oss/bus/inspection>. The out-of-service determination appeals process can be found by scrolling down to the heading, "Can an Out-of-Service Defect be Appealed?"



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IFTA audit changes deserve transportation industry support

By Robert C. Pitcher
State Laws Newsletter

Voting on a proposal to modernize and clarify the rules of the International Fuel Tax Agreement was postponed last month due to shenanigans by opponents and is expected to resume in July.

That gives states and provinces that are members of IFTA more time to rally in support of the proposed changes to IFTA's audit and record-keeping provisions that significantly benefit government and industry and strengthen IFTA itself.

A three-quarters vote of all the member jurisdictions is necessary for adoption of the proposal, and

adoption is unlikely without the strongest support from the trucking and motorcoach industries. The proposal is officially called IFTA Full Track Ballot Proposal no. 03-2014, but talk to your IFTA administrators and urge them to vote for IFTA Ballot 3!

Why Ballot 3 is needed. IFTA's present audit and record-keeping rules look like they were drafted by committee — and they were, by several committees over a period of 30 years. The current provisions are poorly drafted and organized, out-of-date, often unclear and sometimes contradictory, overly prescriptive about carrier record requirements, vague on the application of penalties, and

no longer congruent with requirements under the International Registration Plan.

What Ballot 3 will do. Ballot 3 thoroughly addresses all these problems. If it's adopted, the proposal will reorganize, clarify and update IFTA's language on audits and record-keeping; allow carriers greater flexibility on records; make clear that records produced by tracking systems such as GPS are acceptable; penalize for record deficiencies only those carriers whose records are so bad they can't be audited; make IFTA's mileage-accounting requirements consistent with IRP's; and require states to provide full audit reports to the carriers they audit.

Ballot 3 needs your support now. IFTA's effort follows a similar project for IRP. IRP adopted the proposed changes in its rules, and after two years it's clear they are working well and have benefits for government as well as for industry. IFTA has given Ballot 3 unprecedented opportunity for comment and discussion, and the drafters have made many changes to comply with the suggestions made.

Once the IFTA member jurisdictions have resumed casting their votes on Ballot 3, voting will be open for only 60 days. Why would a state even consider voting no? Mostly, we believe, because the proposal represents a change

in state procedures, and there's always resistance to that. Some objections to the content of the proposal have been raised. These are wholly groundless.

Speak up

If you know your IFTA administrator, talk to him or her and urge a vote for Ballot 3. If you don't know your administrator, now might be a good time to find out who it is — or talk to officials of your state association and ask them to encourage your state to vote right on Ballot 3.

Robert C. Pitcher is vice president, state laws, for the American Trucking Associations and author of the State Laws Newsletter.

Keeping your coaches clean can also polish your image

By Bruno Albanesi

It happens every day, many times a day, at every bus and coach depot, large and small.

Bus washing — an image-setting function as important as a crisp chauffeur's uniform, courteous service, or any of the many tricks of the trade coach operators employ to portray a smart presence.

And clean buses are as much the face of the coach or bus operation as any other feature operators employ to maintain or improve their image.

Our best prospects are customers with clean buses. They are the ones who, no matter what, have prioritized a clean fleet into their doctrine, and they are the ones who best appreciate that the task at hand needs time and resources.

Our best customers are conscientious, hard-working people.

Many of them have climbed up the ladder in a family business where washing a bus was their "mail room." And no matter how long the day had been, mom or dad needed that bus washed and often joined in.

Possibly some have never washed a bus in their life, but all of our customers have at some point or other recognized it's a tough job and it's a job that needs doing.

Tom Holden of Rose Chauffeur Transportation in Pineville, N.C., is a new customer and characterizes our average client. Tom came up to us at a recent show with a simple need: "We need to wash a lot of buses at night and I have to make the job easier for my crew," he said.

It is always those two elements: Recognize the fleet needs to be clean, and recognize it's a hard job.

There is a long list of us suppli-

ers out there waiting for more operators to be infected with those two eureka moments. The job needs doing, and the job is tough!

Modernize with equipment equal to the task. You may need a small-footprint, economical system such as available from Awash or Bitimec starting at \$15,000; a multiple-brush rolover machine for several hundred thousand dollars, which are available from Banger, Pseco, Westmatic or Whiting; or something in-between.

But unless you have five buses or less, you should recognize mechanization of the wash process is the only smart way to maintain a clean-image (which is essential to your prosperity), and eliminate endless turnover by having a happy wash-crew that stays on the job.

Bruno Albanesi is president of Bitimec, a bus- and truck-washing equipment company.



A bus owned by Divine Charter in San Francisco gets spruced up by a worker using a Bitimec 626-EZ model bus wash machine. A clean bus also can spruce up a coach company's image, and mechanical wash machines make the job easy.

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Cavalier Coach Trailways
Boston, Mass.

Marcia Milton
First Priority Trailways
District Heights, Md.

David Moody
Holiday Tours
Randleman, N.C.

Michael Neustadt
Coach Tours
Brookfield, Conn.

