

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Operators roll up miles, dollars for 'Babies' program

A special luncheon trip and Golden Gate Bridge walk.

A "Guess the Baby" contest.

A Halloween visit to the zoo for needy children.

A big city shopping event.

Motorcoach operators across the country got creative in attracting interest to the inaugural United Motorcoach Association-initiated "Miles for Babies" fund-raiser pro-

gram for the March of Dimes.

More than 50 operator members of the association took part in the event, which raised about \$25,000 from donations of 10 cents for each mile their coaches logged Sept. 24.

"We are very pleased that so many operators embraced the Miles for Babies program this year," said Chad Royal-Pascoe,

managing director for the March of Dime's national strategic alliances.

"There have been quite a few success stories that have been shared and many of the operators were quite creative in getting their passengers engaged to give all babies a healthy start."

Money raised by the program will be used to support the March of Dime's efforts to prevent birth

defects.

Royal-Pascoe said additional donations will come in later as motorcoach operators take part in Signature Chefs Auction events that local March of Dimes chapters will be staging in their home areas.

"We anticipate some great bidding on the motorcoach services that have been donated across the

country," Royal-Pascoe added.

To drive interest in the one-day event and bring in additional donations, a number of motorcoach operators put together special activities, some of which have yet to be held.

In Dubuque, Iowa, Stratton Charters is hosting a special Halloween night tour to the Milwaukee

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

'Welcome back' for Detroit Diesel?

DETROIT, Mich. — Detroit Diesel appears to have changed its corporate mind and decided not to abandon most of its motorcoach industry customers after all.

Executives from both Detroit Diesel and motorcoach industry manufacturers report Detroit reversed course several weeks ago and began discussions about possibly continuing to supply engines to other coach builders besides Setra.

In March of last year, Prevost Car announced that Detroit Diesel had informed it and other coach builders it would restrict 2010 and beyond engine sales to Setra. Both Setra and Detroit Diesel are business units of Daimler AG of Germany. (See March 15, 2008 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

That decision seemingly meant no Detroit Diesel engines after this year for Van Hool, Prevost and MCI.

However, since the announcement, Detroit Diesel reportedly



A Detroit Diesel technician performs a quality check during the engine manufacturing process.

has come under pressure from both long-time bus industry customers and many of its own dealers to reverse the decision.

The engine users supposedly

want to stick with Detroit Diesel even though it is switching to a brand new engine platform next year and eliminating its workhorse

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►

USDOT targets bus, truck drivers after high-profile distracted driving summit

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation plans to issue rules that would ban text messaging by interstate bus and truck drivers.

The department also intends to restrict the use of cell phones by commercial bus and truck drivers. And it wants to disqualify school bus drivers convicted of texting while driving from maintaining their commercial driver's licenses.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced the proposed rulemakings at the conclusion of a high-profile summit on distracted driving he hosted here early this month.

LaHood also called on state and local governments to continue passing laws against distracted driving in all types of vehicles, especially school buses.

Additionally, he asked states and local governments to back up public awareness campaigns with high-visibility enforcement actions.

Following the first day of the two-day summit, President Obama signed an executive order directing federal employees not to engage in text messaging while driving government-owned vehicles; when using electronic equipment supplied by the government while driving, or while driving privately owned vehicles when they're on government business.

The order also encourages federal contractors and others doing business with the government to adopt and enforce their own policies banning texting while driving on the job.

"This order sends a very clear

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►

Unified Carrier Registration fee increase is slammed

An unlikely duo, the California Department of Motor Vehicles and the National Private Truck Council, have blasted the proposed 122 percent increase in Unified Carrier Registration Agreement fees.

In separate comments submitted to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the California DMV

and the Truck Council said the proposed fee increase was unreasonable, unfair and illegal, and a clumsy attempt by the FMCSA and UCRA-member states to transfer the risk of widespread noncompliance to those truck and bus companies that obey the law and pay the fees.

The National Private Truck

Council is a trade group composed of truck fleets operated by companies that aren't in the transportation business but operate over-the-road trucks to support their operations. Its members include companies like Wal-Mart and giant grocery chains, as well as smaller distribution companies.

In comments filed in response to a proposed FMCSA rulemaking that would more than double UCRA fees next year, the Truck Council said that while it opposes the increase for a variety of reasons, the No. 1 reason is because it is unreasonable and therefore a violation of the law that created the Unified

Carrier Registration system.

The council points out that the UCR Act allows the UCR board to ask the U.S. Secretary of Transportation to adjust the fees "within a reasonable range" on an annual basis. Anything more than a 61 percent increase for 2010 — because of a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

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Ferrone pushes to re-establish Illinois Motorcoach Association

CHICAGO — Long-time Chicago motorcoach operator Donald Ferrone has initiated an effort to resurrect the Illinois Motorcoach Association, which flourished for all of about 18 months early in this decade.

Ferrone has sent a letter to operators throughout the state, asking them to pony up \$100 each “to start the ball rolling” toward reviving the association.

He also is contacting motorcoach manufacturers, plus the United Motorcoach and American Bus associations, about supporting the effort.

Ferrone plans to conduct an organizational meeting later this

month or early next month at a yet-to-be-announced central location.

“We have a president from Illinois, a Senate leader from Illinois (Richard Durbin, the assistant majority leader) and 90 percent of the White House senior staff are from Chicago, and we as an industry do not have an Illinois Motorcoach Association,” says Ferrone. “We need to do it now even if there are only 10 or 15 companies.”

As often happens in the motorcoach industry, the Illinois Motorcoach Association was born in the wake of an onerous state law that largely breezed through the legislature because — without a watchdog state association — operators were

neither aware the measure was being considered nor organized to fight it.

The triggering legislation in 2003 was a new law requiring motorcoach drivers in Illinois to have a state school bus license — in addition to their CDL — to transport children on school-related trips.

It took nearly six months of hard work and a pile of money for lobbyists to convince the Illinois lawmakers to throw out the controversial and costly licensing

requirement.

The UMA, working with Illinois operators, initially spearheaded the effort to overturn the law. The ABA joined the drive, along with additional operators and suppliers. A lobbying firm, Consulting4Biz, was hired to push the campaign. Most of the costs were borne by UMA and ABA.

