

Older drivers: They're just as safe, says new study

WASHINGTON — A prestigious new study has concluded that older commercial vehicle drivers are no greater safety risk than younger and middle-aged drivers, and the study authors found no reason why older commercial drivers should be treated differently when taking CDL tests.

The study was conducted

under the aegis of the National Research Council for the Transportation Research Board and was sponsored by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

It is entitled "Older Commercial Drivers: Do They Pose a Safety Risk?" and its publication comes amid reports the National Transportation Safety Board may

be planning to use one of the public meetings it conducts at the conclusion of a crash investigation as the forum for questioning the safety of older drivers.

Asked about the study findings, Lancer Insurance, a leading motorcoach industry insurer, said its experience supports the study conclusions.

"Our claims data agrees with (the study) information regarding older drivers," said Randy O'Neill, a senior executive at Lancer.

"The only significant difference we see for drivers over 65 is the time of day when most of their accidents occur; that is, early afternoon, peaking at 2 p.m.

"Fatigue experts call that time

of day the 'post-lunch dip,' — a dangerous time of day for fatigue-related accidents for all drivers, especially for those over 65," said O'Neill.

The Transportation Research Board study does not contain extensive new research. Instead, it is based on new interviews, as well

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Diesel fuel rises above \$3/gallon

The national average price of diesel fuel climbed just above \$3 a gallon early this month, the first time it has been at that level since May, the U.S. Department of Energy reported.

The average price of diesel is now roughly 42 cents a gallon higher than it was a year ago.

The motorcoach industry's main fuel had been below \$3.02 a gallon for roughly four months.

The price increase followed a jump in crude oil prices, which have climbed above \$80 a barrel in some markets.

Gasoline, meanwhile, rose to around \$2.75 a gallon, the USDOE reported. Gas is now 27 cents higher than a year ago.

Each week, USDOE surveys about 350 diesel filling stations to compile a national snapshot of average prices.



TWO NEW. IC Bus introduces what it says is the industry's first fully-integrated small shuttle bus (above), and Lincoln says it's abandoning the limousine industry's long-time favorite, the Town Car, in favor of the MTK (below). See stories on Page 15.



Despite bumpy economy BusRates' growth soars

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — More and more people are discovering the best way to find the right motorcoach company to handle their charter is conduct the search themselves.

And that doesn't mean spending hours combing through website after website on their computers, or thumbing through page after page of assorted telephone directories.

Instead, they are turning to BusRates.com, the self-help website that puts travel planners in touch with nearly 1,000 reliable carriers from across North America.

Founded just five years ago, the website now draws about 110,000 hits a month from people looking to book charters for their organizations, businesses, schools, churches and other groups. That's up a whopping

20,000 from just a year ago.

Of those visiting the website, more than 3,000 follow through each month and ask for a price quote from as many as 20 carriers.

Several thousand more use the information available on the site to contact individual carriers directly, either by telephone or email to discuss pricing and availability.

And all of the thousands who search for carriers through the website aren't just from the United States. Last fiscal year, more than 160,000 of them — that's more than 13,000 a month — were from foreign countries, including Canada, Japan and most of the European nations.

"We're getting contacts from all over now," says Eric Elliott, who manages the website from a small, two-person office housed

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W.Va. pushes property tax on operators working in state

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Charter operators may start avoiding West Virginia as the state widens its enforcement of a personal property tax assessed on carriers that travel through the state.

Some operators, which already have been notified they will have to pay the tax beginning next year

even though they own no property in the state or only drive through it occasionally, say they may have to take the state off their service lists.

"I may never travel in West Virginia again," said George Smith, owner of Lighthouse Travel and Tours, a one-coach operator in Whitesburg, Ky.

He said he and other small operators he knows in the area were stunned last month when they received tax forms and assessment notices from the West Virginia Department of Revenue, informing them they have been identified as being subject to the property tax.

"Nobody could understand

why we were getting tax forms for a property tax even though we don't own any property in the state," he said.

Tax officials recently began expanded enforcement of the state property tax on utilities, and so far they've identified 20 charter companies that should be paying the

tax but were unaware of it.