Jeff Polzien
Red Carpet Charters
Oklahoma City

Tom Ready
Ready Bus Lines
LaCrescent, Minn.

Ron Sargoni
Gray Lines of San Francisco
San Francisco

Brian Scott
Escot Bus Lines
Largo, Fla.

Tim Stout
Stout's Transportation
Ewing, N.J.

Dennis Strief
Vandalia Bus Lines
Caseville, Ill.

Alan Thrasher
Thrasher Brothers Trailways
Birmingham, Ala.

Tim Wayland
ABC Companies
Faribault, Minn.

T. Ralph Young
Young Transportation
Asheville, N.C.

Trust me: If you're gonna drive a bus, you oughta be rested

By Dave Millhouser

We were the masters of the quick turnaround.

Six buses had converged on the Skelly truck stop in Colorado Springs, having traveled there virtually non-stop from points on the East Coast. Loaded with high school students headed for camps just to the west in the mountains, they disgorged the kids at a number of nearby restaurants and headed to a corner of the parking lot.

Waiting there was a pickup truck full of tools, fluids and two manic mechanics. In a few hours, every coach had its oil changed, chassis lubed and any mechanical defects addressed. (On occasion a mechanic would address a driver. "What do you need a right wiper for? You hardly use that side of the windshield.")

While all this was going on the drivers, who had alternated driving non-stop in tag teams, needed to catch up on sleep. Why rent a motel room when a movie multiplex was nearby? Inside it was dark, air-conditioned and, if we picked a chick flick, quiet.

We bought matinee tickets, grabbed seats and slept soundly until the buses were serviced and our new eastbound passengers were shuttled in to begin the cycle again.

My chief contribution to our industry is to serve as a bad example, and this fits. Don't try it at home. As a non-profit, we then had an "exemption" from regulation that no longer exists, and tons of chutzpah.

One thing our gang did right, consistently, was to grab sleep every time we had the chance. If we weren't driving, we were sleeping. You can sleep in package racks, on bus floors and (on at least one occasion) standing up at an airline ticket counter.

Use down time wisely

You jump through all sorts of hoops to keep regulators happy with regard to hours of service. You design schedules to be sure drivers aren't forced to drive too long, spend a ton training them to record hours correctly, and you have to administer their logs. You make sure they have adequate time off, but what if they don't use that

time wisely?

Not too many years ago there was a fatal accident that sent a driver to jail. His company had bought him a room, and allowed plenty of down time. Rather than sleep, he spent the night gambling at an adjacent casino. We know this because investigators got to watch him in action on security camera recordings.

People died, he went to jail, and his company paid a ton of money.

The current environment forces management to intrude into the personal lives of commercial drivers in many ways that seem kind of pushy. Even when there's no evidence of a problem, for example, drivers are drug tested and physically examined. Sleep apnea evaluation is on the horizon and recent events have airlines considering regular psychological evaluations for pilots.

At the risk becoming an even larger pain, may I suggest that, as part of driver training, we throw in a few words on the need to use "down time" responsibly? While it's certainly not an area that can be policed, a discussion is in order.

Most drivers are adults, but it can't hurt to remind the marginal ones that it's childish to "stay up late" just because they can.

The bureaucratic fog (and often nonsensical enforcement) that surrounds "hours of service" frequently obscures the real issue. If you're gonna drive a bus, you oughta be rested.

Sleep not always enough

It's possible to fully comply with regulations, and still be exhausted. Off-duty time is useless if not used correctly. You have to sleep.

And that may not be enough. Just before dawn in 2007 a coach mistook a ramp for a through lane and went airborne. Seven people died and a number of college athletes were injured.

The irony here is that, other than mistaking the ramp for a lane, no rules were broken. The bus wasn't speeding, the driver's log was in compliance, and he had just awakened from a full night of sleep in a hotel room. Just before dawn (and mid-afternoon) our minds do a partial shutdown. We

need to understand and account for that in our driving and planning.

"Back in the day" (code for the statute of limitations has run out) my boss maneuvered me into driving an insane number of miles with the promise of serious time off at the end of the trip. I rolled into Pittsburgh around 4 p.m., staggered off the bus and waddled into the "guest bedroom" that had been provided. I awoke refreshed late in the afternoon and was puzzled. Gee, had I only been sleeping a few minutes?

Nah, the bedroom was a converted Cold War bomb shelter, dark and quiet. I'd slept for 25 hours.

For those of you who've concluded I have no talents, I can do the sleep thing, even with my eyes closed.

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



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Here is some advice about email marketing: Do it now

By Christian Riddell
Motorcoach Marketing Council

What if I told you there was a type of marketing that costs next to nothing, that nearly all your potential customers use, that has been proven to deliver real results, that by using it you could know without a shadow of a doubt if it is working, and that studies have shown can deliver more than \$40 for every dollar you spend on it?

So, I am assuming I have your attention.

All of that is true, and all of it is about email. In my interactions with motorcoach operators, I am always surprised at the lack of enthusiasm or even understanding when it comes to email marketing.

