

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Heading to fall papal visit? Move fast — and pay up

PHILADELPHIA — The phrase “Biblical proportions” is over-used but may be warranted in describing the motorcoach deployment expected at the papal visit to the World Meeting of Families here in September. Hundreds of thousands of people are expected to attend two appearances by Pope Francis.

“We know that parishes in all 50 states, Canada and Mexico will attend this event and they will attend by charter bus,” said Bill Maulsby, president of Go Ground, which is coordinating motorcoach logistics at the event. “The indications are there will be 4,000 to 5,000 buses. That will be the largest bus movement in the history of North America.”

Also unprecedented, apparently, will be the fees for entering a highly secured “transportation perimeter” surrounding the Pennsylvania Convention Center. The mandatory one-day fee will be \$395 for motorcoaches, school buses, mini buses and recreational vehicles. Each additional vehicle operated by a registrant will be charged \$325 and each additional day will cost \$295.

Registration fees will be \$150 for passenger vans carrying 14 or fewer passengers. Each additional van and each additional day will cost \$100.

Organizers say registration applications must be submitted by July 31 to be assured of parking within the designated perimeter. Application information is posted at wmof.goground.com.

“Registration and parking costs are commensurate given an event of this historic magnitude,” said Robin Dance, director of communications at Go Ground. “This is a private event and there will not be public funds to pay for services. The fees are to cover leasing of space, all logistics related to the buses and staffing. Spread over 55-plus passengers, it is nominal compared to what an individual might expect to pay for high-profile event parking.”

Fees of this size have never been charged in the United States, industry experts in event transportation management told *Bus & Motorcoach News*, but could be warranted depending on the amount of planning and support that is being provided.

The first World Meeting of Families, organized by the Pontifical Council for the Family, was called by Saint John Paul II in 1994. Meetings have been repeated every third year. Previous meetings have been held in Rio de Janeiro, Manila, Valencia, Mexico City, Milan and Rome (twice).

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An estimated 4,000 to 5,000 buses are expected to converge on Philadelphia in September when Pope Francis visits the city. Organizers are warning coach

operators to make reservations by July 31 if they want access the Central City to drop off and pick passengers and park.

Operators report improved finances, safety measures

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — As the motorcoach industry continues its slow climb out of the Great Recession, a majority of operators are reporting increased income and improved financial status compared with a year ago, according to the 2015 *United Motorcoach Association Membership Survey & Industry Assessment*.

The survey also found that a majority of operators have voluntarily adopted safety programs such as installing speed governors on buses.

Nearly 75 percent of the survey's respondents said their finan-

cial status was slightly or significantly better than last year, up from 65 percent in the 2014 survey.

Only 6 percent of this year's respondents reported a “slightly worse” financial status, while none said their financial situation was “significantly worse.” The remaining 19 percent reported no change.

Sixty-six percent of this year's respondents said their revenue increased greatly or some, compared with 58 percent last year. Another 21 percent said their revenue was unchanged, while 12 percent said it “decreased some” and 1 percent said it “decreased greatly.”

In the safety area, 94 percent of the respondents said they govern the speed of their motorcoaches and 62 percent said they have fatigue-management programs.

More than 93 percent said they have written policies regarding texting and cellphone use by drivers.

“I believe the survey clearly demonstrates that the motorcoach industry is proactive when it comes to safety,” said UMA President and CEO Victor Parra, adding that a majority of the operators have adopted safety measures that aren't required by law.

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Bill to block increased insurance limits clears House

WASHINGTON — A bill that would block federal regulators from increasing the minimum liability insurance coverage required of motor carriers passed a major hurdle with passage by the House of Representatives.

The House passed the \$55 billion transportation and housing spending bill last month by a 216-210 vote, with most of the support coming from Republicans.

The bill, H.R. 2577, includes funding for a variety of transportation and housing agencies, including the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

Of particular interest to the motorcoach industry is a provision that would prohibit the FMCSA from using any of the funding it receives to implement an increase in the minimum financial responsibility requirements on companies that

transport passengers or property.

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

Opponents contend that the in-

crease is unnecessary because only a fraction of insurance claims have ever reached the current minimum liability amount.

The fate of the House bill is unclear because the Senate has yet to develop its own version and the Obama administration has said it would consider vetoing the bill if it is sent to the president in its current form.

However, the administration's

complaints about the bill were mainly about the funding level — President Obama has proposed a higher amount — and about other provisions favoring the trucking industry that it believes would compromise highway safety.

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



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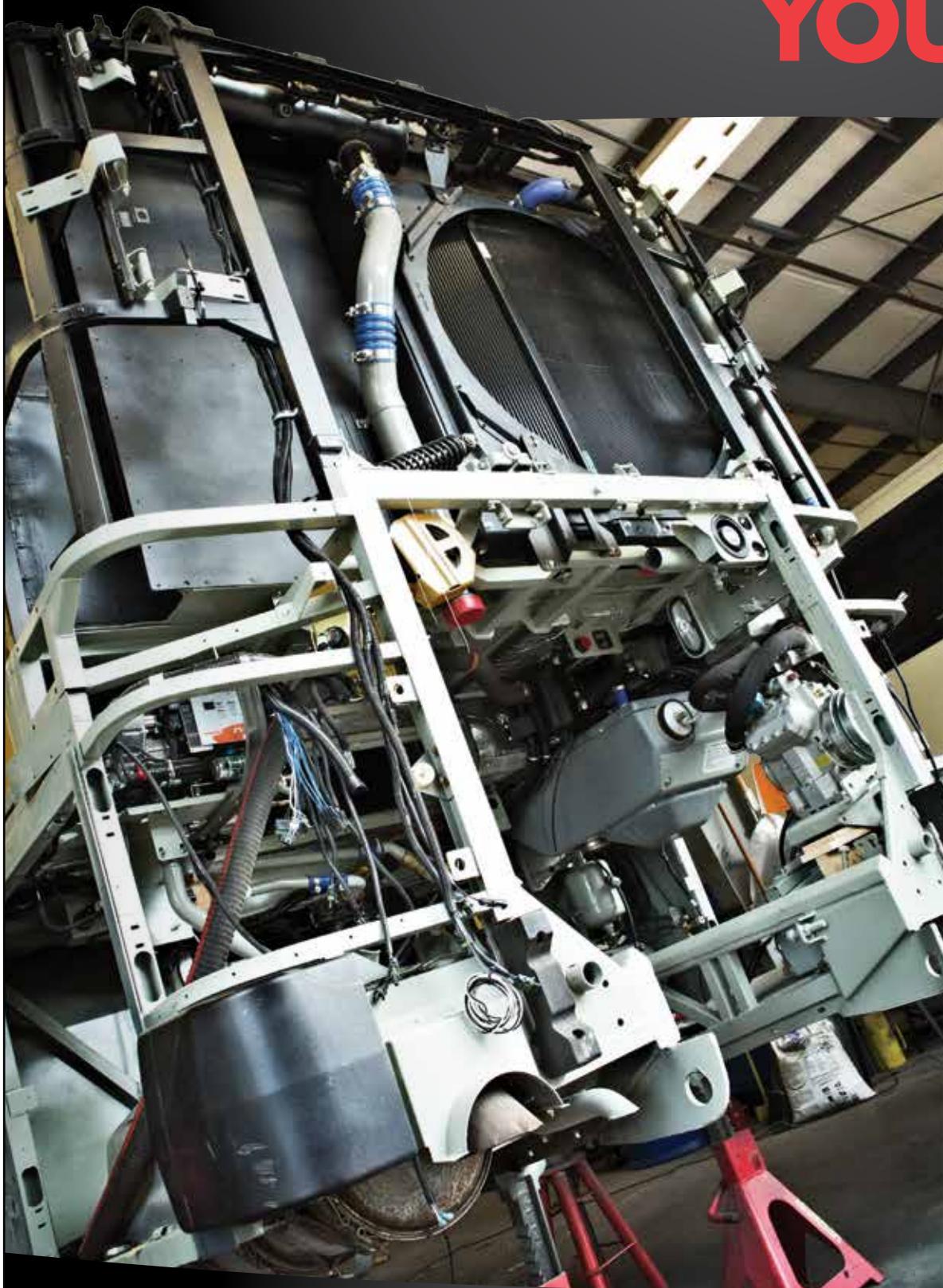
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MCI reportedly wins huge commuter coach order

NEWARK, N.J. — New Jersey Transit has selected Motor Coach Industries to fulfill the largest order for commuter coaches awarded in 15 years, industry sources report.