The tax brought in about \$125,000 in revenue from motorcoaches, limousines and railways last year, and is expected to produce another \$25,000 next year from the newly identified carriers, according to department spokeswoman

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Olympics payment dispute to be mediated next month

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — The dispute that has left dozens of motorcoach operators waiting for millions of dollars they say they are owed for transportation services they provided at the 2010 Winter Olympics in British Columbia last February may be headed for resolution.

The Vancouver Organizing Committee and Gameday Management say they will meet with a mediator in Vancouver Nov. 8–10 in an effort to settle the disagreement.

The nonbinding mediation session was part of the contract the two signed when VANOC hired Gameday to manage the

transportation for the games, and must be held before either side can take any legal action against the other.

However, Gameday President Tony Vit-rano and others expressed hope the mediation will lead to a satisfactory settlement and finally bring an end the extended dispute.

“I am very confident that once we sit down at the table face-to-face, and with a third party mediator, we will be able to reach an agreement and I will have good news to report to everybody afterwards,” he said.

Gameday and VANOC are quarrelling over charges that Gameday billed VANOC

for shuttle services provided by the 58 charter companies it brought in to work the games. (See Sept. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

VANOC maintains it has paid all of the approved claims to Gameday, and that the disputed bills include costs that far exceeded what had been approved by VANOC. Gameday denies the claims by VANOC and insists the bills cover legitimate expenses.

Gameday needs the money so it can settle with Trailways International, the organization it hired to recruit the operators that supplied ground passenger transportation

for the games. Most of the operators who took part in the games signed individual contracts with Trailways in a deal it made directly with Gameday.

Trailways attorney Ron Wall said mediation is a good sign that a settlement will be reached and the organization is hopeful it soon will get its money from Gameday so it can pass on final payments to operators.

Operators say they have been paid about 75 to 80 percent of their money.

“This is a good step in trying to resolve the situation and we are very hopeful that this will bring an end to it,” he said.

San Francisco considers a load of tour bus rules

SAN FRANCISCO — It increasingly appears this ‘City by the Bay’ has aspirations of becoming as tour bus unfriendly as New York City.

City fathers want to silence the amplified announcements coming from open-air sight-seeing buses that visit San Francisco’s most-popular tourist destinations.

In addition, the head of the Board of Supervisors would like San Francisco to impose tougher penalties for idling buses.

Currently, commercial vehicles parked for more than five minutes with their engines running face an initial fine of \$100. The penalty can jump to \$500 for multiple violations in a year.

But supervisors President David Chiu

wants to see even higher fines, and perhaps increase the transgression from an infraction to a misdemeanor to further discourage extended idling.

Chiu also has been working with the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency to develop a tour-bus management plan that focuses on parking and loading at Pier 39, Fisherman’s Wharf and Union Square.

And, if that weren’t enough, Chiu wants the agency to look at parking permits for tour buses to generate revenue that can be used to enforce the rules.

Specifically, Chiu has asked the city attorney to draft tour-bus regulations, including restricting loudspeakers used by tour guides to alert bus passengers to the sights they’re

passing, including the Crookedest Street in the World, Coit Tower, City Hall, the Golden Gate Bridge, and Castro Street. The legislation also would address the issue of tour buses that idle too long at curbsides and block traffic.

“While we all recognize the importance of tourism as a major economic engine for our city, too many San Franciscans have had their quality of life impacted by tour buses,” said Chiu, who represents several San Francisco neighborhoods that are popular with tourists, including Fisherman’s Wharf, Chinatown, North Beach and Union Square.

Chiu envisions loudspeaker/announcement limits similar to those in New York City. They would cover double decker and other

open-air coaches where the sounds coming from within are not confined.

Bus operators are concerned about the city’s plan for new rules and its proposed blanket ban on amplified tours. Some operators say the city should go after those operators that are causing the complaints and not adopt sweeping policies that impact all operators.