First let's dispel some of the myths associated with email marketing. If you use Outlook, Gmail, Yahoo or any other mail client or online system to send emails, you are not using an "email marketing system."

I know some of you may hate to hear that, but email-marketing systems are vastly different from

these email clients. Email marketing systems deliver a completely different set of tools, features and benefits that we will get into a bit later.

The second myth is that because of advances in social media, search engine marketing, pay per click and other digital avenues, email marketing has gone the way of the dinosaur. This is simply not true. Email continues to be a valuable asset to all businesses, but especially to those with little time or money to dedicate to their marketing efforts.

Impressive ROI

Email marketing has come a long way in the four-and-a-half decades since the first email was delivered. While most technologies that hit 40 have long since seen the scrap heap, email has continued to develop into a modern marketer's dream. In fact, as recently as 2014, more than half of marketers surveyed by the Direct Marketing Association planned to increase spending on their email channel, citing their impressive return on investment as the driving factor.

Marketing Minute GoMotorcoach It's the Smart Move

There are several features that make email marketing one of my personal favorites.

Real-time tracking

Unlike Gmail or Outlook, when you use an email marketing service you get insights into your efforts that make every marketing professional drool. They include open rate (the number of people that opened your email), click-through rate (the number of people who clicked on the links on your email), and incredible details about what they did and how they did it.

Have you ever put the time and effort into creating a brochure only to wonder if your clients really care? Have you ever built a new ad for the phonebook but wondered if your call to action was actually causing action? With email the information is there and available in

near real time.

You cannot only tell who opened your email, you can also see what they clicked on and how much time they spent on it. With some systems you can even use this data to take more action. Imagine if you could send a follow-up email about your business services only to the people who clicked on that link in your last email that highlighted four of your top services.

What if your sales people could call on people who you knew had clicked on specific links in your emails? The power this could bring a charter company is staggering.

Many coach companies that we work with have never fully gathered their email marketing lists. Often this can feel like a major roadblock when it comes to fully implementing an email marketing system. But I will tell you what I tell anyone who brings this up — in the words of my mother-in-law, get over it!

Compile a list

Getting started is simple; just start adding people to the list

today. When people call or email with a quote request, get their email addresses and put them in your system. So often people want to go back and gather 25 years of email addresses when the best place to start is today. There are plenty of easy ways to have your team put them in your system, from simple Web forms to exporting client lists from Quickbooks.

Line in the sand

The value of your email marketing will be tied to the quality of your list. Many 10-year-old email addresses are no longer any good and simply clutter up what could be a powerful list. There is no time like the present to draw a line in the sand and say that everyone you do business with, or quote, from now on will be added to your list.

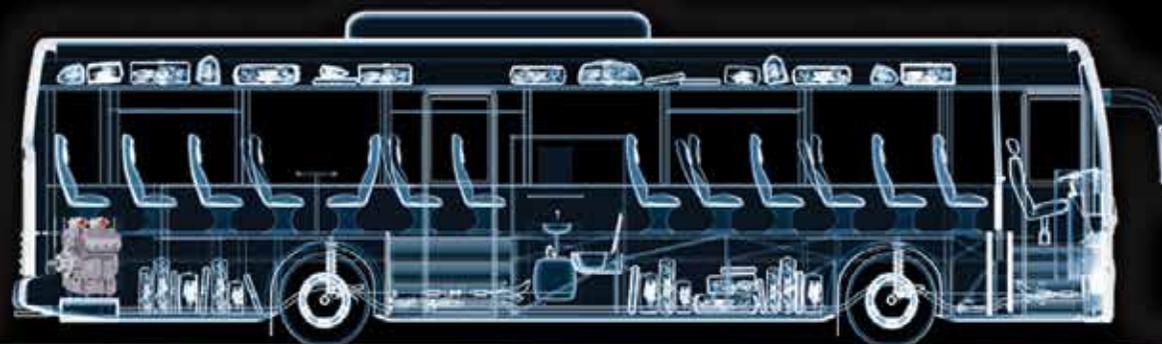
All marketing takes time. This is true and, unfortunately, the reason so many marketing tasks get put off until tomorrow.

As we have worked with hundreds of companies around North America, we have seen that the scarcest commodity in the motor-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11 ►

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Marketing Minute

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

coach industry is time. Email is probably the fastest way to market.

From start to finish an email, in most modern email marketing systems, can take as little as 10 minutes. With professional templates and content ideas, these tools are designed to be used quickly by busy professionals.

Bang for the buck

As I mentioned above, email is considered one of the highest-returning marketing avenues of any available to most businesses. The Digital Marketing Association estimates that for every dollar companies invest in email marketing, the return is \$44.25.

Now, before you run out and start buying email lists, that statistic must be filtered to reflect the fact that most email marketing is delivered to people who already know you or who have been qualified as potential buyers. These tools are best used to re-engage previous customers, up-sell consistent users and cross-sell your database.

Here are four tips to help you get your email marketing off the ground successfully:

Be responsive. Mobile users are becoming a huge percentage of total viewers of email. In the third quarter of 2014, more than half of all emails were opened on either mobile or tablet devices. Choosing a responsive template for your emails will dramatically impact the engagement you get from these users.