The order, which is expected to be completed over the next five or six years, is for 750 commuter coaches.

Commuter coaches fundamentally are standard motorcoaches with transit agency-specific additions, such as destination signs, and deletes, such as lavatories (though New Jersey Transit has purchased commuter coaches in the past with lavatories).

Not since 2000, when New Jersey Transit ordered upwards of 1,400 40- and 45-foot MCI commuter buses, has the nation's third-largest transit agency placed a motorcoach order on this scale. That 2000 purchase was the largest ever in the North American bus industry.

The nation's first- and second-largest transit agencies are in New York City and Los Angeles.

To win this year's order, MCI had to beat out Prevost/Volvo and ABC-Van Hool. Industry sources report MCI beat its competitors by substantial margins.

According to one insider, MCI

bid roughly \$370 million to supply the 750 buses, or an average price over the length of the contract of approximately \$490,000 per coach. The source said the bid from Prevost was for an average price of about \$540,000, while Van Hool's bid was for around \$570,000.

That would mean MCI beat Van Hool by \$60 million, or around \$80,000 per bus, and beat Prevost by roughly \$50,000 per coach.

Neither the price figures nor the supposed winning bid could be officially confirmed because they still needed approval from the New Jersey Transit board.

However, industry sources said transit agency staff members had notified MCI it had won the years-long competition for the giant order, and they were recommending the contract be awarded to MCI, North America's leading mo-

torcoach supplier.

MCI said there was "nothing signed, nothing official."

Since the early 1980s, MCI has far and away been the dominant supplier of commuter coaches to New Jersey Transit. In the '80s, the transit system bought some Flexibles and a few Eagles, and three years ago it purchased 15 Design-Line coaches. But beyond that it has bought all MCI commuter

coaches, including two separate purchases of CNG-powered MCIs totaling 224 coaches.

Earlier this year, MCI completed delivery of 150 CNG-powered commuter coaches to New Jersey. They replaced a fleet of 77 CNG MCI coaches the transit agency acquired in 1998-99, plus other older models.

Because of its long history of supplying New Jersey Transit, MCI had a huge leg up in the competition for the contract. Not only is New Jersey Transit's infrastructure and training geared toward MCI, its specification writing also would be MCI-centric, meaning the competitive bidders likely would have to adapt or seek exceptions.

It appears, based on what industry sources are reporting, that the New Jersey Transit staff has completed its evaluation of the bids, assigned values to the various items in each bid, and will recommend to the board that the contract be awarded to MCI.

"This is almost always a formality," said one source. "The board is going to buy what NJT staff recommends, but it ain't official 'til the fat lady sings, and the board votes."

Trailways launches second search for president

FAIRFAX, Va. — For the second time this year, a search committee and executive recruiting firm have embarked on a search for a president and CEO of the Trailways Transportation System.

The renewed search was necessitated by the abrupt departure of Sheila Ryba, who lasted barely more than two months as Trailways' top executive before being let go.

The termination is being challenged by Ryba, who had been recruited to replace longtime Trailways leader Gale C. Ellsworth when she retired March 15. (See April 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

In a two-paragraph statement

sent to its members early last month, Trailways said Ryba's employment ended May 29.

"It was determined that it was in the best interests of the organization to move in a different direction at this time," the statement said. "We wish Ms. Ryba the very best in the future."

"We hope to announce a successor in the near future. Ms. Theresa Marin will be acting as the director of operations on an interim basis while the search for a replacement is being conducted."

"The executive committee will work closely with Ms. Marin during the transition process. The board has retained a search firm to

conduct a search for a replacement for Ms. Ryba," the Trailways statement concluded.

The termination of Ryba's employment appeared to stun many Trailways members not only because it came so quickly after her hiring but also because it was so sudden.

Additionally, it was out of character for the motorcoach industry and its trade organizations.

"Everyone is taken aback," one Trailways member told *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

Both Ryba and the spokesman for Trailways search committee, Curtis Riggs, president of VIA

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THE DOCKET

Catch 22: NYC ticketing charter buses despite permits

NEW YORK CITY — There seems to be some confusion about the need for a charter bus sticker to park a motorcoach in Manhattan.

And it isn't only the charter operators who are confused.

Apparently the police are, too, because they have been ticketing drivers even when they have the charter stickers, which cost \$1.50 per trip.

"A lot of bus companies are having a problem with this," said Brian Hagey, manager of Hagey Coach & Tours in Souderton, Pa., whose drivers have been ticketed in New York several times despite having the stickers. "It's a problem, no question about it."

According to New York traffic laws, intercity buses — those that transport passengers between the

city and locations outside the city in scheduled service — are required to have an intercity bus permit.

The permit requires the scheduled service carrier to have an approved fixed stop for picking up and dropping off passengers.

Charter buses, as well as public transit buses and school buses, are exempt from the intercity bus

permit requirement.

Instead, charter buses are required to purchase the \$1.50 charter stickers from the New York City Department of Transportation.

There are plenty of charter operators who have been running buses into Manhattan without buying the charter stickers because they didn't know about

them, even though they have been required for several years.

But that's not why drivers have been getting tickets.

It seems that some parking enforcement officers — and there are several agencies in the city that have the authority to issue parking tickets — have decided that any bus, including a charter bus, without an intercity permit is in violation of traffic laws and deserves a ticket, which costs \$515, according to Hagey.

"When they see a bus parked, they don't realize, or even care, that it is a charter bus," he said. "Officers are still giving us tickets even when we have the \$1.50 sticker affixed to our coach. The officers tell us it means nothing. They just give out tickets if you don't have an intercity permit."

Hagey said he has had to go to court to fight the tickets, and the judges have always dismissed the fines.

"Thankfully we have won every case by simply showing the traffic court judge a copy of our charter orders, thus proving we were conducting a charter trip and not scheduled service," Hagey wrote in a recent Bus Association of New York newsletter.

Hagey said that nobody seems to care about the unfair enforcement of the permit laws. He has even tried to buy an intercity bus permit for his charter buses so he could avoid the tickets.

"They said I didn't meet the criteria because I'm not running scheduled service," he said.

But wait, there's more. Since a growing number of charter operators have discovered that they need the charter stickers, the transportation department has run out of stickers.

"They are out of print because everybody has been buying them," Hagey said. "It's the old Catch-22."

He said he called the city finance office to ask what he should do, and was told they would send him an email that drivers could show an officer to confirm that the bus was there legally.

"Which would mean nothing to an officer," Hagey said. "Round and round it goes."

Historic D.C. bridge closed to coaches

WASHINGTON — One of the historic and important bridges that connect Northern Virginia to the District of Columbia has been closed to motorcoaches and other heavy vehicles.

The National Park Service and the Federal Highway Administration instituted an indefinite 10-ton load limit to cross the Arlington Memorial Bridge. That 20,000-pound limit would keep even 30-foot coaches off the bridge.

The weight restriction was implemented as part of other constraints placed on the deteriorating bridge.

The Park Service announced that both of the curbside lanes in

the drawbridge section of the bridge have been closed until emergency repairs are completed. However, there was no indication those repairs would lead to a lifting of the 10-ton load limit to use the bridge.

"Two lanes closed on one of the most important entrances to our nation's capital. We already have the worst traffic congestion in the country, and now this," Rep. Don Beyer Jr., D-Va., said at a press conference on the Virginia side of the bridge. "This is not just the symbol, but the reality of failed leadership."

Democratic politicians used the press conference to call for in-

creased federal transportation spending.

"It must be funded, not some by the states and some by the federal government, but 100 percent by the federal government," said D.C. Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton. "This closing is going to have a domino effect on the rest of the congested transportation."