A top official with the San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau told a local publication he was hopeful the city would be open to designing rules that could address the concerns of exasperated residents along the tour bus routes while not hurting San Francisco’s important \$7.8 billion-a-year tourism industry.

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THE DOCKET

Booze testing: It does cut crashes

BALTIMORE — Fifteen years ago, mandatory alcohol testing programs for commercial vehicle drivers were implemented in the United States.

Surprisingly, since then no one has adequately evaluated the effectiveness of the testing requirement — until now.

Scientists at Columbia University in New York City conducted an epidemiological study of 24 years worth of crash data and found, perhaps not surprisingly, that the mandatory alcohol testing program may have contributed to a very significant reduction in al-

cohol involvement in fatal commercial vehicle crashes.

Using data going back 13 years before the testing obligation went into effect and 11 years worth of data after the requirement became effective, the scientists found that the occurrence of alcohol involvement in fatal crashes plummeted 80 percent among motor carrier drivers, a remarkable statistical drop.

The findings were published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*.

“The study sample consisted of 69,295 motor carrier drivers and

83,436 non-motor-carrier drivers who were involved in 66,138 fatal multi-vehicle crashes,” reported study author J.E. Brady and her Columbia colleagues.

“Overall, 2.7 percent of the motor carrier drivers and 19.4 percent of the non-motor-carrier drivers had positive blood alcohol concentrations.

During the study period, the prevalence of alcohol involvement in fatal crashes decreased by 80 percent among motor carrier drivers and 41 percent among non-motor-carrier drivers,” wrote Brady.

Operators: Check those battery terminals

TORONTO — An Ontario motorcoach operator has told the Ontario Motor Coach Association that one of its coaches was put out of service because of corrosion on battery terminals.

Another operator reported it too had been written up for the same transgression when its coach was put out of service.

In both cases, the Ministry of Transportation officers told the coach drivers the terminals had to be “cleaned and greased” before their buses could return to service.

The North American Standard

Out-of-Service Criteria, published by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance, lists loose or corroded battery connections as an out-of-service item.

The corroded terminals prohibition is included in the criteria as a bus fire prevention measure because corrosion can indicate escaping battery gasses.

However, as the OMCA points out, the standard provides no guidance to inspectors as to the extent of corrosion — if any — that is deemed acceptable.

“For example, if an inspector

finds just a light trace or dusting of corrosion, does this warrant taking a coach out of service?” asks the association.

The incidents have prompted the OMCA to ask the CVSA to review the criteria for a possible amendment, or to provide interpretive guidance to inspectors regarding battery corrosion.

Meanwhile, operators traveling in Ontario should check their batteries, get out their wire brushes and give the terminals a cleaning, and follow up with a light coat of grease.

Congress will consider electronic recorder bill

WASHINGTON — A pair of U.S. Senators have introduced a bill that would require electronic onboard recorders on all over-the-road trucks and buses.

The measure is being supported by some large trucking outfits.

Sen. Mark Pryor, D-Ark., introduced the Commercial Driver Compliance Improvement Act, along with co-sponsor Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.

Their bill would require electronic onboard recorders that provide real-time tracking of a vehicle's location and enable law enforcement to access the information during roadside inspections.

Last June, a Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration rule became effective that requires the devices for truck and bus companies with significant compliance problems.

Carriers with a 10 percent or greater occurrence of hours-of-service noncompliance in a compliance review now are mandated to have EOBRs for two years.

That rule already faces a court challenge from independent truckers.

More recently, the FMCSA has

said it was considering a more expansive mandate for EOBRs. The broader mandate would go beyond requiring the units for hazardous materials carriers and new trucking companies, which FMCSA already indicated it would propose.

Under the proposed Pryor/Alexander bill, recorders would have to be linked to the commercial vehicle's electronic control module. They would have to identify the driver, record driving time, provide real-time location of the vehicle, give enforcement personnel access to the information and be tamper-resistant.

In addition, the rule would have to define a standard user interface, set up a secure process for driver identification and set up a process for approving eligible systems.

Of critical importance to operators, the bill sets forth limitations on how the data in the recorders could be used.