A new law eliminating the school licensing requirement was passed and went into effect Jan. 1, 2004.

The drive to overturn the law

led to the formation of the Illinois Motorcoach Association. (See June 1 and Nov. 15, 2003 and Jan. 15, 2004 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

However, the association flamed out less than two years later from lack of interest and financial support.

Ferrone, whose company is American Sightseeing Chicago, was one of the key organizers of the association six years ago. He can be contacted at (312) 251-3100.

Eyre Bus field trip planning program gains recognition

GLENELG, Md. — Who says there are no good new ideas in the motorcoach industry?

Eyre Bus, Tour & Travel, a 62-year-old coach company based here, is stirring interest with a new service it is offering schools.

The service was named the “best idea” at the annual International Motor Coach Group Strategic Alliance Meeting a few weeks ago and the website was voted the most innovative new concept at the meeting, as well.

The service and its related website, called FieldTripMaker.com, is designed to make planning student field trips easier and faster for teachers, administrators, church groups, home school groups, and others.

Described as being as simple as 1-2-3, teachers can pick the date/time, destination and itinerary for their trips. Within one business day, an Eyre Tour staff member returns a comprehensive price quote to the teachers.

Eyre’s field trip service arranges all details, including transportation, meals, guided tours and attractions for trips of any duration.

“This is exactly the kind of service I’ve been looking for,” said Katie Noecker, a special education teacher in Howard County, Md.

Go to www.fieldtripmaker.com to learn more about the service.

Eyre Bus is a third-generation, family-owned charter-and-tour company that operates nearly 50 coaches and employs 150.

Byways switches to internet, expands circulation 125 fold

MOUNT JACKSON, Va. — *Byways* magazine, which for the past dozen years has been circulated to hundreds of motorcoach charter and tour operators by the National Motorcoach Network, has converted to an electronic publication distributed via the internet, and increased its circulation to 500,000 travelers in the U.S. and Canada.

Byways Editor and Publisher Steve Kirchner said the chance to create a group travel publication for the mass consumer market was “just too tempting to pass up, especially at a time when advertising interest in small publications like *Byways* is declining.”

Kirchner also is founder of National Motorcoach Network, one of North America’s largest motorcoach marketing networks.

With *Byways*’ transition to the internet for its October issue, Kirchner said the magazine is adding more than a half-million, pre-qualified frequent traveler consumers to its complimentary subscription list.

They are joining the 4,000 motorcoach charter and tour operators who have been receiving the 40-page, 5½ inch-by-8½ inch publication that has been around for 26 years. For more than half its lifetime, *Byways* was distributed by National Motorcoach Network members on their coaches.

Kirchner said *Byways* is retaining its base of motorcoach charter and tour companies, which operate in excess of 100,000 motorcoach charters and tours annually.

“Now, for the first time, con-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ▶

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THE DOCKET

When it comes to business climate, New Jersey is the pits

WASHINGTON — The next time you're crying in your beer (or milk, for that matter) about how tough it is to make a buck when greedy state governments seem to want to take every last dollar, keep in mind... things could be worse.

Your company could be operating out of California, or New York or, even worse, New Jersey.

When it comes to "business tax climate" there's no worse place

in the U.S. than New Jersey, according to The Tax Foundation, a nonpartisan educational organization that works to educate taxpayers about sound tax policy and the size of the tax burden borne by Americans.

In its annual report on business tax climates, the foundation reports that South Dakota is the most salubrious state, while New Jersey is the most toxic.

A good tax climate, says the foundation, is one that is simple, transparent, stable and pro-growth. Generally, the states that score the best with the foundation are the ones absent either a sales or an income tax, making at least for simplicity.

Here, in order, are the states with the best business tax climate, according to the foundation: South Dakota, Wyoming, Alaska, Nevada, Florida, Montana, New Hampshire,

Delaware and Washington.

The worst — in order, from the bottom, are: New Jersey, New York, California, Ohio, Iowa, Maryland, Rhode Island, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

These state have all of the major taxes and need to levy them at high rates, says the foundation, because of broad exemptions and government handouts.

By the way, the foundation

does not approve of state tax incentives to tempt businesses to relocate, likening them to steroids.

So, when you're in Las Vegas in February, attending UMA Motorcoach Expo 2010, and you run across old friends from New Jersey or New York or California, offer them a kindly shoulder to cry on.

Find the foundation's complete report at www.taxfoundation.org/research/show/22658.html.

Highway funding debate lingers

WASHINGTON — Congress has passed a stop-gap bill that temporarily funds government operations, including highway funding, for this month.

According to one published report, there are 12 spending bills lawmakers still haven't finished for the fiscal year that began Oct. 1.

The temporary spending measure funds government operations largely at their fiscal 2009 levels, including the Highway Trust Fund.

Congress is still squabbling about separate measures to extend the current highway reauthorization. The House voted to extend the program through Dec. 31. But

in the Senate, there are competing 12- and 18-month extension proposals.

Meanwhile, the push by House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman James Oberstar, for a six-year, \$450 billion highway and public transportation reauthorization bill was bolstered last month when several business groups said they'd agree to raising fuel taxes if the bill made changes that cut congestion and trimmed other costs.

"If the government will give us good policy, a refined federal role, a focus on fixing the problems that cost business a lot of money,

that drain our economy and steal dollars out of Americans' pockets, we'll support increasing the gas tax and diesel (fuel) taxes to pay for" it, said Tom Donohue, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

"A lot of people will say that's a tax increase; correction — that's a user fee."

American Trucking Associations President Bill Graves said the federation was willing to weigh paying higher fuel taxes because, "while all of those are technically taxes, of course we really do view them as investments in the nation's infrastructure."

Tough greenhouse gas rules may drive up price of diesel

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed new rules for so-called greenhouse gas emissions that many analysts believe will drive up the price of diesel fuel and gasoline.

The proposed rules would require new and newly modified oil refineries, power plants and factories to obtain permits to emit greenhouse gases.

They also would require new, large industrial facilities and existing ones undergoing alterations to

use the most up-to-date technology to curb carbon-dioxide emissions.