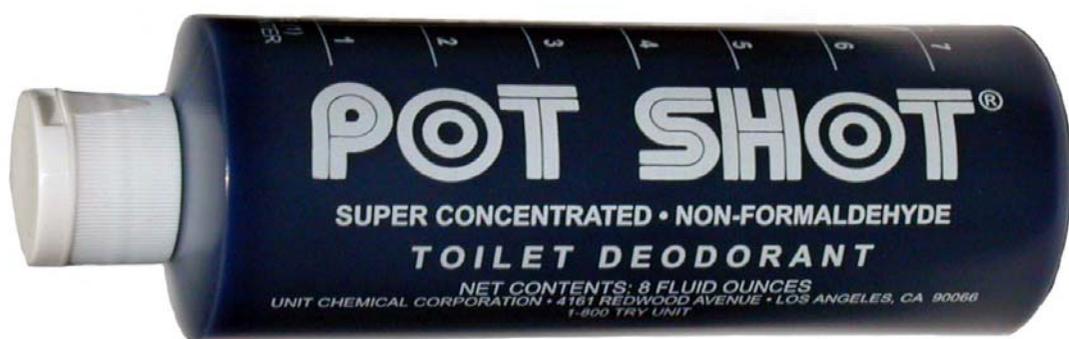
Temporary repairs to the bridge were to begin in September, but an annual inspection revealed that some drawbridge support beams were corroding faster than expected.

So work will begin this month and last between six and nine months.

There reportedly are not sufficient funds to make the "big fixes" the bridge needs that would allow heavier vehicles.

The National Park Service has been developing a comprehensive bridge repair plan since 2012. The bridge is one of 14 "structurally deficient" bridges in D.C. and is the most heavily trafficked, with roughly 68,000 vehicles crossing it on weekdays.

The Arlington Memorial Bridge and Avenue provide a "ceremonial entrance" to Washington from Virginia. They stretch between Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington.



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Missouri wants to have nation's first 'smart highway'

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Highway and public officials in Missouri have been trying — without success — for well over a decade to come up with a plan to pay for upgrades and better maintenance of Interstate 70 across the state.

I-70 is one of the oldest stretches of interstate in the U.S. and one of the half-dozen major east-west interstates crossing the country, meaning it is regularly used by large numbers of motorcoach companies.

That the oft-times congested, beat-up roadway requires better maintenance and improvement is widely accepted — even by those who have opposed some of the funding schemes that have surfaced since the early 2000s.

Ideas including fuel-tax increases, tolling, dedicated commercial vehicle lanes and public-private partnerships have essentially gone nowhere during the past dozen or so years.

Now, the state has come up with a scheme to make a 200-mile stretch of I-70 the nation's first "smart highway."

What that exactly means and

how such a project would be paid for remain unclear, suggesting it stands a good chance of going the way of the many other ideas for rebuilding I-70. That is, nowhere.

'Road to Tomorrow'

Last month, Stephen Miller, chairman of the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission, announced the state's "Road to Tomorrow" initiative: a call for those inside and outside the state to come up with a way to rebuild the highway between Independence and Wentzville, Mo., as a technologically advanced highway.

Right now, he conceded, the state has no clear plan on how to make that happen.

Miller told a local business journal the state is open to suggestions from entrepreneurs, innovators, small businesses and established companies on how I-70 could be overhauled. He said it's not a plan or a solution for the state's transportation funding woes, but rather a new direction and a new goal.

"It's not a solution," Miller said. "The objective is to find a solution."

The concept of smart highways

has been around for nearly 20 years, since the U.S. Department of Transportation sponsored the National Automated Highway System Consortium project, a prototype highway that was tested in San Diego County, Calif., in 1997 along I-15.

However, despite the technical success of the project, investment has moved more toward autonomous intelligent vehicles rather than building specialized infrastructure.

Current research typically places sensory technology in vehicles that can read passive road

markings and use radar and inter-vehicle communications to make the vehicles orient themselves without the intervention of drivers.

Declining budget

The Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission announcement doesn't mean the Missouri Department of Transportation is giving up on finding new or conventional revenue streams. The agency is facing a budget calamity and it won't be giving up on a fuel-tax increase.

Missouri's annual construction budget for roads and bridges has fallen from about \$1.3 billion in 2010 to \$685 million a year ago. The budget is projected to dip to \$325 million by 2017 — the lowest since 1992.

The Missouri Legislature failed to enact a fuel-tax increase during its session that ended in May. Lawmakers could not agree on the size of an increase and how it should be allocated between gasoline and diesel fuel. Business interests strongly opposed a fuel-tax hike that would have put most

FedEx to pay \$228 million in driver suit

OAKLAND, Calif. — FedEx Corp. has agreed to pay \$228 million to settle litigation in California challenging the status of drivers the company classified as contractors.

The settlement stems from allegations that FedEx Ground workers were employees, not independent contractors, because of the company's control over their activities.

The Ninth Circuit U.S. Court

of Appeals ruled last August that 2,300 drivers working for FedEx Ground in California from 2000 to 2007 should have been classified as employees covered by workplace protection statutes. (See Sept. 15, 2014, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

"FedEx Ground faced a unique challenge in defending this case given the decision of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals last summer," said Christine Richards,

general counsel of FedEx Corp. "This settlement resolves claims dating back to 2000 that concern a model FedEx Ground no longer operates."

After the suits were filed, FedEx changed the legal structure of its relationship with the workers, but they still are contractors.

"While we disagree with the court's interpretation of California state law related to this case, we

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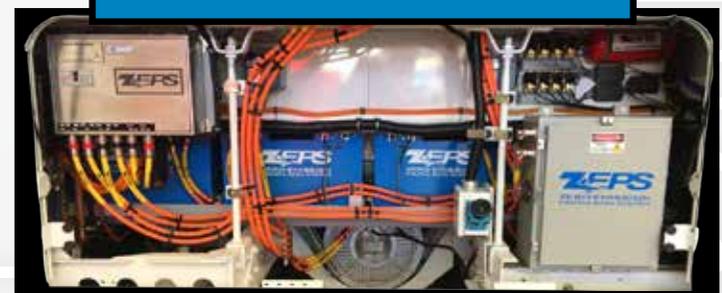


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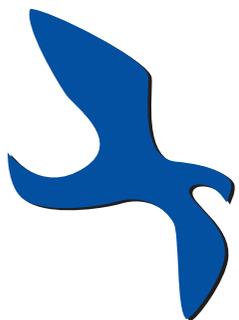
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Survey: More folks are tweeting, texting while driving

Editors Note: *While texting is dangerous, it also remains illegal for bus and motorcoach drivers and the fines can be quite hefty. Ninety-three percent of motorcoach operators also have written policies banning texting by drivers.*

We've all seen individuals texting while driving. But the different types of risks people take with their smartphones while on the road are more widespread than some people realize.

A new AT&T survey reveals that drivers also surf the Web, tweet, take selfies and even video chat while behind the wheel. Some even shoot videos, the telecommunications giant found.

The survey, commissioned by AT&T and conducted by Braun Research, polled 2,067 people in the U.S. ages 16 to 65 who use their smartphone and drive at least once per day.

Among the findings:

- 61 percent of respondents said they read, send or reply to texts while driving. 33 percent do the same thing with email.

- 28 percent said they surf the net.

- 27 percent said they view or post on Facebook.

- 17 percent said they snap a selfie photo.

- 14 percent view or post on Twitter. Of that number, 30 percent who post to Twitter while driving said they do it "all the time."

- 10 percent conduct a video chat.

- 12 percent shoot videos

- Of the respondents who shoot videos while driving, 27 percent think they can do it safely while driving.

- 14 percent view or post on Snapchat.

AT&T said it conducted the survey to help boost driver awareness about the dangers of smart-

phone use behind the wheel. It has already pursued this message through its "It Can Wait" campaign, which focused initially on the dangers of texting while driving. Now, AT&T plans to expand its public service campaign to address other driving distraction issues that emerged from its survey. The effort will include collaborations with social platforms, as well as a nationwide "virtual reality" tour over the summer.