Segment your segments. The power of your database will be directly tied to your ability to segment it. This means that as you add new names you should also be adding them to separate segments. In some email systems this is called segments, while others call them tags, folders or even boxes.

In any case, the time to do it is when they are added. You could include the type of business they are doing (corporate, church, ski, wine, etc.), who their point of contact was, what type of coach they were interested in, and if they were budget conscience, safety oriented or simply price shopping.

While on the surface this work may seem a bit strange, the long-term ramifications are amazing. Imagine if you could send an email to every wedding planner, venue and local restaurant you have worked with telling them about your new piece of equipment. Imagine being able to send an email to everyone who did food

and wine trips with you about a new vineyard you are partnering with. The possibilities are endless and exciting.

Test, test, then test again. One of the biggest questions when it comes to marketing is “does it work?” With email you can finally put that question to rest. When you’re planning your email and you come up with a catchy subject line but are afraid it might be to

“sales-y,” email marketing offers something called split testing that allows you to send multiple iterations to your database and test the engagement. No more wondering, just test it and see what works.

Personalize. One of the great features about email is the ability to personalize it. Simple tools built into the systems allow you to put in little pieces of text that are replaced with data from the custom-

er’s record. This can be a first name, for example.

Experian showed in a recent report that this personal touch could boost open rates and click-throughs as much as 40 percent. A subject line that says “look at our new coach” will not have nearly the engagement of one that says “Mike, we bought a coach we thought you would love.”

If you’re not using email as a

cornerstone of your marketing effort, start now. If you or your team members are not adding names and emails to your marketing list daily, start now. You will find that this effort will pay dividends far into the future and will help you keep those coaches rolling.

For more information about the Motorcoach Marketing Council and its programs, go to www.motorcoachmarketing.org.

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Driver retention: It's (a lot) more than more money

With the motorcoach industry facing a shortage of drivers, operators across the country say they are working harder than ever to hold onto good drivers.

They are using an array of strategies to keep their experienced people behind the wheel, including incentives that aren't based on money alone.

In fact, many operators contend that adding more to pay envelopes isn't always the key to retaining drivers.

"With retention, everybody defaults to, well, it's pay. But it's not always pay," said David Annett of Annett Bus Lines in Sebring, Fla.

"Sometimes it's those intangible things, like recognition, or doing things that people aren't expecting," Annett said.

For example, each week his company's operations and sales staff members review customer feedback surveys from the previous week and use them to select the driver "who went above and beyond the most," he said. That driver receives a gift card and a "thank you."

"It's a small token, but at the same time it goes beyond pay. It's a

sign of respect or recognition of the job the drivers have," Annett said.

Here is an assortment of other tactics and methods companies are using to improve driver retention.

Some are concrete, specific ideas, while others are more philosophical. They are drawn from a sampling of companies that employ as few as 10 drivers and as many as 200 drivers.

Keep the drivers' quality of life foremost in mind.

"In this crunch — and we're all facing this crunch — it's going to be easy for us to shrink into that mentality of forgetting how many hours drivers have been out, how long have they been gone from home," said Larry Shickles of Star of America in Bloomington, Ind.

"In this world, it's easy for us to forget, as we're dispatching drivers, to consider the driver's family life and personal life. I think every company needs to get down to the basics of quality of life."

Build a high-quality work environment that fosters dedication.

"We try to make people feel that he or she is the company itself," said James Brown Sr. of Magic Carpet Tours Bus Service

in Richmond, Va., which employs about 10 drivers.

One way Brown does that is by offering part-time work to some employees during the off-season. The drivers work five-and-a-half hours a day, five days a week.

"When it's slow, we bring them into our shop and (they) do maintenance on the coaches to get familiar with the coaches. So it's cleaning, washing and getting coaches up to par," he said.

"We try to keep them motivated, and do things for them that is not the norm when it comes down to making sure they survive during the off-season. That builds in loyalty. They really appreciate it," Brown said.

Be respectful and positive, even when a driver makes a mistake.

"If a driver has a fixed-object incident, we don't come at him like, 'You're a dummy.' We look at it like everybody's human, everybody makes mistakes," said Cord Stuart, safety director at Calco Hordard Group in New Orleans.

Stuart offered the hypothetical example of a driver who hits a post.

"Once I get the report, I will



David Annett



James Brown Sr.



Cord Stuart



Alan Thrasher

call the driver and I will talk about what happened, and maybe offer a suggestion of what he or she can do differently so we don't have that same situation next time," he said.

"If it's something more serious, I may talk to the driver and require a face-to-face meeting. We might look at a DVD or a video. We don't look at it as a punishing event when a driver makes a mistake, we look at it as a learning event.

"They have a tough job. They have the toughest job in the company. We try to make them understand that we understand that as well," Stuart said.

Be vigilant about honoring customer requests for specific drivers.

"If the customer is calling back and asking for a specific driver, that shows the customer values more

than just riding down the road, they value the service that that driver can provide," Annett said.