The announcement came the same week last month as a group of Senate Democrats vowed to bring their newly unveiled and far-reaching climate bill to a vote before a major international summit on climate change in December.

However, other Democratic lawmakers from states dependent on coal and manufacturing jobs said they couldn't support the draft proposal, which calls for cutting U.S. emissions somewhat faster than a similar proposal narrowly approved by the House in June.

Because the federal Clean Air Act limits the EPA's ability to weigh the costs of new regulations, many businesses worry the new EPA rules will be unduly burdensome.

The rules only apply to facilities that emit 25,000 tons of greenhouse gases or more a year, making oil refineries a primary target.

Some groups are questioning the legality of the proposed rules. The National Mining Association, for example, is skeptical the EPA would be allowed under current law to distinguish between small and large emitters when setting new controls on greenhouse gases.

Under the EPA proposal, new refineries, power plants and other large emitters could be denied regulatory permits if they didn't use the most up-to-date technology to curb carbon-dioxide emissions. Similar technology would have to be incorporated into any major upgrades.

Meanwhile, several key senators said the draft bill designed to fight climate change, lacked sufficient support to pass the chamber.

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Nominee for FMCSA administrator gets tough questioning

WASHINGTON — President Obama's nominee to head the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, Anne Ferro, ran into strong headwinds during her confirmation session before the Senate Commerce Committee last month.

Ferro, who is president of the Maryland Motor Truck Association, spent much of her time responding to questions and comments from Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., a vocal and long-time critic of the FMCSA and the trucking industry.

Lautenberg said he viewed the FMCSA as "an agency in dire need of reform, and given your ties, Ms. Ferro, to the trucking industry... I am concerned about your ability to take the bold action that we need to keep Americans safe."

The senator was sharply critical of Ferro's apparent unwillingness to commit to revising truck driver hours-of-service rules or requiring commercial vehicles to have electronic onboard recorders.

Ferro told the committee that her "passion is highway safety."

She pointed to her time at Maryland's Motor Vehicle Administration, where she implemented a graduated licensing program and the required use of ignition-interlock breathalyzer systems by convicted drunk drivers.

Lautenberg, who did most of the questioning during the 74-minute hearing, pressed Ferro to commit to changing the hours-of-service rule issued during the Bush administration and ordering all commercial vehicles to use electronic onboard recorders to monitor drivers' hours.

On the hours-of-service issue, Ferro said she would be "firmly committed to reviewing the data, the research, the analysis of the effect of the current rule and use that information to advance improvements."

Her answers to Lautenberg's call for an EOBR mandate did not appear to satisfy the senator.

Ferro said electronic onboard recorders "have been demonstrated to be very effective," and she committed to examining opportunities to expand their use "if there's data that suggests safety gains to be made by using them."

Lautenberg responded by asserting "what I hear you saying is you're not certain" electronic onboard recorders should be mandated, telling Ferro he'd like "a more affirmative answer" on the issue.

"I don't understand," he said of Ferro's position on the electronic onboard recorders issue, and then he listed a number of countries — including the European Union nations, Japan, Israel, Uruguay and Brazil — that require the technology.

"They all require it but you express some doubt or some concerns about whether or not we ought to

move ahead," Lautenberg said.

Ferro replied, "I don't want to suggest that it's a matter of being convinced or not. What I want to convey — I will be a fair and balanced regulator that will use both data-driven policymaking (and) sound scientific research to ad-

dress that issue."

Near the end of the hearing, Ferro got a powerful vote of support from Sen. Ben Cardin, the Democratic senator from Ferro's home state of Maryland.

Slipping into the hearing room, taking a chair next to Ferro and

facing fellow senators, Cardin said he had the highest regard for Ferro's competence, leadership, professionalism and skill as an even-handed administrator.

He recounted some of her experience as the head of the motor vehicle division in Maryland, pointing

out accomplishments and safety innovations she instituted in that position. He said she took on tough and sometimes unpopular challenges but always did the right thing.

Cardin said he recommended her confirmation in the "strongest possible terms."

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Transportation fatalities dip

WASHINGTON — Total fatalities in transportation accidents fell for the third straight year last year, but bus and motorcoach fatalities rose.

The National Transportation Safety Board reported that transportation-related deaths decreased nearly 10 percent in 2008 compared to 2007.

The agency recorded 39,397 deaths on highways, rail lines, watercraft, aircraft and pipelines, a drop of nearly 4,000 from the prior year.

Highway deaths, which make up the vast majority of transportation-related deaths in the U.S., declined from 41,259 in 2007 to 37,261 last year, a decrease likely attributable, at least in part, to a

decline in driving caused by high gasoline prices.

One troubling aspect of the report was a continued rise in motorcycle deaths, which have been increasing since 1998. The NTSB said there were 5,290 motorcycle deaths last year, a 2.2 percent increase from the prior year and 42 percent higher than the 2003 total.

Bus and motorcoach fatalities also rose, from 36 in 2007 to 67 last year.

There was a slight increase in aviation deaths, from 550 in 2007 to 572 last year. Nearly 87 percent of aviation fatalities occurred in general aviation accidents, meaning there were around 50 people killed in incidents involving commercial planes.

Tenn. targets highway deaths

NASHVILLE — The Tennessee Department of Transportation and several other agencies have announced a highway safety plan aimed at reducing traffic fatalities in Tennessee by 10 percent by 2012.

The Strategic Highway Safety Plan will include improved signs and highway markings, stakeholder partnerships, improved highway components and work zones, and

education and awareness programs.

The safety plan will focus on "the four Es": education, enforcement, engineering, and emergency response.

Bus drivers should be alert to the second "E"—enforcement.

A similar safety plan undertaken from 2006-2008 is attributed to helping produce a 14 percent reduction in highway fatalities.

Onboard recorder rule is submitted

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has sent its final electronic onboard recorder rule to the U.S. Department of Transportation for review.

The Bush administration was close to finalizing the rule but withdrew its proposal to let the Obama administration review it. The Bush proposal would have expanded the number of carriers required to use the devices which monitor hours-of-service performance by commercial drivers.

Once approved by the USDOT, the rule then goes to the White House Office of Management and Budget for final review.

The agency also was getting closer to implementing its new safety rating system, known as Comprehensive Safety Analysis 2010, or CSA 2010.