The data would not be admissible in any civil, criminal or administrative proceeding for any purpose other than establishing compliance or noncompliance with the hours-of-service rule, unless the owner of the vehicle consents, the bill says.

Truckers supporting the bill and onboard recorders for all commercial vehicles say it will improve highway safety by applying technology to document driver compliance with hours-of-service rules.

“Electronic logs take the non-compliance issues off the table,” said one trucking industry official.

Additionally, some truckers contend electronic recorders are “the only salvation for the motor carrier community to collectively resist the power of the purse,” meaning the industry can better resist demands of shippers who don't care if truckers have to meet their requirements.

An unspoken factor is the fear among large trucking companies that they will be undercut by independent truckers who willingly violate hours' rules to achieve a competitive advantage.

Those opposing the recorders generally do so on the grounds of economics (the devices cost between \$300 and \$400) and efficacy (their viability and effectiveness needs more study).

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Highway Institute: Texting bans don't reduce crashes

ARLINGTON, Va. — Here's a surprise: Researchers at the Highway Loss Data Institute say laws prohibiting motorists from texting while driving are not bringing down crash rates.

In fact, the institute says crash rates tend to increase after a texting ban goes into effect.

One possible reason: Drivers are more careful to avoid being observed while texting by moving their cell phones down and out of sight when they text. By doing so they recognize what they're doing is illegal but it possibly exacerbates the risk of texting by taking drivers' eyes further from the road and for a longer time.

"Texting bans haven't reduced crashes at all. In a perverse twist, crashes increased in three of the four states we studied after bans were enacted," says Adrian Lund, president of both the Highway Loss Data Institute and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

"It's an indication that texting bans might even increase the risk of

texting for drivers who continue to do so despite the laws," adds Lund.

The institute's new findings, together with the organization's previous research on use of cell phones, "call into question the way policymakers are trying to address the problem of distracted-driving crashes," Lund said.

"(The USDOT) is focusing on a single manifestation of distracted driving (texting) and banning it. This ignores the endless sources of distraction and relies on banning one source or another to solve the whole problem."

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood called the study mis-

leading, and accused the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and the Highway Loss Data Institute of working to discredit his national anti-distracted driving efforts. He vowed to continue his campaign against distracted driving.

"This report is completely misleading," said LaHood. "Distracted

driving-related crashes killed nearly 5,500 people in 2009 and injured almost half a million more. Lives are at stake, and all the reputable research we have says that tough laws, good enforcement and increased public awareness will help put a stop to the deadly epidemic of distracted driving on our roads."

Help for crossing Canadian border

NIAGARA FALLS, Ontario — The Ontario Motor Coach Association, working with the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, has come up with a system designed to reduce border crossing times at the Rainbow and Queenston-Lewiston bridges.

Under the arrangement, the OMCA has obtained permission from the commission for bus drivers and dispatchers to call a special phone number to obtain up-to-the-minute information on the approximate number of buses waiting to clear at the Rainbow and Queenston-Lewiston bridges.

The bridge commission has asked that the numbers not be given to the general public because the phone lines likely would become blocked in very short order, the OMCA warned.

Only coach drivers and dispatchers should use the numbers for current bus traffic information. The numbers are: (905) 354-5641 Ext. 4161 (in Canada) or (716) 285-6322 Ext. 4161 (in the U.S.).

Operators at these numbers have access to "real-time," closed-circuit TV pictures of the traffic lanes and can determine the approximate number of buses in line.

The OMCA is interested in getting feedback from operators as to whether the initiative is effective. Contact numbers for the association can be found on its website, www.omca.com.

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NW operators seek support to help defeat Sen. Murray

SEATTLE — Motorcoach operators across the U.S. are being encouraged by fellow operators in Washington state to support the Republican candidate for U.S. Senate from Washington, Dino Rossi, who's locked in a tight — and important — race with incumbent Democratic Sen. Patty Murray.