"To the extent that you don't accommodate those requests over time, that leads to retention issues," he said.

"The driver thinks, 'Well, the company does not care enough about us to honor those requests.' We really go out of our way to do that. It makes the driver feel like we're doing more than putting bodies with buses. It makes them feel like we're being intentional about how we assign drivers to trips."

Use GPS and other technology to support drivers.

"Back (drivers) up when there's a complaint from a client. Don't just take the client's side. Find out the truth. These GPS and logging

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13 ►

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Driver retention

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

systems help us find out what happened," said Alan Thrasher of Trasher Brothers Trailways in Birmingham, Ala.

"I've used my Drive Cams, not just for safety in case of an accident, but I have a button on the dash, and I say when you have an irate customer yelling at you from 10 rows back, don't you get up and yell back at them. You press this button and start recording.

"Smile and say, 'Ma'am, I can't hear you, come up here,' and get her on tape. When she calls me up and tells me how terrible you were and what an awful person you are, I can play her the video of her screaming and cussing you. It'll tell the truth," Thrasher said.

"The video helps us investigate what the driver really did. 'Your driver is doing 90 miles an hour!' Really? The GPS shows him doing 71 miles an hour."

Offer a driver-incentive program to let drivers know they are appreciated.

Stuart said the Calco Hotard Group extends a monthly and quarterly incentive program to the approximately 140 drivers it employs.

"We offer a percentage of their pay each month if they do their job. You come to work and do your job as a professional, as we trained you. You come in uniform and aren't late for work. You don't have any complaints, no accidents, do everything you're supposed to. In other words, just do your job and you get an extra 5 percent per month," he said.

"If you go a quarter where you don't have any incidents, you get another incentive on top of that. Incentives, I think, are important to drivers to let them know that they are appreciated," Stuart said.

Caldwell Transportation offers an annual retention bonus to its school bus and motorcoach drivers.

"If you're employed with us at the end of the school year, which is June 1, and if you are employed when the school year begins again on the first of September, at Thanksgiving time, we offer a \$300 retention bonus to anybody that applies to," said Mike Stephenson, general manager of the Caldwell, Idaho-based company.

Use educational opportunities as a driver incentive.

"About 18 of my drivers have gone through the Bus and Motorcoach Academy," Thrasher said. "I wanted them to have some skin in the game and show them that I can lead them to training but I can't

make them drink. So, I put a program into place that says if you pay for your courses and attend them, I will reimburse you."

Upon completion and certification, the drivers automatically earn a \$10-a-day raise or \$15 a day if they meet a longevity requirement, he said. "You will make more than a newbie simply because a guy with a college degree makes more than one who doesn't

have one, and this is the closest thing we have to a bus driver's degree right now," Thrasher said.

Use contests and incentives to help make drivers feel rewarded.

Stephenson said Caldwell Transportation sponsors "Fifty Dollar Friday" giveaways.

"On Friday afternoons, we'll draw a bus number out of a hat and whoever happens to be in that particular bus at that time, whether it

be a school bus driver or motorcoach driver out on the road somewhere, that person wins \$50. We do that every Friday during the school year."

Other prizes include tickets to Boise State University football games and gift cards.

"We try to go above and beyond to keep people and make them feel appreciated," Stephenson said. "I think that is the most

important job we have as managers, to make sure that our drivers feel appreciated."

Underscore the value of per diems.

"I've been trying to convert per diems into an hourly rate equivalent to show them that they're getting additional money besides what is showing on the paycheck in the hourly column," said Dale

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

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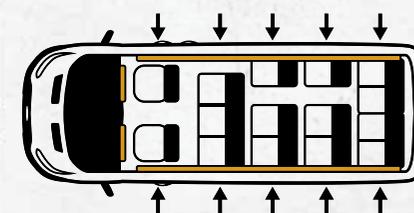
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Limo operator buys Passaic Valley Coaches of New Jersey

CHATHAM, N.J. — Passaic Valley Coach Lines, a family owned company based in north-central New Jersey, has been purchased by a nearby limousine company that wants to offer its clients coach services.

Broadway Elite Chauffeured Services Worldwide of East Hanover, N.J., purchased Passaic Valley Coaches from the Braunwarth

family, which founded and owned the company for the past 48 years.

Jason Sharenow, chief operating officer of Broadway Elite, said his company “is driven by top-notch customer service, meaningful client relationships and worldwide availability.

“It is what has motivated us since Broadway Limousine and Elite Limousine joined forces to

become one company eight years ago,” Sharenow said. “With our acquisition of Passaic Valley Coach Lines, we are now able to provide motorcoaches as part of our extensive fleet of vehicles.”

The deal was an asset sale, with Broadway Elite acquiring Passaic Valley Coaches’ fleet. Most of the Passaic Valley Coaches’ staff of about a dozen people

remained after the transaction was completed.

Passaic Valley Coaches was incorporated as Summit-New Providence Bus Lines in 1967 by Bill Braunwarth. In 1980, the company purchased charter bus rights issued by the old Interstate Commerce Commission and expanded those rights to the lower 48 states.