CSA 2010 aims to make "significant changes in the way we assess [a carriers'] individual safety fitness," the agency said.

The FMCSA will look at more data than ever before and intervene sooner so fleets can get into compliance without additional enforcement.

House support is sought for Travel Promotion Act

WASHINGTON — Travel groups, including the United Motorcoach Association, pushing for passage of the Travel Promotion Act of 2009 that would launch an ambitious campaign to promote the U.S. as a travel destination are urging those in the travel industry to write their U.S. representative to support the measure.

The travel groups say the proposed law would help create 40,000 jobs, drive \$4 billion in economic stimulus, and generate \$321 million in tax revenue.

The Travel Promotion Act passed the U.S. Senate last month on a strong bipartisan vote of 79 to 19.

The House passed the Travel Promotion Act in the 110th Congress but that session ended before the Senate could act on the bill.

Now the bill is back before the

House and its advocates are urging strong grassroots support to assure passage during the current House session.

"The Travel Promotion Act would establish a nationally coordinated program funded by the private sector and foreign travelers to attract millions of additional visitors to the United States by promoting America.

"Although there are 56 million more global travelers today than in 2000, the United States continues to welcome fewer overseas visitors than we did prior to September 11, 2001. A major reason for this decline is that foreign countries are capturing America's visitors through effective travel promotion programs and regular criticism of America's travel policies," says the coalition.

Texas gets its own DMV; beware of lines

AUSTIN, Texas — On Nov. 1, Texas is getting a separate Department of Motor Vehicles.

Several units are being spun off from the state Department of Transportation to form the new department: the Motor Vehicle Divi-

sion, the Vehicle Titles and Registration Division, the Automobile Burglary & Theft Prevention Authority, and the motor carrier credentialing, consumer protection, and enforcement programs of TX-DOT's Motor Carrier Division.

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Canadians chafe over Olympic buses

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reports that many Canadian motorcoach companies are upset because they didn't get contracts to provide transportation for the upcoming 2010 Winter Olympics.

In its report, the CBC quoted British Columbia coach operators and others who said not enough Canadian companies got contracts for Olympic transportation.

The CBC noted that the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee had hired Florida-based Gameday Management Group to coordinate transportation for the Winter games, prompting some Canadian operators to suggest an apparent pro-American bias by the organizing committee.

"We're hosting the games. It's our taxpayer money being spent on this, so the local carriers should be given a fair shake," Brendan McCullough of McCullough Coach Lines in Victoria, B.C., told the CBC.

"It seems to me that the Canadian carriers, and in particular the local carriers, are being passed over for carriers in the states," McCulloch added.

McCullough said Gameday Management is leasing hundreds of buses to shuttle everyone from athletes to journalists and spectators at the games, but the U.S. company isn't including enough Canadian vehicles.

"Our drivers are experienced in mountain driving and snow driving so to bring coaches from the south of Texas to operate in Whistler in winter conditions

doesn't make any sense to me," said McCullough, whose company has been in business for 30 years.

"I had a phone call from a Texas operator who is sending 20 coaches and he was wondering if he needs to put winter tires on," McCullough said.

A company can command \$1,800 a day for a bus and two drivers. And the potential of 30 days of Olympic work would come at a slow time of the year for the industry.

Last year, both provincial and national bus industry associations wrote to the federal government, expressing concerns that U.S. drivers would be fast-tracked for work permits.

"Did they search enough in Canada to ensure Canadians are doing the jobs?" asked Brian Crow, president of Motor Coach Canada.

Crow admits that some local operators weren't selected because they missed application deadlines and have aging bus fleets.

About 1,000 buses are now in place for the games, with two-thirds of them coming in from the U.S.

VANOC officials maintain the process was fair, and said deadlines were extended to ensure Canadian companies could compete. And they said it's possible still more buses will be needed.

"We want every Canadian company who wants to be part of the program to have a chance to do so," VANOC communications vice president Renée Smith-Valade told CBC News.

Motor Coach Canada lashes Olympics

TORONTO, Ontario — Motor Coach Canada has criticized the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee for its handling of motorcoach transportation arrangements for the Winter Olympics next year.

In an editorial in its electronic newsletter, Motor Coach Canada said it had been contacted by members who reported they had signed contracts with Gameday Management and the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee for Olympic coach transportation but that they have been notified that the number of coaches was being cut back and at least one contract cancelled outright.

Gameday Management of Jacksonville, Fla., was hired by the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee to arrange for motorcoaches at the Olympics.

"MCC has questioned VANOC and is awaiting an answer. MCC again reminded Gameday/VANOC that they cannot use foreign drivers if Canadians are available for work.

"This action by Gameday/VANOC with no advance communication to the industry, after committing to be more open, is troubling.

"In our opinion it was wrong for Gameday (procurer for VANOC) to sign contracts with

U.S. companies before they exhausted Canadian carriers in the first place, but that aside, cancelling signed contracts with Canadian carriers, leaving Canadian drivers available for work while still contracting American carriers is wrong and in our opinion contrary to the law.

"VANOC is an entity of government and as such should be the first to be seen to set a good example and uphold the laws of Canada, not be skirting them."

Gameday Management sent a response to the Motor Coach Canada editorial.

Gameday said it has endeavored to use as many Canadian car-

Wireless inspections dispute still splits members of CVSA

BALTIMORE — The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance has decided to wait until early next summer before deciding if it will support or oppose a wireless inspection plan being put together by federal regulators for commercial buses and trucks.

Board members voted to postpone any action on the program until after the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration completes a needs assessment it is conducting as part of the run-up to testing the "no-stop" inspection program.

The study, which will review the technical options currently available, how well they would work in the field and their cost, is expected to be completed in June.

The move by the CVSA to hold off on a decision came at the organization's annual conference last month where the board had hoped to settle the differences between two of its committees that have opposing views of the inspection program. (See July 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The Intelligent Transportation Systems Committee, which is led by law enforcement authorities, had urged the board to support the wireless inspection program, saying it would improve roadway safety, protect the highway infrastructure, maintain road fund revenue, and create a more level playing field for the motor carrier industry.