"When we launched 'It Can Wait' five years ago, we pleaded with people to realize that no text is worth a life," AT&T global marketing officer Lori Lee said in prepared remarks. "The same applies to other smartphone activities that people are doing while driving."

A major insurance industry group reacted favorably to the AT&T survey and resulting public education plans.

"We applaud the AT&T expan-

sion of the 'It Can Wait' campaign," Loretta Worters, vice president of the Insurance Information Institute, told Carrier Management via email. "Activities that take drivers' attention off the road, including talking or texting on mobile devices, tapping into social media and other distractions, are a major safety threat."

She noted some statistics that bear out the risks, such as the deaths of 3,154 people in the United States in 2013 from distraction-related crashes (based on National Highway Traffic Safety Administration criteria).

And there have been confirmed cases of bus drivers causing accidents while texting. Police investigators in Knoxville, Tenn., said recently that a school bus driver sent and received multiple text messages in the time leading up to a Dec. 2, 2014, crash in which his bus made a sharp turn,

crossed over a concrete median and struck another school bus.

Two students and an aide were killed. The driver died June 1, but it wasn't clear if the death was related to the crash.

"People can become so absorbed in their conversations and other uses that their ability to concentrate on the act of driving is severely impaired," she said. "That's why it is important to get laws on the books throughout the country to penalize those who use their smart phones while driving."

In 2012, a *Consumer Reports* survey determined that 71 percent of respondents cut back on texting, talking on a handheld phone or using a smartphone while driving in the previous year. More than half said they did so because of state laws, up from 44 percent in 2011, Worters said.

This article was first published by www.carriermanagement.com.

FedEx settles

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are pleased to put this matter behind us," FedEx spokesman Jess Bunn said.

He told a trucking publication that the company is in the process of transitioning to a new independent service provider agreement.

The case is the latest in a series of suits that have challenged FedEx Ground's independent contractor

model, and it could ultimately have implications for all companies that hire drivers, including motorcoach operators.

There are various factors that come into play when determining the status of drivers. In the FedEx case, one of the main factors was the level of control the company exerted over its drivers. The court ruled that because the company imposed several strict requirements on the drivers, they should

be classified as employees.

"The drivers must wear FedEx uniforms, drive FedEx-approved vehicles, and groom themselves according to FedEx's appearance standards," Judge William Fletcher wrote in his opinion.

"FedEx tells its drivers what packages to deliver, on what days, and at what times. Although drivers may operate multiple delivery routes and hire third parties to help perform their work, they may do

so only with FedEx's consent."

Although a majority of motorcoach operators used to treat their drivers as independent contractors, most companies today hire drivers as employees. That means that the companies withhold taxes from the drivers' paychecks, pay unemployment insurance, and issue W-2 forms for tax purposes.

Independent contractors must pay their own federal and state taxes and companies issue 1099

forms to them for tax purposes.

Another factor that can help determine how a bus driver is classified involves ownership of the bus. In general, drivers who own their own buses are considered independent contractors.

Operators who are still using independent contractors as drivers should consult a tax professional to determine the tax implications of individuals who perform work for the company.

Smart highway

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of the increase on diesel.

Missouri's current fuel tax is 17.3 cents per gallon.

Miller said he's also hopeful the promise of possible technolog-

ical innovation will help pump life into the state transportation department. He said MoDOT still is looking for a new permanent director and is dealing with serious attrition of its engineering talent.

Hopefully, he said, the opportunity to develop a first-of-its-kind

highway in Missouri will help reverse that trend.

In 2009, Missouri explored the idea of creating commercial vehicle-only lanes on I-70 as a means of not only improving safety but also as a way to cope with projected increases in traffic and improve

efficiency. (See Sept. 1, 2009, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The huge price tag of \$4 billion easily killed that idea. It also was estimated at the time to cost \$3.5 billion to add a third lane to I-70 across the state.

Legislators, as well as voters,

have in the past — on a number of occasions — rejected tolling on interstates in Missouri.

Still, Gov. Jay Nixon, a Democratic, called on state transportation officials late last year to take another look at the potential for tolling I-70.

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It all boils down to this: Brakes are good things to have

By Dave Millhouser

“Oh poop,” muttered Oakie. (This is G-rated, so that’s paraphrasing.)

The bus was utterly silent at the time, so his entire load of dignitaries heard him.

Oakie was spearheading the effort to get a new model of coach accepted in the U.S., and that involved transporting a demo to Albany, N.Y., and taking bus industry and regulatory VIPs on a ride that included the New York Department of Transportation (NYDOT) brake test.

For the uninitiated, this involves sticking a G-meter on the windshield, accelerating the coach to a specified speed, and dynamiting the brakes.

The bus came to a shuddering halt, silent because Oakie had stalled the engine, forgetting to disengage the clutch on a coach with a standard transmission. Then came “Oh poop.”

There are two reasons for telling the story. First, any opportunity to embarrass Oakie should not be squandered. But I also want to point out that when NYDOT tests brakes they measure what matters.

Do the damn things stop the coach quickly?

There are all sorts of other “thingys” that regulators measure to determine if brakes are in good repair, but doesn’t it boil down to whether the bus stops quickly? Some of those “thingys” really do matter, but some are not very relevant.

Years ago an operator’s brand-new bus was stopped for a roadside inspection and declared “out of service” because there was too much travel in the slack adjusters. After several hours of frantic phone calls and faxes from the brake vendor, the trooper involved accepted that these slacks were designed to have a long stroke and turned the bus (and its passengers) loose.

There are two overlapping concerns here. If the inspection actually tested stopping distance, per NYDOT, substantial inconvenience for both the operator and customers would have been avoided. Instead the trooper was only trained in the use of an arbitrary measurement that, in this case, gave a false impression.

It may be more difficult and expensive to measure actual performance, but if a coach operator

gave that excuse about safety related items, imagine the outcry.

‘Adjusty stuff’

You’re probably aware that coach builders buy the braking systems they install. Years ago, during the switch to disc brakes, the manufacturer I worked for chose a particular model of brakes that had external slack adjusters. I asked an engineer why they picked that model, as opposed to a competitor’s that did all that “adjusty stuff” internally, out of the gritty environment.

His response spoke volumes. “We wanted to give the inspectors something to measure,” he said. That’s the tail wagging the dog.

According to a recent article in a trucking publication, there has been a significant increase in the number of out-of-service violations related to automatic slack adjusters that are either defective or out of adjustment. This is on trucks where drum brakes are still common.

The writer’s point was that many drivers (and some shops) don’t understand how automatic adjustment works. My guess is that is even truer in our industry, where more-complex disc brakes

predominate.

The old way we did it — crank that sucker clockwise until tight and back off a couple of clicks — simply doesn’t work. In fact, it can damage the adjustment mechanism.

Inspectors need to have a better understanding of brakes than just gauging slack travel or lining thickness. The measurement that REALLY matters is stopping distance. Drivers need to take note when a bus is stopping long or crooked and get the brakes properly adjusted. The more they understand how modern braking systems work the better off we all are.

Over a cliff

Back in the day, my buddy Dick was about to depart our Colorado property in a GM 4104. This involved descending a gentle cliff on a dirt road replete with tight turns. Pulling in, before boarding a group of high school kids, he had noticed the brakes didn’t feel quite right and sent for a mechanic to adjust them.

When you’re about to drive over a cliff, even a gentle one, brakes are good things.

The mechanic rolled under the bus and cranked each slack adjuster tight, and then backed off the

required three clicks.

Dick finished loading the bus, popped loose the parking brake, and headed down the cliff.

The first time he touched the brakes, and virtually nothing happened, he cleverly figured out something was wrong. We later heard that the rest of Dick’s (and his passengers’) descent reminded them of Disney’s Big Thunder Mountain Railroad roller coaster.

It turned out that the mechanic had been a bit confused regarding clockwise versus counterclockwise and had cranked the brakes all the way off before giving them a scant three clicks of “ON-ness.”

If he’d been a little better trained — or paid a bit more attention — well, things would have gone smoother. It also wouldn’t have hurt if Dick had tested the brakes before driving off.