In 1983, Braunwarth’s brother,

Wayne, joined the company. Summit-New Providence Bus Lines ceased charter operations in 1984, with Passaic Valley Coaches continuing in its stead.

When Bill Braunwarth died in 1987, Wayne became general manager and led the company until the sale. He is now retired.

Broadway Elite operates a mixed fleet of 100-plus vehicles.

Driver retention

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

McMichael of Executive Coach in Lancaster, Pa., adding that his company offers a higher per-diem allowance than other companies in the region.

Use annual performance appraisals as an opportunity to identify and praise exceptional drivers.

“We’ve gotten a lot more intentional about identifying our top drivers. We’ve revamped the performance appraisal process to define more rigorously the behaviors that we want to reward,” said Annett of Annett Bus Lines, which employs about 60 drivers.

“Obviously, safety is easy to define because it’s defined by speeding or unsafe driving or accidents. But we also look at resourcefulness, the degree to which they fill out the paperwork correctly, and professionalism. Have they handled a difficult issue with a customer or with a bus with diplomacy or finesse?”

“We’ve stepped back and thought about how we want to reward those drivers who are demonstrating those key behaviors better than the rest and moving them pay-wise up the scale faster,” he said.

In addition, the company handles reviews as a “multi-dimensional feedback process.”

“What makes us feel good

‘Sometimes it’s those intangible things, like recognition, or doing things that people aren’t expecting’

about the process is that it’s a team approach,” Annett said. “It’s not a single dispatcher or a single operations person. (For example), sales has impact on it because if a customer is unhappy, they call sales. It’s not just your direct supervisor who provides feedback.”

Keep the lines of communi-

cation open to drivers.

Thrasher said he encourages drivers to talk to him directly. “I personally am accessible. I tell them, if you’ve got a complaint, yeah, you’ve got managers and the dispatcher and secretaries, but as the owner of the company, my door is open,” he said.

“If you have an issue, if you felt like your pay wasn’t right or you weren’t treated right, or if you have an issue with another driver, I prefer you come to me rather than going to a secretary. That’s not going to accomplish anything. Why waste time?”

Shickles, of Star of America, said: “Our managers go out, talk to the drivers about more than just

work. We actually care about what’s going on at home, what the family is doing, and knowing who they are. We call it M-B-W-A, management by walking around.”

Consider balancing the growth of your company with the drivers available.

“At some point, you may have to restrict your size based on your ability to get drivers as much as your ability to get equipment,” Shickles said.

“From a business model, you have to sit back and say, can I do a good job with 20 vehicles or 40 vehicles or 60 vehicles? If I’m scraping to find enough drivers to fill 60 vehicles, then maybe I need to be a 40-vehicle operation.”

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Bus thief

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

from Bestway Charter Transportation in Rosemont, Ill.

Jones reportedly had been using the stolen Van Hool T2145 to run an unregistered, unlicensed and uninsured charter service out of Toledo, and was stopped by police while driving passengers to a Michigan casino. (See March 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Mike Skopec, vice president of Bestway, said authorities impounded the bus and it eventually was returned to the company — after he paid a \$1,020 towing charge.

Jones was released after the

February stop in Michigan, and a warrant reportedly was issued for his arrest but he has not been taken into custody.

Anger aplenty

Skopec, like others who have been victims of Jones' criminal actions, is bitter about the incident for a variety of reasons:

- Jones operated the coach for nine months before he was stopped, meaning Bestway Charter was short a coach during that period.
- Jones put 35,000 miles on the coach. That's almost 4,000 miles a month.
- Rehabbing the coach after it was recovered cost Bestway

\$20,000, including having to have it repainted (Jones had painted it), fixing brakes that weren't working and replacing damaged glass and missing molding.

• Bestway was treated shabbily by its auto liability insurer.

Bill McKinley, vice president of American Heritage Trails in Fort Wayne, Ind., which had a coach stolen by Jones in 2008, had the same ugly experience with the same insurer as Skopec.

Both reported the insurer treated them as if they were the criminal, with McKinley reporting the insurer hired a private investigator to investigate American Heritage.

Although stolen buses are a rar-

ity, talking with your insurer about the theft provisions in its policy might be prudent for coach companies operating in urban areas.

Jones was caught within days of stealing the American Heritage Trails coach and eventually was convicted, spent time in jail and was ordered to pay restitution to the company. However, he paid only part of the restitution, filed for bankruptcy after American Heritage sued him and was released from the obligation.

Jones also has been connected with the thefts of buses from Lakefront Lines in Ohio and Ground Transportation Specialists in Michigan.

Does anyone care?

Both Skopec and McKinley are livid that neither the criminal justice system nor the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration appears to take Jones' criminal activity, or the huge risk he represents on the highway, seriously. Stealing the bus in one state and operating it in another means law enforcement agencies and prosecutors never seem to connect the dots.

"It's outrageous he's still walking around," Skopec said.