Murray is the politician Washington operators love to hate because of her efforts to weaken or demolish the federal charter service rule. (See July 1 and June 15 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

"As the head of the Senate appropriations committee, Patty Murray is single handedly destroying the charter rule. She actively supports allowing transit agencies to perform charter services. With reauthorization (of federal highway and public transportation legislation) coming up we can't afford to allow her another term at the helm of the appropriations committee," said Seattle operator Gladys Gillis of Starline Luxury Coaches in an

email appeal to operators across the U.S.

"Dino Rossi can knock her out of office. We need your help today," Gillis added.

Many national political analysts consider the Murray-Rossi face-off to be a bell-weather race. If Rossi is able to unseat Murray, the analysts say, the Republicans stand a good chance of capturing control of the U.S. Senate. If Murray wins, the Democrats retain their Senate majority.

Three weeks before the election, Rasmussen Reports had Rossi leading Murray, 49-46, among likely voters. Other polls have the race even closer.

The Northwest Motorcoach Association is soliciting contributions on behalf of the Rossi campaign. The address of the association is: Northwest Motorcoach Association, 2101 Ludwig Road, Snohomish, WA 98290. Or, direct contributions can be sent to: Rossi for Senate, P.O. Box 50713, Bellevue, WA 98015.

UMA safety seminar is Dec. 1-2

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The 2010 version of the popular United Motorcoach Association Safety Management Seminar, featuring topics ranging from understanding the new federal safety measurement system, to what to expect during a USDOT/DOD compliance audit, will be Dec. 1st and 2nd in Ashburn, Va., outside of Washington, D.C.

Among the featured elements at this year's seminar are briefings by senior officials from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Department of Homeland Security Transportation Security Administration.

The seminar is designed for those individuals who manage and direct bus safety and security operations, as well as motorcoach company owners and managers.

The seminar has two tracks, one for experienced safety and operational executives, and the other for those who would benefit from having information about setting up or improving a coach company safety and risk management program.

The seminar will again take place at the training facility of the

National Transportation Safety Board in Ashburn, which is near Dulles International Airport, off the Leesburg Pike west of Arlington, Va.

"The seminar will present valuable how-to information for both new operators and safety professionals, as well as those who have been in business for years," said Victor Parra, president and CEO of UMA.

Other highlights of this year's program include:

- Identifying and managing transportation-related risk
- ADA requirements and considerations
- Wheelchairs, wheelchair lifts and securement devices
- Driver hiring and management strategies
- Complete injury investigations
- Encouraging driver fitness: Programs and success stories
- Behind-the-wheel training
- Understanding CSA 2010
- Making Bus & Motorcoach Academy a tool for your success

Those attending earn a continuing education certificate from the Bus & Motorcoach Academy.

The seminar involves a day and a half of classroom presenta-

tions, with some sessions running concurrently. The first day begins at noon, and the second at 8 a.m. Lunch is served both days; a continental breakfast is available on day two.

The Marriott Spring Hill Suites Ashburn Dulles North is the host hotel for attendees, and shuttle transportation is provided. The hotel is offering special rates for seminar attendees, but reservations must be made by Oct. 30. Contact the hotel at (888) 287-9400.

To register for the seminar, call UMA at (800) 424-8262, or go to www.uma.org and sign up online. The fee is \$245 for UMA members, \$390 for nonmembers. The seminar has sold out every year since it began in 2004.

This year, there will be a special day-and-a-half Business Management Seminar, presenting curriculum from the Bus & Motorcoach Academy, preceding the UMA Safety Management Seminar. The business seminar dates are Nov. 30 and Dec. 1. (See Oct. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

For information about the Business Management Seminar, see the flyer and article in the Oct. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*, or go to www.uma.org.



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A how-to for adopting distracted driving policies

By Anne B. Ellison
Dinsmore & Shohl

In this age of instant information gratification, it is easy to forget that the multitude of electronic devices we use for communication and entertainment (cell phones, MP3 players and other multimedia devices) can have a downside.

Electronic devices can command their user's attention in a way that can have disastrous consequences, especially when driving. This phenomenon, called "distracted driving," presents unique challenges for employers who depend upon employees to perform errands, make deliveries, travel throughout work territories,

or whose main function is to drive.