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



Dave Millhouser

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Summer runs: Coasters, pop culture rides and Orlando Eye

With theme and amusement parks among the nation's leading motorcoach destinations, the newest park rides and attractions are of more than casual interest to coach operators and their marketing staffs.

For 2015, there are must-do and must-see additions ranging from a dark, submarine-inspired thrill ride in California to swank new offerings at Downtown Disney in Florida.

For those operators with groups who want more extreme summer adventures, a hybrid wood-steel coaster in Massachusetts and a spinning-wing coaster based on Batman in Texas also are new for this year.

"Pop culture really stands out this summer," Colleen Mangone, spokeswoman for the Virginia-based International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions, told a leading news service. "It's allowing fans to experience pop culture in a whole new way."

Here are the top new theme park summer offerings:

California

Universal Studios Hollywood unveiled its Fast & Furious: Super-

charged attraction June 25, a 50,000-square-foot motion simulator ride based on the movie franchise.

It takes riders on a 120-mph journey through the "underworld of fast cars and international crime cartels" with the help of 3-D-HD imagery and 360-degree screens.

Just over a month ago, Knott's Berry Farm in Buena Park opened its "4-D, interactive" dark ride called Voyage to the Iron Reef. It's a submarine-inspired attraction and guests can use ray guns to "freeze" puffer fish, octopi and other creatures during the ride, which takes place on 600 feet of track.

Legoland California in Carlsbad has opened Lego Star Wars Miniland Death Star, with models of classic movie scenes. In late May, the park also opened Heartlake City, an area based on the Lego Friends toy line, which centers on the lives of five girls.

Florida

The most visible and talked about attraction in Orlando this summer isn't at one of the mega theme parks. It's I-Drive 360, an entertainment complex good for all

ages that combines Madame Tussauds wax museum, the Sea Life Aquarium and the Orlando Eye.

The 400-foot-tall Ferris wheel is slow enough for those with jumpy stomachs (but not good for those with fear of heights). The aquarium has touch pools, a wall of trippy floating jellyfish and plenty of sharks to spy.

The wax museum includes a figure of Juan Ponce de Leon, who led the first European expedition to Florida.

Over at Disney, imagineers are busy transforming Downtown Disney into Disney Springs. Some of the new restaurant and shopping offerings are open, including The Boathouse, a waterfront eatery that overlooks Lake Buena Vista. Guests can now take tours in "Mad Men"-era "amphicars" around the lake; the boat-cars are original, not replicas. Nearby, Starbucks serves beer and wine after 4 p.m.

Because the "Frozen" movie frenzy keeps growing, the "Frozen Sing-Along Celebration" at Disney Hollywood Studios moved to the larger Hyperion Theater last month, with new technology like a high-definition LED screen and new snowmaking.

Note to grown-ups: The theater is deliciously air-conditioned and dark, enabling weary park-goers to kick back and rest while little ones happily belt out "Let It Go" at the top of their lungs.

Two other openings in Central Florida are: The Crayola Experience and Legoland Florida's new hotel.

Ohio

Cedar Point in Sandusky has opened its signature summer ride: Rougarou, a werewolf-themed roller coaster that's also floorless. Translation: Riders' feet are dangling as they plunge 137 feet through four inversions.

Massachusetts

Wicked fast: Six Flags New England in Agawam has updated an old wooden coaster with a metal structure for a smooth hybrid ride, now called the Wicked Cyclone, with a 109-foot hill, two zero-G rolls and top speeds of 55 mph.

New Jersey

Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson adds a 13th coaster to its mix, El Diablo, a pendulum-style coaster.

Pennsylvania

Camelback Mountain Resort in Tannersville has unveiled a 533,000-square-foot Aquatopia Indoor Water Park with six pools, a surfing simulator, 13 water slides and an indoor water coaster.

At Hersheypark in Hershey, the Laff Trakk indoor coaster is a spinning glow coaster that "pays homage" to funhouses of yesteryear, including a hall of mirrors.

Tennessee

At Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, the DreamMore Resort is new for this summer. It's a 307-room resort with a lazy river, a splash park and views of the Great Smoky Mountains.

Texas

Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington has introduced a 3-D interactive dark ride, Justice League: Battle for Metropolis. A similar ride is opening at Six Flags St. Louis in Missouri.

At Six Flags Fiesta Texas in San Antonio, Batman: The Ride is a 4-D coaster with magnetic fins that flip riders.



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New engines and transmissions stress fuel efficiency

The biggest news in engines and transmissions these days involves fuel efficiency — natural gas engines and fuel-efficient automatic transmissions.

Natural gas engines have yet to catch on with motorcoaches — and that may never change. Transit buses remain the largest market for natural gas-powered engines in the bus industry, according to Cummins Inc., which continues developing the technology in its joint venture with Westport.

Their latest product is a 6.7-liter natural gas engine due out next year that targets school and shuttle buses as well as medium-duty trucks.

About 34 to 35 percent of the transit bus market has opted for natural gas engines from Cummins Westport, said Spencer Dell, senior marketing communications specialist, on-highway engine business, at Cummins. About 5 percent of school buses have made the switch, making them the No. 2 user of natural gas engines in the bus category, which also includes shuttles and motorcoaches, he said.

The trucking industry remains the largest user, Dell said.

Among motorcoaches, there's been some adoption, but for those who don't return to their base frequently, fuel availability can make diesel more attractive, he said. There also is the issue of the loss of under-coach storage space with natural gas.

Falling diesel prices can affect natural gas engine adoption rates, Dell said, but there are additional reasons besides economics that customers opt for the engines, which keeps demand growth relatively consistent. Chief among them is environmental.

Going green

"A lot of transit authorities, especially on the West Coast, have seemed to be a little more progressive with (carbon) standards and elements there of adopting natural gas from an environmental standpoint," he said.

There's also considerable push on energy stability, including domestic fuels, that can affect adoption, he said.

But economics is probably the primary driver as technology has improved diesel engine emissions to, in general, make them nearly as clean emitting as natural gas, he said.

"We'd like to say diesel is just as green as natural gas," Dell said. "The beauty of Cummins is we've got the opportunity to give the customer what they want," whether

diesel or natural gas.

A growing number of customers have sought natural gas engines. In 2007, Cummins Westport's ISL G natural gas engine was 17 percent of the North American OEM bus production and in 2014 it grew to 35 percent, Dell said.

The potential market size for

natural gas-powered buses? That's the million-dollar question, he said.

It's the chicken or egg scenario. Natural gas fueling stations need to continue growing, which requires more natural gas engines, each feeding off the other.

"A lot of it's going to depend

upon government regulation pieces, if there's any economic incentives to continue to purchase natural gas," he said. "So that will be a big driver for the cost side of things."

There's also the unknown over diesel prices. Will they drop, rise or level off? Will natural gas continue to be the low-cost option?

NGV Today, which covers natural gas vehicle markets, technology and policy, reported last month that the retail price of a gallon of diesel purchased for on-highway transportation fueling averaged \$2.88, up from \$2.75 in April. With the average retail price of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13 ►



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Trailways search

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Trailways in Merced, Calif., declined to discuss the end of Ryba's employment and the reasons for it.

Ryba said in a phone interview she wished she could discuss the situation "but the attorneys are involved. I can't right now." She asked that her attorney be called.

Contacted by phone, Ryba's attorney, Nick Hantzes of Hantzes & Associates of McLean, Va., said the termination is being challenged.

Her termination "was not in accordance with Virginia law," he said. "It was improper." He did not elaborate.

Riggs declined specific comment on Ryba's departure. "Obviously we can't say much," he said. "Trailways decided it was in the best interests of the organization to move in a different direction at this time.

"We have retained a search firm to find a new CEO...I can't say the reasons for the end of the employment."

The silence by Riggs and Ryba did not stop Trailways members from offering ideas — on a not-for-attribution basis — about what happened and what went wrong.

More than one member specu-

lated that Ryba may have been a victim of the industry turmoil over the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration proposal to raise the minimum auto-liability insurance level for operating companies from the current \$5 million to as much as \$20 million.