However, the Associate Advisory Committee, which is headed by truckers, opposes the wireless

program, contending it would create new problems for truckers and be costly for states because they would have to install back office electronic equipment.

"The board decided to wait until after the needs study is finished before making any decision on this issue," said Steve Keppler, interim executive director of CVSA.

The FMCSA, which is conducting the needs study in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration, is planning to begin testing wireless inspections early next year, with carriers in Kentucky, Tennessee and New York, before starting a broader pilot program in 2012.

Although the wireless inspection program would provide much of the same information obtained during physical roadside examinations, federal regulators say they would not replace them. Physical inspections still would be needed because the wireless technology could not detect some vehicle safety issues such as cracked brake lines, leaking hoses or worn tires.

In the testing phase that will begin next year, inspectors plan to use devices that will allow them to quickly identify vehicles equipped with special electronic decals as they are driven past highway inspection stations. The inspectors then would be able to immediately obtain a variety of critical information about the vehicles and drivers, including hours of service, safety violations, and tax-and-fee data.

riers as possible that responded before the June 1 deadline. Gameday also said that no contracts have

been cancelled or reduced that were submitted by the June 1 contract completion deadline.

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Industry may be safe from proposal to reclassify leases

A Financial Accounting Standards Board proposal to reclassify equipment leases as a form of debt or asset, rather than an expense, is causing considerable gnashing of teeth in many industries, including the trucking industry, but two motorcoach industry financing specialists say it should have limited impact on the private bus industry.

The FASB, which sets accounting standards for the U.S., along with the International Accounting Standards Board, is proposing the change.

The Equipment Leasing and Finance Association, a U.S. trade group, says the lease accounting model, as proposed by the two accounting standards bodies, is unduly complex and will impose a compliance burden on lessees that will not result in a significant improvement in the quality or reliability of financial information.

The association says the model seems to be overly concerned with preventing potential abuse, rather than accurately reporting the economic aspects of leasing transactions.

In the United States, leases account for more than 25 percent of all financing for industrial machinery, transportation equipment, computer software and other items.

One leasing company executive has gone so far as to predict lease financing will disappear if the change is implemented, and will result in an anticipated reduction in [equipment] acquisitions of more than \$100 billion.

Not so, at least not in the motorcoach industry, say Matt Hotchkiss, assistant vice president/territory manager for Wells Fargo Equipment Finance in Minneapolis, and Peter King, vice president of TCF Equipment Finance in Minnetonka, Minn.

"This proposed rule will have a limited affect in the coach industry," says Hotchkiss. "Here's why: The primary financing vehicle in our industry is traditional loans and TRAC leases. This probably comprises 98 percent of the financing in our industry. Neither of these are impacted by this proposed rule," says Hotchkiss.

However, he points out that the proposed rule would impact how a "true operating lease" would be recorded on a FASB set of books. A true lease is typically a shorter term lease, allowing an operator to turn a coach in throughout or at the end of the term. They are not common in the industry, though.

"For operators that do have FASB statements prepared, and do have true operating leases, the new rule could affect them in two

ways," says Hotchkiss.

"First, putting lease assets and obligations — that have previously been off balance sheet — on the balance sheet obviously will change the profile of their balance sheet, including their leverage. This could put them out of compli-

ance with bank covenants and make them less attractive to outside lenders and investors.

"Secondly, the rules and formulas for accounting for these leases are somewhat complex and will be difficult for preparers to calculate and readers to understand.

"Keep in mind my response pertains to the impact of this proposed change as it relates to motorcoach and bus financing," said Hotchkiss. "This could have a larger impact on companies that lease other types of assets.

"Also, this change is only in the

discussion stage at this point and may never come to fruition," he notes.

Adds King: I don't think it will have much of an impact. Most of the operators we deal with don't seem to be concerned about debt ratios and how their balance sheet might be impacted."

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ABC opens expansive California sales/service center

COSTA MESA, Calif. — ABC Companies officially opened its new California sales and service location last month with a ribbon cutting, luncheon, vendor expo, brief remarks from a handful of speakers, a dinner cruise and lots of networking.

Although the facility had been operating for several weeks, the grand opening was an opportunity for ABC “to give our great customers a private tour and show our appreciation for their continued support,” said ABC President and CEO Dane Cornell.

During his welcoming remarks, Cornell stressed that developing the sales/service center was an investment by ABC and Van Hool in local operators. He said ABC expects to make the Costa Mesa facility a one-stop shop and eventually have it grow as large as the company’s two main facilities in Faribault, Minn., and Winter Garden, Fla.

Cornell also discussed how ABC was diversifying the range of bus-and-coach models it distributes to not only set it apart from competitors but to be a single destination for whatever bus type a

customer needs.

ABC’s Costa Mesa facility features indoor bay areas for showcasing new and pre-owned vehicles and more than 80 vehicles are kept on the property for sale from its own inventory and on consignment.

Customer amenities include two furnished waiting areas with Wi-Fi internet connections, satellite television, lockers/restrooms/showers, kitchenette, billiards and ping pong tables, and children’s play area.

There also is a training facility.

In the service area, there are 22 maintenance bays staffed by technicians and specialists capable of delivering a broad range of fleet services including:

- Motorcoach and transit bus care, maintenance and mid-life refurbishment
- Repairs and interval maintenance
- Major collision repair and body services
- Digital graphics and wraps
- ADA retrofits and wheelchair-lift installation
- Campaign and retrofitting
- RV services and repairs



Lunch and a dinner cruise were highlights at the opening of ABC's new facility.

- Towing and specialty transportation arrangements

The facility houses more than \$2 million in parts inventory, featuring a comprehensive selection of OEM, aftermarket and private-label parts and components for most popular coaches and transit models.

The parts center also offers parts sourcing; online ordering or live ordering via telephone; 24-hour shipments on in-stock items, and parts special values and

coupons.

The center is just south of Interstate 405, off Harbor Boulevard. The new building was custom designed as a sales and service center, meaning the layout is customer friendly. For example, the parts counter is right inside the front door. The garage is off to the other side but connects to the parts facility. The lot is spacious. And, for those interested, the facility is conveniently located behind a Ferrari/Maserati dealership.