"A missile flying down the interstate with no authority, no insurance and no maintenance — driven by a criminal," is the way McKinley

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CARB filters

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Penalties for violations of the diesel rules range from \$300 to \$10,000 per vehicle per day. CARB may enforce the penalties through liens placed on vehicles, real estate or other personal property. The board also may ask the California Highway Patrol to "remove the vehicle in violation from service," according to an agency fact sheet.

The DPF devices contain ceramic filters that capture soot and must be serviced routinely. Many

of California's diesel operators have found the filters are no match for emissions produced by engines that were emissions-compliant a decade or more ago.

Some engines that once had workmanlike reputations now are notorious, Jones said.

"They are known for trouble with DPFs. I don't blame the manufacturer — these engines only had to meet the regulations in place at the time they were built. On some engines we can't keep the DPFs in very long until they have to be serviced."

Discovery Charter operates

two retrofitted motorcoaches that have averaged 10,000 miles and 14,000 miles between DPF servicing, which costs about \$300, Jones said. "In comparison, our 2008 original equipment (filter) was cleaned for the first time this year at 211,000 miles. That is an OE that came with the coach. Those have been very good."

Operators are facing additional maintenance costs in trying to keep older engines running as cleanly as possible, he said. "On one coach we are spending \$3,000 to \$5,000 a year for injector repairs. We didn't have any trouble with the motor

until we put the retrofit on."

Inconvenient breakdowns

A filter may light the clog warning light at an inconvenient time, he added. "We have had a few issues where we had to go out and service them when they are out of town. It has been a huge expense."

Truck repair shops may not be equipped with the lift needed to gain access to the DPF on a coach.

"What do you do if a bus is headed out of town for a few days and the (warning) light is coming on? It is the worst thing that could

happen," Jones said. "There is no place you can run it in real quick and have it serviced. We have to try to get it serviced on the road or take another bus out there."

Replacing old coaches, of course, is not an option, he said. "You can't afford to have all new coaches. If we could all run fleets of 2010 or newer buses we would."

In response to complaints from operators, CARB asked its staff in 2013 to investigate industry experiences with DPFs. That was the evaluation released last month.

"Many stakeholders voiced

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Bus thief

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

describes Jones.

“He is a danger not only to the passengers but everyone on the highway.”

Jones’ sordid history with stolen buses in the Midwest dates back to at least 2003.

About three years ago, Jones made an apparent attempt to go

legit, but that didn’t last. He started a bus company, Destiny Tours, in Toledo that operated for less than a year before the FMCSA discovered he was — surprise, surprise — operating outside his authority. The company was placed out of service by the FMCSA on May 1, 2013, with no further action taken.

Jones’ effort at being legitimate apparently was tripped up by

his failure to complete the USDOT registration process and go through the normal new-entrant vetting procedures. According to the FMCSA, on at least five occasions between May 2012 and February 2013, Jones operated as a for-hire carrier in interstate commerce without the authority to do so.

A year later he stole the Bestway Charters coach in Illinois, operating it for nine months and

35,000 miles illegally in Ohio, Michigan and probably elsewhere.

Robbing Fort Knox

That Jones — or anyone for that matter — could have taken a coach last month from the MCI Des Plaines location startled one operator who regularly takes buses to the facility for service.

“That place is like Fort Knox,” he said.

The bus stolen from the MCI center last month is a 2001 MCI J4500 demo coach painted all white. The VIN number is: 1M83JMPA81P061610.

If it’s in the hands of Derrick Jones it doubtless has been partially repainted and/or graphics of some sort, including a phony company name, have been added.

Ask your drivers to keep an eye out.

CARB filters

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

concerns regarding the cost, reliability, fire safety of PM filters and perceived adverse impacts of those filters on the performance of their trucks,” stated the executive summary of the report.

Filters are effective

The CARB staff, however, reported that “filters were effective and initial indications suggested engine malfunctions and mal-maintenance were the likely causes of most PM filter concerns expressed by stakeholders...Millions of trucks are operating in the United States and in California with a PM filter.”

The filters “are effective in removing more than 98 percent of toxic diesel PM emissions,” the summary continued. “PM filters are operating properly and most trucking fleets are not having problems with their engines or PM filters...Some fleets are experiencing problems with their PM filters, but engine durability issues and inadequate maintenance practices are the primary reasons for these problems.”

The staff report did acknowledge that “warranty claims data indicates that model year 2010 and newer engines have better durability performance than engines manufactured between 2003 and 2009.”

In conclusion, the staff recommended that CARB “continue working to hold manufacturers accountable” to produce compliant engines and “educate truck and bus owners and operators...to identify the best preventive maintenance practices.”

The California Trucking Association is surveying its members to gather information about problems caused by the filters. As for the bus association, “We are working on our own version of the survey to try to get our members to fill it out so we can send the information to CARB,” Jones said.

What DPF solution would the motorcoach and bus operators like to see from CARB?

“It could be taking them off, but they are not going to go for that,” he said. “We don’t know. We don’t think they are concerned about the costs. That is my opinion.”



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Parts game

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ABC parts sales have increased each year since the Great Recession, said company Vice President Shaun Huxford.