Stuck in the middle

The proposal has split the industry along familiar lines. Greyhound and large line-run Trailways operators favor the increase while small operators, including small Trailways operators, are opposed.

There are reports Ryba had opposed the increase when the political thing — as president of Trailways — would have been to stay out of the fray or remain neutral.

Trailways members also speculated that Ryba, who has something of a reputation for being an advocate for accelerated change, may have rushed ideas and sent the wrong signals to the wrong executive committee member or members.

"She was extremely progressive," said one Trailways member. "I think some of (the members) weren't ready for it."

Others indicated they thought she spent too much time on social media and not enough focusing on or actually tackling pressing orga-

nizational issues.

Still others wondered whether Ryba had the experience and adroitness to head a D.C.-based international business development organization. Managing Trailways generally is considered one of the tougher industry trade organization jobs. The old "herding cats" cliché is sometimes raised when discussing the challenges of getting Trailways' diverse membership mix of old line-haul operators and upstart charter companies on the same page.

Ryba was introduced to Trailways members at the organization's 79th annual stockholders meeting and conference in Palm Springs, Calif., in March.

Questions raised

Trailways said that at the stockholders meeting Ryba shared her vision for Trailways' future, including charter business growth and partnerships with state and local municipalities to help them build municipal transportation systems.

Those who heard her detected no red flags, but in one-on-one meetings she was said to have raised questions.

Ryba brought experience with both profit and non-profit organizations to the Trailways position. Her for-profit experience included

running her own consulting firm, specializing in business development, lobbying, fund development and strategic planning.

Ryba also had led non-profit organizations, including the Boys and Girls Club of Durham, N.C., the Alice Aycock Poe Center for Health Education in Raleigh, N.C., the San Diego regional office for the American Heart Association, and the Savannah Hospitality Association.

Long-term leaders

It was noted by more than one person that most of her employment was for a relatively short stint — certainly by motorcoach industry standards.

Vic Parra, for example, has been president and CEO of the United Motorcoach Association for 17 years, and Peter Pantuso has headed the American Bus Association for 19 years.

The previous two Trailways presidents held their jobs for years — Ellsworth was president and CEO for more than 17 years and her predecessor, J.D. Johnston, spent four years as president.

Steve Klika spent 11 years as head of the International Motor Coach Group before leaving three and a half years ago. Bronwyn Wilson succeeded him as presi-

dent early in 2012.

And then there was Steve Kirchner, who founded the National Motorcoach Network in the wake of industry deregulation, and headed it for 31 years before pulling the plug on the marketing organization at the end of last year. (See Jan. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Some of the job moves by Ryba may have been prompted by employment changes by her husband.

Search committee member Riggs said the same executive recruiting firm that assisted with the hiring of Ryba was working on the new search. The effort is again being overseen by a committee composed of Trailways members.

He said the search would "move quickly" but "we don't have a deadline...We want to do our best."

Riggs confirmed that Ellsworth has made herself available to assist the organization during the transition, which he welcomed, but he asserted that Marin is directing operations under the guidance of the executive committee.



Sheila Ryba

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Engines

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

compressed natural gas at about \$2.43 per diesel gallon equivalent (DGE), the nationwide average price spread between a gallon of diesel and a DGE of CNG is at 45 cents.

Early last July, before diesel prices plummeted, the average price spread was at \$1.47 per DGE. In April 2012, the average price spread between CNG measured on a DGE basis and a gallon of diesel was at \$1.81.

Cummins Westport has two engine platforms in its natural gas lineup for highway use, with another, the 6.7-liter product, to debut in 2016. The joint venture has had a 9-liter platform in use for more than 10 years and it introduced a 12-liter a few years ago that serves more of the trucking operations, Dell said.

The 6.7-liter is targeted, in part, at the school bus market. Transit and motorcoach users have used the 9-liter platform.

Transmission news

This spring, Allison Transmission Holdings Inc. announced new transmission models for buses with advances in fuel economy technology.

The fully automatic bus transmissions, referred to as xFE for extra fuel economy, showed up to 7 percent improvement in fuel economy compared with baseline models, the company said.

The transmissions are compatible with alternative-fuel engines like those powered by natural gas, according to Lou Gilbert, director of North American marketing and global brand development for Allison Transmission.

“Allison transmissions are perfectly suited to a myriad of alternative-fuel engines in a wide range of applications,” Gilbert said. “In fact, as compared with a manual or automated manual transmission, an Allison automatic is better suited for the attributes of natural gas engines. Our continuous power technology provides seamless shifts with no torque interruptions, thereby increasing performance and productivity in stop-and-go traffic, even with lower-rated engines.”

The 7 percent improvement in fuel economy with xFE applies equally to diesel- and natural gas-powered buses, he said.

“We tested the xFE transmission in real world service at fleets around the globe in both diesel and CNG buses,” he said. “The fuel economy improvements of the CNG buses were roughly equivalent to the diesel buses. The focus of xFE is to get the transmission into lockup in first range and keep

the lockup applied.”

Allison says transit and city buses are the ideal candidates for the technology.

“Transit buses that operate with a high number of start/stops per mile and a low average speed can expect to see the greatest fuel economy improvement,” Gilbert said. “For coach applications and those that spend more time at higher vehicle speeds, the xFE

transmission offers reduced engine speeds in higher ranges when compared to our B400.”

Lifecycle cost

Asked if improved fuel economy is the driving force behind bus transmission technology today, Gilbert said improving overall lifecycle value is the driving force, which is most often manifested by fuel economy.

“Transmission reliability, ease of maintenance, initial cost and fuel economy all play an important part in the total lifecycle cost of a major vehicle component, such as the transmission,” he said. “Allison products are leaders in all of these areas, but we’re always looking for ways to improve our value to the end user customer; xFE does just that with improved fuel economy.”

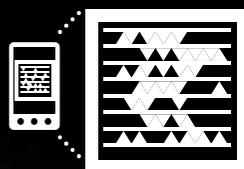
As for the kind of technology

and features being developed or envisioned in the transmission field, Gilbert said electric powertrains, infinitely variable transmissions, smarter electronic controls and advanced telematics/connected vehicles are all developing technologies in the marketplace aimed at reducing lifecycle costs.

“We expect to see increasing product offerings featuring these technologies in the future,” he said.

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UMA survey

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Parra also noted that 87 percent of the operators believe the most effective coach inspections are conducted at their own facilities, "where officials have the optimum access to all components of the bus, as well as complete maintenance records."

The 2015 survey was emailed to UMA members between April 13 and May 8 and had a 15 percent response rate, down from 19 percent last year. Answers to the survey's 82 questions provide a snapshot of the motorcoach industry. The survey also gave operators a chance to offer their ideas and opinions about the industry and its challenges, the UMA and its programs, and the federal regulatory climate (hint: they don't like it).

Some of the key findings of the

survey are pretty much the same as last year. For example:

- Forty-six percent of respondents plan to purchase new coaches in the next 12 months, about the same as last year's 45 percent (which was a 10 percent increase from 2013).

- Thirty-six percent said they planned to purchase pre-owned coaches this year, compared with 37 percent last year.

- Operators have an average of 15 full-size coaches in their fleets, compared with 16 last year.

There also were other signs of improvement. Thirty-four percent of respondents said they plan on increasing their full-time staff over the next year, up from 26 percent last year. Motorcoach fleets were driven an average of 731,595 miles in 2014, up from 712,789 in 2013.

Some of the responses also indicate that despite being encour-

aged by UMA officials to get more involved in local, state and national political issues affecting the industry, most motorcoach operators are opting to remain on the sidelines.

Only 32 percent said they have written to their congressional representatives, down from 35 percent last year, and 11 percent said they are active in state political affairs, down from 17 percent last year.

That, however, could change in the future given the success of this year's UMA Capitol Hill Days, during which members met with representatives in Congress to discuss such pressing issues as federal attempts to raise liability insurance minimums on motorcoach companies.

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a bill that would ban regulators from increasing the insurance minimums after transportation industry groups, including UMA, lobbied their representatives to support the measure.