Among the vendors showcasing their services and products at the openings were Advantage Funding, Allison Transmission, Amaya Seating, Detroit Diesel, Goodyear Tire & Rubber, Key Equipment Finance, People’s Capital & Leasing Corp., Radio Engineering Industries, SKF USA, TCF Equipment Finance, Proheat, Wells Fargo Equipment Finance, G&K Services, American Trans Data, ARI-Hetra, Dura Lite, Teleflex and Precision Wheel Polishing.

Among the special guests were Costa Mesa’s Mayor, Allan Mansoor; Geert Criel, consul general of Belgium, and John McCray and family. The ABC facility was built on land owned by the McCrays.

Ray Gilligan of Transportation Charter Services in Orange, Calif., won an all-expense-paid trip for two to Belgium, including a tour of the Van Hool factory as part of the travel itinerary.

“This event was a great opportunity to reach out to our customers and the business community,” said Clint Guth, regional vice president and general manager of the ABC location.

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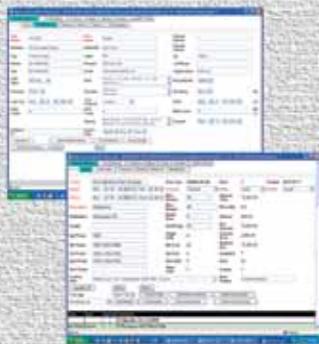




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Distracted driving

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

signal to the American public that distracted driving is dangerous and unacceptable. It shows that the federal government is leading by example," said LaHood.

The proposed rules for over-the-road bus and truck operators would effectively ban them from texting while operating a vehicle. It wasn't clear, however, how the restrictions would be enforced or what kind of penalties they might carry.

LaHood's department doesn't have the authority to ban drivers of passenger cars from using hand-held devices, but state laws are proliferating. At least 21 states and the District of Columbia ban all cell-phone use by young drivers, and 18 states have passed text-messaging bans, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association.

The Obama administration has declined to endorse legislation sponsored by a handful of Democratic senators that would strip states of 25 percent of their annual

federal highway funds if they don't pass text-messaging bans.

Congress used similar tactics in the past to compel states to enforce a minimum drinking age of 21 and laws combating drunk driving.

Motorcoach and trucking industry trade groups generally support the concept of banning commercial vehicle drivers from using cellphones or sending text messages.

Many private bus companies already have such policies.

Still, enforcing such bans is a genuine challenge, but technology may be one answer. Companies are offering a range of solutions, such as devices that won't send text messages if they are in motion, and on-board dispatch devices for truckers that go blank once the truck's engine starts.

However, the American Trucking Associations is urging the federal government not to outlaw what it calls "reasonable and prudent use" of in-cab devices that help manage fleet operations or

enable truck fleets to communicate with their drivers.

At the same time, one of the nation's most influential highway safety organizations is asking the federal government to extend its texting and cell phone ban to the laptops and CB radios used by truck drivers.

Plus, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety wants the USDOT to restrict the use of "all" electronic gadgets used for "talking, texting and other purposes" by bus drivers and truckers.

Detroit Diesel

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Series 60, and the dealers don't relish the prospect of losing a segment of their customer base while the trucking industry is mired in a deep downturn.

One senior Detroit Diesel sales executive said the company was offering its 2010 BlueTec engines to all of its long-time bus builder customers but didn't plan to officially announce its move until the coach manufacturers had decided whether they would jump back into bed with Detroit.

That scenario was confirmed by top executives at two leading suppliers of motorcoaches — Prevost Car and ABC Companies.

ABC and its major coach sup-

plier, Van Hool, have confirmed they will be offering both Detroit Diesel and Cummins engines in 2010.

A senior marketing executive with Prevost Car said his company had not yet made a decision whether to accept Detroit's offer.

MCI issued a statement saying it "is continuously evaluating a multitude of suppliers' products that may work in our coaches and offer a performance and commercial advantage to our customers. At this time, MCI is not at liberty to disclose future commercial relationships."

While on its face the decision for coach builders would seem fairly simple, it is not. Despite the popularity of Detroit Diesel in the motorcoach industry, coach manufacturers, with the notable exception of Setra, have been living life for near-

ly 18 months as if there would be no Detroit Diesel in their future.

They have engineered their 2010 coaches for the emissions-upgraded engines from Cummins, Volvo and International.

Plus, there may be other factors at work. For example, Prevost is owned by Volvo, and Volvo's No. 1 world competitor is Daimler. And some coach builders reportedly have made overtures to other engine manufacturers.

Still, the Detroit Diesel sales executive said the company had received a generally positive reaction from the coach builders.

Stay tuned.

Meanwhile, Detroit Diesel announced it had applied for 2010 certification from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the

California Air Resource Board for its DD13 and DD15 engines with BlueTec emissions control systems.

The applications sent to the USEPA and CARB include test results and documentation to prove the engines are in compliance with the tougher 2010 emissions standards. The 2010 rules are aimed at reducing NOx and particulate matter to near-zero levels at the tailpipe.

"We have millions of test miles

under our belt, including ... testing in extreme ambient conditions and diverse operating conditions," said Rakesh Aneja, 2010 program manager at Detroit Diesel. "We are satisfied with the readiness of our engine and after-treatment system for production launch."

Detroit Diesel is using selective catalytic reduction as the primary technology to meet the 2010 emissions regulations.

Byways magazine

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

sumers with an interest in North American travel destinations will receive the publication as well," he said.

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als in the motorcoach industry, the travel trade, and to consumers with an interest in exploring North American destinations.

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Realistic talk about the cost (and price) of safety

By Dave Millhouser

"The job pays \$10 an hour IF you show me you can run the bulldozer well enough," said the foreman.

The bulldozer operator fired up the beast and set out down the dirt road.

The 'dozer churned ahead, its blade flailing up and down, chopping the surface into a washboard.

When he got to the end, the driver yelled back: "That's what you get for \$10 an hour. Good operators get \$25, and THIS is what they can do."

He turned the machine around, lowered the blade and returned, leaving in his wake a surface so smooth it might as well have been paved.

One illusion our society cherishes is that no cost is too high when it comes to safety. Like the 'dozer driver pointed out, quality in anything costs.