"Our sales have increased through good times and bad," he said. "There is no evidence that our parts sales are being driven by coaches being kept longer or due to a down market. It may be a factor but it's a very minor one overall."

To strengthen its footing after the nationwide economic slowdown of the last decade, ABC invested in its infrastructure and service performance — a move that seems to have paid off given the company's continued sales growth.

While Huxford said the opportunity for prolonged growth is promising, that doesn't mean the path is without some hurdles.

"Trying to lower customers' costs without raising our own costs is a huge challenge," he said.

"Also, during these economic times, time is money. It is essential for buses to be on the road, with little downtime. So, it is vital to have a structure in place to get the bus companies the parts they need in a timely manner. Our industry has had to truly up our game."

ABC's approach to this issue has been to take steps to operate on a large scale throughout North America while offering reliable, locally focused service.

"We have established a best-in-class distribution network that allows our customers to have the part they need when they need it and where they need it," Huxford said.

"To accomplish this, we partnered with the best suppliers and invested in the most comprehensive bus inventory in North America. In addition, we invested heavily into a robust nationwide distribution system and delivery service that allows us to ship parts usually within 24 hours. We've even added the convenience of online ordering, for which we give a 2 percent discount."

Motor Coach Industries

With an economic dip as harsh

as that of 2008 still relatively close in the rearview mirror, stability is appreciated in industries of all sorts.

Wolfgang Winzer, vice president and general manager of after-market and service at MCI, said the company is faring well.

"We have seen a solid market over the past two years," he said. "Parts sales are relatively stable but I wouldn't say the demand has increased."

MCI is the largest builder of intercity coaches in the United States and Canada and stocks parts for its own plus competitive brands — 24,000 types of products in all. That's particularly convenient for operators with mixed fleets.

Two years ago, the company took steps to improve its parts service by launching what it calls its Coach Critical parts guarantee. The effort guarantees that parts deemed most essential to coach uptime will be in stock and available to customers having a coach out of commission.

"The selection is across the board: the very basics, like headlights, windshields and brake components, and all of the components that would cause a coach to go out of service," Winzer said. "They are shipped within 24 hours, and if you order by 2 p.m., they are shipped the same day. We have these on hand at any given time."

MCI invested \$7 million to beef up its inventory for the Coach Critical parts program.

The company's parts strategy also includes more localized distribution centers and six service centers (in Montreal, New Jersey, Texas, Illinois, California and Florida), as well as efforts at product life-cycle management, i.e. predicting the demand for these parts.

This includes the 15 percent of orders that are made online.

"This takes planning and constantly listening to our customers," Winzer said. "We made a substantial investment into our inventory in Louisville, as well as satellite locations. Our inventory levels have improved.

"We have been taking our or-

der-fill rates to an all-time high. Our initiatives are paying off: As our order-fill rates go up, customer satisfaction rates go up."

Prevost

Customers may be holding on to buses a bit longer, but production of new coaches has been solid at Prevost. That's according to Jack Forbes, the Quebec-based manufacturer's vice president of parts sales and business development.

Some operators keep coaches up to 20 years, he noted, and they become loyal customers.

"There are more parts they'll have to replace as they get older," he said. "But if they maintain them well, they'll last."

"The whole bottom dropped out in 2008, but we've seen that bounce back now," he said. "We're in a growth mode. The main change in the past half-dozen years is the solid growth we've seen year over year because we've been able to maintain good production levels."

Prevost stocks competitor parts, as well as cross-reference parts, such as Bendex brake parts that MCI, Van Hool and Prevost use. In fact, stocking up has become an important part of his company's approach to meeting customers' needs.

"Our on-hand inventory has had to keep up because customers stopped stocking as much about five or six years ago," Forbes said. "And manufacturers are not stocking as much."

"We're finding that lead times are longer from the time we place an order to when manufacturers get it in stock because they're not keeping as much raw material in stock. We are being more strategic."

Approximately 70 percent of the company parts business is conducted via the Internet, which is up about 20 percent over the past four years or so, Forbes said.

Online customers receive a discount of 1 percent. He credits the steep increase in online sales to its 24-hour access by larger shops that don't shut down overnight, as well as a younger generation that's accustomed to ordering online.

Calendar**June 2015**

23-26 Pennsylvania Bus Association Annual Conference, Seven Springs Mountain Resort, Seven Springs, Pa. More Info: www.pabus.org.

25-28 New England Bus Association Annual Conference, Mountain View Grand Resort & Spa, Whitefield, N.H. Info: www.newenglandbus.org.

August 2015

8-12 Georgia Motorcoach Operators Association-Alabama Motorcoach Association-South Central Motorcoach Association Regional Meeting, Lake Lanier Islands, Ga. Info: www.alabamamotorcoach.org.

10-11 2015 Midwest Bus & Motorcoach Assoc. Convention, Hotel Fort Wayne, Fort Wayne, Ind. Info: 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.

October 2015

17-20 42nd Annual California Bus Association Convention and Trade Show, Tenaya Lodge at Yosemite, Fish Camp, Calif. Info: www.cbabus.com.

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