UMA also has been encouraging members to diversify their companies by moving into different areas, such as school transportation and public transit. However, 89 percent of the survey respondents said they hadn't added any new services in the past year (the question wasn't asked in the 2014 survey).

Respondents said the top three operational issues they face are driver recruitment and retention, driver training and insurance costs. Their top regulatory challenges are figuring out Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations and understanding how to use federal tax exemptions for fuel and tires.

Transit competition

Motorcoach operators continue to face competition from transit agencies, but the percentage citing such competition dropped to 35 percent this year from 38 percent in 2014. Thirty-four percent said they have a good relationship with their local transit authority, up from 27 percent last year.

The survey also provides a glimpse into the types of passengers UMA members serve, where they come from, and their most popular destinations. Here are some examples:

- Students make up 36 percent of motorcoach passengers/groups, followed by seniors at 21 percent and college and professional athletes at 17 percent.

- The top five charter destinations are Orlando, Washington, D.C., New York City, Chicago and Atlanta.

- The top three destinations for tours in 2014 were New York City,

Los Angeles and Chicago.

- Sixty-four percent of the respondents said they run trips to Canada, most of them to Ontario and Quebec.

- None of the respondents said they travel to Mexico, although there are a few operators in California, Arizona and Texas that run Mexico tours and charters.

- The top three countries where inbound international customers come from (excluding Canada and Mexico) are China, Japan and Germany. Last year Germany was first, followed by China and Japan.

- The top three marketing tools used by operators are Facebook, BusRates.com and the Yellow Pages.

UMA members said the most important products and services offered by the association are *Bus & Motorcoach News* (86 percent), UMA Motorcoach Expo (63 percent) and the www.uma.org website (62 percent).

"I'm pleased that *Bus & Motorcoach News* continues to be the most important service we offer," Parra said. "Our editorial commitment to keep motorcoach operators, vendors and suppliers informed about important developments in our industry in a timely manner remains a top priority."

Travel groups disband

CHICAGO — Leisure Travel Group, publisher of several group travel magazines, notes that the first quarter of this year saw the "continued exodus of customary senior-oriented travel groups as programs disbanded and group leaders or organizations discontinued their programs.

"Many of these groups formed as early as the 1970s as generational efforts to keep senior citizens active. With many of these travelers (now) past their prime travel years, and a lack of interest by Baby Boomers in assimilating to this type of program, groups have simply disbanded."

FirstGroup profits rise; Greyhound still losing riders

ABERDEEN, Scotland — FirstGroup, the Scottish-based corporate parent of Greyhound Lines, First Student and First Transit, has reported a 13 percent increase in fiscal 2015 earnings, buoyed, in part, by the improved financial picture at First Student.

Greyhound saw its revenue and profits decline for the year as lower gasoline prices prompted travelers to use private automobiles instead of taking buses.

First Transit posted mixed results that met company expectations.

FirstGroup, which operates bus and rail service in Europe and bus service in North America, posted a companywide adjusted operating profit of \$470 million for the 12 months ending March 31, in line with analyst forecasts and up from the \$416 million it made in the same period last year.

The company said improvements at First Student, its North American school bus division, and British division UK Bus largely offset the impact of its shrinking UK rail business, which last year failed to win new contracts to keep running services on First ScotRail and First Capital Connect, and also lost out on bids for new contracts.

Fewer riders, less money

Greyhound, by far the largest bus and motorcoach operator in North America, has been losing passengers for the past few years, resulting in its annual revenue dropping below \$1 billion in fiscal 2014 and again in 2015.

The bus company reported \$986 million in revenue for the 12 months ending March 31, down from \$991 million during the same period last year. Operating profits declined to \$68.5 million from \$73.2 million last year, while the company's profit margin shrank to 7.2 percent compared with 7.4 percent last year.

Greyhound said it is working to improve its pricing and retail distribution strategies to reflect the increased use of the Internet and mobile devices to purchase tickets. A refreshed website with augmented functionality is due to go live this summer.

"Increased use of Web and mobile sales channels improves our ability to communicate our prices to customers, making our yield and price management actions more effective," the company said.

"In addition, our customers can more easily act on the price benefits of advance ticket purchases when they have the flexibility to do

so, which in turn enables us to operate more efficiently as we have increased visibility of demand. Further customer relationship management enhancements are also planned for the next year, including upgrading our customer loyalty program."

The company said it remains

"confident of achieving our 12 percent margin target, recognizing, however, that long-term oil price trends may impact the timing."

First Student gains

First Student, FirstGroup's North American school bus division, saw both its revenue and prof-

its increase in fiscal 2015. Revenue reached \$2.4 billion, up from \$2.3 billion last year. Operating profit increased to \$177 million from \$153 million, while operating margin grew to 7.5 percent from 6.5 percent.

FirstGroup's turnaround plan for the school bus division includes

increasing the pricing on new contract bids and renewals, which it said has been successful. The company said approximately one-third of its bus portfolio was up for renewal in the 2014 bid season, and it managed to achieve a 90 percent contract retention rate and average

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 ►

The advertisement features a collage of various bus models. At the top, the 'TURTLE TOP' logo is displayed in a stylized, metallic font. Below the logo, several buses are shown, including a white school bus, a black motorcoach, a white van, and a black van. The bottom half of the ad shows the interior of a modern bus with rows of grey seats and a red carpeted aisle. A digital display screen is visible at the front of the bus. The text 'Turtle Top Strong.' is prominently displayed in large white letters across the bottom of the interior view.

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Campus Coach Lines founder Bert Askwith dies in New York

NEW YORK CITY — Bert Askwith, who founded Campus Coach Lines in 1928 and ran the bus company for 85 years, died at his home here last month. He was 104.

Askwith was well known in the motorcoach industry and was a pioneer in offering low-fare bus travel

to New York.

He started Campus Coach Lines while he was a student at the University of Michigan, busing his fellow students from Ann Arbor to the East Coast for a fraction of what it cost to take a train. His company was so successful that he

was able to put himself through college with the money he earned.

Askwith moved the business to New York in 1931 and continued going to the office until the company was sold two years ago.

During his career, Askwith served in a variety of national and

regional industry leadership positions, including a nearly 20-year tenure on the American Bus Association's board and a six-year term as president of the Bus Association of New York.

Askwith was a generous supporter of his alma mater, the Uni-

versity of Michigan, and Harvard University, which his parents attended. He also contributed to United Way of Westchester,



Bert Askwith

Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE), the Museum of Jewish Heritage and the Educational Alliance.

He is survived by his children, Patti Askwith Kenner, Dennis Askwith and Kathy Franklin, and a large extended family.

Greyhound

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

price increases of 4.5 percent on those contracts.

With just over half of the negotiations completed so far on 2015 contract renewals, First Student has realized average price increases of more than 5 percent.

"We expect this improvement, together with additional cost efficiencies, to result in further margin improvement in 2015/16," the company said. "The level of acceptance of our price increases, together with a third year of modest organic growth under existing contracts, suggests that market conditions are continuing to improve."

First Transit mixed

FirstGroup's third North American division, First Transit, reported an operating profit of \$96.1 million on revenue of \$1.36 billion, resulting in an operating margin of 7.1 percent.

A year ago First Transit earned \$95.7 million on revenue of \$1.29 billion, for a margin of 7.4 percent.

The company won several new transit and shuttle contracts around the country and also won new business in the North American Bus Rapid Transit market.

"During the year, we continued to maintain our track record of profitable growth in a range of segments, while developing opportunities in new markets," the company said. "We continue to anticipate achieving a margin of approximately 7 percent in the medium term, which we believe is attractive in the context of the limited capital employed in the division."

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Papal visit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The Philadelphia meeting will open on Sept. 22. Pope Francis will speak on Saturday, Sept. 26, and say Mass on Sunday, Sept. 27.

“This visit by Pope Francis will be the largest event in Philadelphia’s modern history and will include historic attendance levels of visitors, many of whom will travel by charter bus,” said Donna Crilley Farrell, executive director of the meeting. “While the exact number of buses is unknown at this time, early indications suggest it will surely be in the thousands.”