We would eliminate highway deaths by enforcing a 10 mph speed limit. Air travel could be completely safe but airliners would seat 20 people and be the size of 747s.

This is "reductio ad absurdum"

(and you thought I didn't know Latin), taking an idea to its logical, but absurd, conclusion. Now we're in a similar spot as the bulldozer operator. We need to draw a line and where we draw it is in large part determined by economics.

How much safety can we afford? Technology and training have come a long way, and coaches are safer than they've ever been. Brakes, suspension, steering, tires and structure all are far superior to what we saw just 30 years ago. There are systems on the horizon (and on some current coaches) that will reduce or eliminate all sorts of bad things.

So, what's the problem?

The perception that we must spend whatever it takes to be 100 percent safe creates all sorts of dichotomies.

For years, European operators have had access to a variety of safety technology that American suppliers were reluctant to offer. The fear was that a system failure would result in a lawsuit in the litigious U.S. On the other hand, by not installing this technology they weren't providing the safest vehicle possible, leaving them open to,

you guessed it, a lawsuit.

If safety was government's ONLY concern, they'd eliminate those dangerous toll booths. (Don't hold your breath.)

On the rare occasion when a coach accident results in a fatality, almost always the death occurs when the individual is thrown out the window. Seatbelts help, but shrink those windows to 1940s dimensions and you eliminate the problem. (Good luck getting anyone to ride such a coach.)

Anne Ferro, President Obama's nominee to be administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, testifying at her confirmation hearing last month, was refreshingly frank. She acknowledged that safety is clearly related to economics, pointing out that it is difficult to improve safety in an industry "where segments of it have such low barriers to entry that competition for business is sometimes characterized as a race to the bottom."

In other words, too many unqualified and hand-to-mouth operators lower industry standards and compete on price alone. Until the public is willing to pay what a

coach trip is worth, safety will invariably suffer.

As usual, I have more questions than answers, but wanted to offer a couple of thoughts stolen from friends.

Safety is good business. Training drivers, buying and operating safety systems, and careful maintenance can save you on both insurance and public relations (accidents are not good advertising).

Sell safety. If you've spent money on stability control or event monitors, point it out to your customers. Many of you are parlaying recent purchases of seatbelt-equipped coaches into a marketing advantage. Don't stop there. Don't be shy about touting investment in your passengers' safety. All buses are safe, but yours are a bit closer to perfect.

Don't fight reasonable regulations coming down the pike. All the good guys are going to have to pay the price to comply and it may drive off some of the bad guys. If we support the reasonable rules, we have a better chance of being heard when something silly is proposed. Talk to your congressman and regulators.

Get your prices up (easy for me to say). Help your customers understand that their paying a bit more allows you to do a better job for them. Modern equipment is expensive and safe(r).

Many of you push safety on your websites. Good idea.

This isn't an easy topic because no one (particularly defense attorneys) wants to hear that economics forces us to draw a line on how much we can invest in safety.

Our job is to move the line in the right direction just as far as we can afford, and help the public understand the concept. I'd sure like to hear some good ideas on how we can sell this — because we need to.

DeNial is NOT a river in Egypt, and pretending that safety doesn't come at a price is silly.

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



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Miles for Babies

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

zoo and is raising money for the March of Dimes by having people sponsor children on the trip.

"We're very excited about the zoo trip and think it will be a great event," said Kayla Stratton.

Stratton's also donated a shopping trip to Chicago for the Dubuque March of Dimes' chapter auction.

Royal Coach Tours in San Jose, Calif., increased its Miles for Babies contribution with a special day-long trip that included lunch in San Francisco and walk across the Golden Gate Bridge.

"We had special T-shirts printed up for our walkers to show their support," said Kathleen C. Nunes, a sales associate and tour planner for Royal Coach.

The event drew publicity from several local newspapers and newsletters.

In Lockport, N.Y., Grand Tours/Ridge Road Express ran up about 3,500 miles for the Miles for Babies fund-raiser and hyped up the day's runs by putting disposable cameras on each of the buses so drivers could take pictures of passengers who were taking part in the event.

"The day was really fun for our drivers," said Christine Weeks, who handles marketing for the company. "We're in the process of having the pictures developed and many of the groups have asked for copies for themselves since they were part of this great day."

Among those who rode on a Grand Tours/Ridge Road Express coach were March of Dimes volunteer ambassador Whitney Boca-

bella and her five-year-old twins, Owen and Mia, who were born with serious and life-threatening complications, and the Buffalo State College women's soccer team.

"The coach and the team were incredibly excited to be part of this and they made a big fuss over the twins, who coincidentally, both play soccer now," said Weeks, adding that the soccer team coach gave them school souvenirs.

Bocabella said her youngsters, despite their physical challenges at birth, have developed into healthy children thanks to the hospital staff and the March of Dimes.

"Today, Mia and Owen are now happy and healthy five-year-olds with the world at their fingertips," she added.

Northfield Lines in Northfield, Minn., drummed up interest

in the run-up to the Miles for Babies event by hosting a Guess the Baby picture contest.

Lisa Peterson, quality assurance and marketing specialist for the company, said 13 office and maintenance employees brought in their baby pictures and had people try to guess who they matched. One employee got them all correct and won a gift card to a coffee house.

"We also blasted the Miles for Babies promo to our Facebook and Twitter audiences so many of them may have donated," she added.

Magic Carpet Ride in Vero Beach, Fla., boosted its fund-raising efforts by inviting local businesses to match the amount of money the charter company raised on Miles for Babies day and donated a bus trip for the community's March of Dimes chapter to

auction at its Signature Chefs event, according to marketing director Sharman P. Moore.

The company also received local newspaper publicity through a news release it issued that highlighted Vero Beach residents Heath and Jenny Schoenfeld, the parents of two-year-old twins who were born prematurely and are March of Dimes volunteer ambassadors.

"When Jacob and Casey were born we realized that March of Dimes research helped keep them alive during the first critical days of their lives," said the father of the twins. "We owe a lot to the March of Dimes."

In Gainesville, Fla., Candies Coachworks owner Sander Kaplan championed the campaign by tapping a commercial urging people to donate and put a donation form on the company website.