“Event organizers are projecting that the World Meeting of Families Congress (Tuesday through Friday) will bring together at least 15,000 people from more than 150 nations,” said Lizanne Pando, director of marketing and communications. “During the papal visit (Saturday and Sunday) we are expecting upwards of 1.5 million people to visit Philadelphia from around the world in celebration of Pope Francis’ historic visit to the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection.”

The organizers realized help was needed to manage the traffic, she said. “Go Ground is the most experienced ground transportation management specialist of its kind in North America. We needed the best industry experts at charter bus services and bus operations to coordinate all commercial charter buses and privately-owned buses coming to the 2015 Congress and the Papal Visit.”

Special Security

The papal visit has been designated a “National Special Security Event” by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The weekend protocol will include closure of many streets in the Center City to traffic — unless those vehicles and drivers have been registered in advance and have obtained security clearance and permits.

“While exact plans are being refined, the first step is for all buses to be registered at wmof.goground.com,” said Jack O’Brien, event director of the meeting. “It is also important that operators understand all vehicles and drivers must meet minimum safety and operating conditions to be allowed to park and enter within a designated perimeter of the event.”

According to a press release announcing the ground transportation arrangements, “Registration of buses is the responsibility of the bus operator. Parishes, tour operators and other private groups who are chartering buses from commer-

cial operators should direct them to register now as access to parking space will be on a first-come, first-served basis. If a parish or private party owns its own vehicle they will be considered the operator and must also register.”

Maulsby said the designation as a National Special Security Event means there will be extra security, extra traffic constraints and extra limitations on parking.

“The specific security perimeter has not been released, but the parking we will have will be the only parking available because that is the way it has been set up by the World Meeting of Families,” he said.

All drivers, including relief drivers, must be registered before arriving in Philadelphia, according to registration materials. Operating authorities and safety certifications

for carriers will be verified in advance. “If they have completed a compliance review, (they) must have a USDOT/FMCSA Satisfactory rating or comparable state certification.”

Restricted space

The Pennsylvania Convention Center is midway across Philadelphia’s Center City district, which stretches from the Schuylkill River

eastward about two miles to the Delaware River. Interstate 76 parallels the Schuylkill and Interstate 95 runs along the Delaware. These highways are connected by Interstate 676, which crosses Center City and continues east into New Jersey.

The secured transportation perimeter could extend to both riverbanks and stretch three to four

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

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*Medium roof shown.

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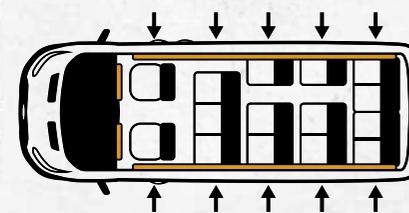
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Papal visit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

miles north and south, Maulsby said. His team is working with the U.S. Secret Service, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and State Police, the Philadelphia Police Department and law enforcement officials in New Jersey.

Planners stress that the meeting will be a walking event. The World Meeting of Families website advises visitors that “walking is vigorously and continually encouraged.”

So, Maulsby said, Go Ground is

assembling spaces for thousands of buses within walking distance of the convention center and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, which is bordered by green spaces.

“We are literally acquiring real estate on behalf of the World Meeting of Families. We are finding areas where we can create parking lots and we are doing that.”

The planning process includes the logistics of guiding buses to and from assigned parking spots. Drivers will be assigned entry and exit times and must carry “a dedicated smartphone or comparable device.”

Maulsby said the logistics applied to this papal visit will push new boundaries.

“To my knowledge, no other event has taken shape at this level,” he said. “The only other comparable events would be the inaugurations of President Obama in 2009 and 2013. In those cases it was a government agency doing the permitting. In terms of the sophisticated technology and data management we are doing, to our knowledge it has never been done before.”

Driver services

Extreme events are notorious for abandoning motorcoach drivers to their own devices when coming, going and even surviving the down time. Maulsby vows that the World Meeting will be different.

“Drivers are an important part of this program,” he said. “We have convened an industry advisory group to help us deal with the operators’ rest and relaxation and hours-of-service issues. We will have hospitality and rest areas for the drivers. Right now I can’t give you the specifics but clearly that is something that everyone has thought about.”

Large events without transportation management can turn into disasters that will not leave visitors feeling as if they just enjoyed a religious experience, industry leaders said.

Planning for an event can begin two years out, said Frank Sherman, chief executive officer of Transportation Management Services. The company has managed events involving up to 750 motorcoaches in a day.

“Our average event is 100 to 400 buses. Whenever there is a large mass of people you may have several hundred buses coming in. You need to be coordinating the routes the buses are taking. Sometimes we will say you come in this way and park on this route, this is your slot to arrive,” he said.

“Bus companies have seen it both ways. They have been in an unmanaged situation where it takes

an hour and a half to get into a parking lot and three hours to get out. They have seen that when it is managed it works out better for them and their clients.”

Worth the cost?

It is not uncommon to charge motorcoach operators for access to events, Sherman said, adding that, “If there is a cost it normally is very nominal.”

How about \$395 per coach?

“That seems a little high but I don’t know what services they are providing,” Sherman said.

“Nobody has done anything like this before but this is a unique situation. How often does the pope come? An event like this requires massive coordination,” said Alan Thrasher, founder of the former International Trailways company that provided transportation management for a Super Bowl and Olympic games in Atlanta, Vancouver and London.

“Sounds to me like the city of Philadelphia ought to be paying someone to do it out of the tax dollars they are going to generate, but somebody has got to coordinate this thing or it will turn into utter chaos,” he said.

Thrasher expects “some push back” from motorcoach operators who are unaccustomed to such parking charges.

“If they are having to hire parking lots, they have to pay somebody for that land. You have to go in early and negotiate for properties,” he said. “If they are promising security, that is another thing. The man needs to make a profit and has a lot of expenses to pay.”

He said Go Ground should make it clear to carriers why a parking space needs to cost \$395. “If you are giving value, there is a reason for that cost and the bus companies just need to pass it on to the customers.”

Driver accommodations would be a great — and often neglected — service that would help justify the cost of entering Center City, Thrasher said.

“Usually you have mass confusion at mass events and nobody ever thinks about the drivers. If they are going to set up a tent and have food for the drivers that would be great. If I found out my driver was getting barbecue and iced tea and a place to sit in the shade, coordinated so there is no confusion, I would be happier,” he said.

Skirting the limit?

Groups that cannot meet the registration deadline or choose not to pay fees conceivably could park their motorcoaches outside the security perimeter and travel into Center City by public transportation. Downtown Philadelphia is served by several Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) rail lines, including one connected to an Amtrak station just west of the Schuylkill River.

“One could suggest that is feasible,” Maulsby said. “The World Meeting of Families and Go Ground are not going to tell people where they can or cannot drive.”

However, he added, “The demand on public transportation during this event will be unprecedented. Assuming you can drop off someone at a train station or SEPTA station may be erroneous because of the number of people who will be there and the wait that will take place at some perimeter well beyond Philadelphia.

“East of the Mississippi River there are about 56 million Catholics in about 16,000 parishes,” Maulsby said. “Pope Francis is unquestionably the most charismatic and popular pope of our time. Group transportation in charter buses clearly is the preferred way people will come into this event.

“Some will take public transportation, but the reality is there just isn’t enough public transportation to accommodate the demand. The reason we are doing this is because we know bus operators, we understand big events and we have the resources to make this event very special.”

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Calendar

August 2015

4 Pennsylvania Bus Association Bus Inspection Workshop, York Springs, Pa. Info: www.pabus.org.

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.

13-16 2015 NAMO Annual Conference, Crowne Plaza Riverfront Hotel, Jacksonville, Fla. Info: www.namocoaches.org.

20-23 Motorcoach Association of South Carolina, North Carolina Motorcoach Association and Virginia Motorcoach Association 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.

25-27 2015 BANY Annual Meeting and Marketplace, Villa Roma Resort and Conference Center, Callicoon, N.Y. Info: www.BANYbus.org.

30 California Highway Patrol Commercial Vehicle Safety Summit, Wyndham Anaheim in Garden Grove, Calif. Info: www.chp.ca.gov/html/cvss

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