UCR fees blasted

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

major change in the way commercial vehicles are counted — is clearly unreasonable, the council asserts.

The council also notes that states receiving UCRA fees have not engaged "in any effective enforcement of the existing UCR fee structure. Nor has the UCR board audited the enforcement activities of the states.

"Raising the UCR fees by 122 percent allows the states to avoid their responsibility to ensure that all potential registrants pay the fees

and thereby increases the burden on those registrants who lawfully pay the fees," the council said.

Finally, the council accused UCRA-member states of possibly violating the UCR Act because they haven't demonstrated they are spending the UCR fee money for motor carrier safety programs, enforcement or administration of the plan as required by law.

In its comments, the California DMV said the data contained in the federal Motor Carrier Management Information System that's used to calculate the fees is "very inaccurate due to poor carrier reporting

and a confusing 'interstate carrier' definition, resulting in incorrect UCR fee calculations and low revenue collections."

It said a more accurate UCR fee calculation should be based on the International Registration Plan count of interstate carriers as each IRP carrier must receive a credential annually for each vehicle. This would ensure an accurate count of carriers and eliminate any confusion regarding "interstate" carriers.

"The fees would fluctuate marginally each year and payment compliance would improve as the fees would be affixed to the IRP creden-

tial process," said the DMV.

Like the Truck Council, the California DMV noted that the proposed fee hike would increase the burden on UCR-compliant carriers "while benefiting those carriers who continue to be noncompliant."

UCR fee collections have been low since the inception of the program in 2007. Collections have hovered at about 65 percent of the total amount needed to achieve the statutory level of \$108 million.

The proposed fee increase will "only punish those carriers who currently comply. The fees must apply to all with a reasonable

expectation of compliance," said the DMV.

Among factors cited in the DMV comments for the low level of compliance with the UCR program was the "weak" enforcement efforts by non-UCR participating states to collect fees from their home state carriers and no incentive for UCR participating states to collect UCR fees from intrastate carriers since the revenue the state is able to retain is capped and, if they collect a UCR fee, the state is prohibited from collecting any intrastate fees thereby losing revenue.

To fix the problems, the California DMV said the UCR fee should only be affixed to IRP vehicles because they actually cross interstate boundaries; all states should be required to participate in UCR; and eliminate the prohibition of collection of intrastate fees to also provide states incentive to collect the UCR fees.

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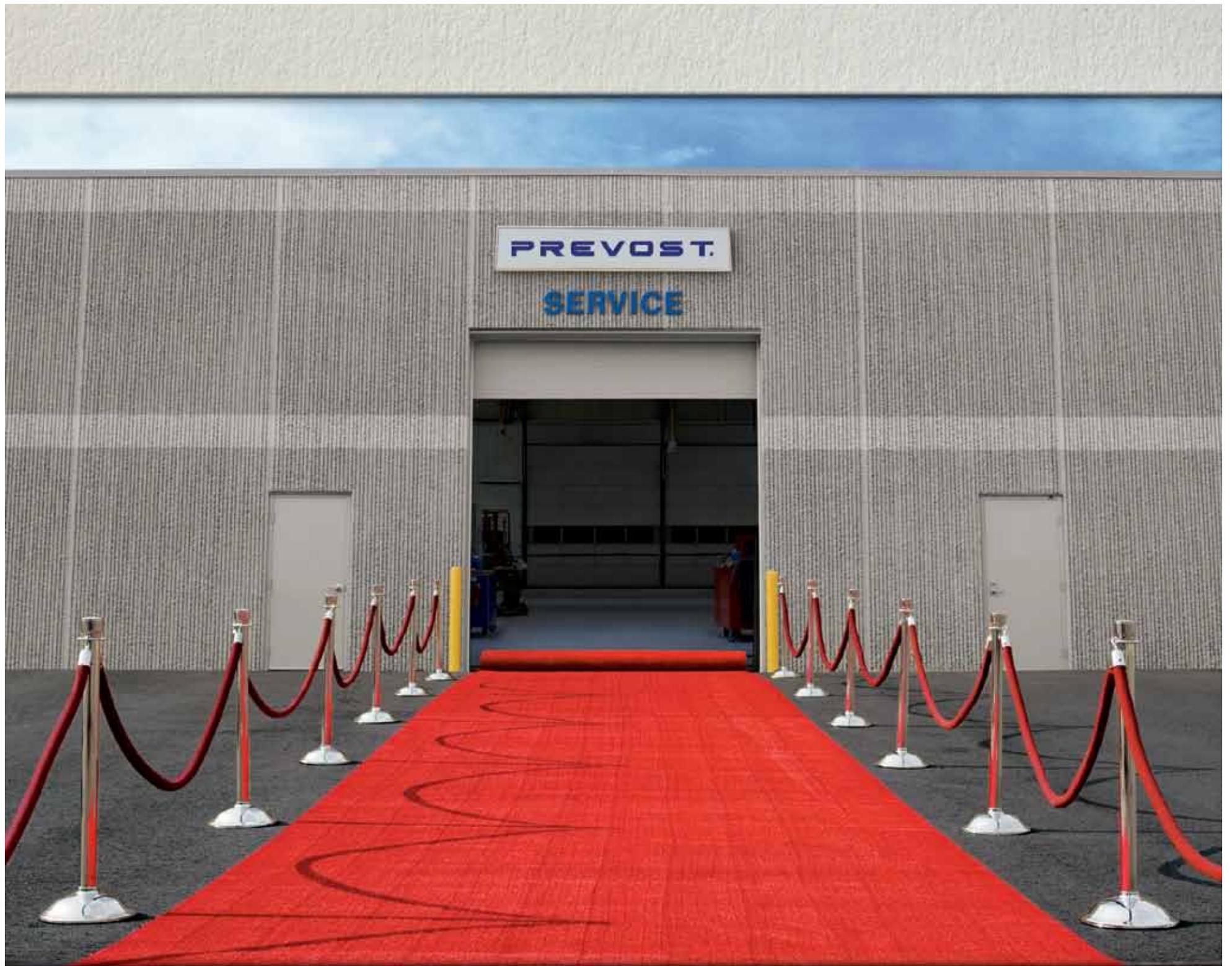
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