In the wake of the increasing number of motor vehicle accidents attributed to distracted driving, and because the leading cause of worker fatalities year after year is motor vehicle accidents, the U.S. Department of Transportation, in conjunction with the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, has ramped up efforts to encourage employers to enact safety policies prohibiting employees from using electronic devices while driving.

This initiative follows President Obama's Oct. 1, 2009, issuance of an executive order barring federal employees from texting while operating government-

owned vehicles. Also, the USDOT earlier this year announced guidance under the Motor Carrier Safety Act of 1984, prohibiting texting by drivers of commercial vehicles.

In addition, approximately 30 states have laws to prevent some drivers from using cell phones or text messaging while driving. However, some states have laws that target only a segment of drivers, such as teenagers or those with learner's permits.

Because a state may not have banned the use of these devices while driving, employers in these states should not be lulled into complacency. The potential for vicarious liability to employers for their employees' accidents while talking or texting should provide the incentive for employers to address this issue with their workforce now.

An employer can be liable for its own negligence in failing to adequately warn employees regarding the risks of use of electronic devices while driving or failing to take other measures to reduce risk.

In *Elender v. Neff Rental Inc.*, 965 So.2d 898 (La. Ct. App. 2007), the employer was found vicariously liable because, at the time of the accident, the employee was using a cell phone the employer had provided and also had never prohibited the employee from using the cell phone while driving.

Other companies have been forced to settle costly cases arising from similar circumstances.

For example, a Fortune 500 company settled a lawsuit for over \$5 million following an accident that occurred after one of its employees, who was using a company cell phone, rear-ended a driver, causing her to lose an arm.

In *Bustos v. Dyke Industries Inc.*, a lumber wholesaler settled for more than \$16 million after one of its salesman, who was talking on a cell phone, hit and severely disabled an elderly woman.

In Virginia, a major San Francisco-based law firm was sued for \$30 million by the parents of a 15-year old girl, a pedestrian, who was killed by a car driven by one of the firm's lawyers, who was using a cell phone. A jury ordered the attorney to pay the family \$2 million and the law firm settled for a confidential amount.

The safety and liability risks of not having a policy banning use of electronic devices while driving are becoming too great. Employers need to incorporate such a policy into their everyday operations.

When establishing a policy to prevent employee distracted driving, employers may wish to consider the following:

- Make clear that safety, for both the employee and the public, is of utmost importance, which is why the employee cannot be distracted while driving.

- Ensure that all prohibited uses of electronic devices are clearly defined.

- Ensure the definition of the electronic device is broad and inclusive to cover all wireless communication devices, not simply cell phones. Policies should also include television screens, computers and other entertainment devices.

- Ensure that everyone in the workplace (including management and contractors) is covered by the policy, and that both company-issued and personal devices are covered while an employee is on company time or business.

- Allow and explain when and where use of devices is permitted. For example, an employee may pull off the road into a safe area, such as a parking lot, to make a call.

- When an employee is on an extended trip, determine a schedule by which the employee can safely stop, retrieve messages, and provide responses to those inquiries in need of immediate follow-up.

- Create consequences for those employees who violate the policy, and consistently enforce them.

Dinsmore & Shohl is a Cincinnati, Ohio-based law firm. Ellison is with the firm's Charleston, W.Va. office.

Letter to the Editor

I would like to comment on the "Mega Movements Perplex Operators" article (Oct. 1 issue):

There is a very easy fix to getting paid for service: DO NOT DO THE WORK WITHOUT BEING PAID FIRST.

At least have the job guaranteed with a credit card that you do a pre-authorization on. Really, it works.

Since Hurricane Katrina, which we are still owed money for, and since they (partially) paid eight months after invoicing, we decided we would never do a trip for anyone without payment — unless they were an established customer or we had that credit card.

A convention service provider needed service this past July and when I told them we do not provide service without payment up front, guess what? Two weeks prior to the trip a check came for

the full amount.

For another service we provided for a festival in West Virginia, the organization said they "never pay in advance" and I said, "then we cannot provide service." Guess what? A check was overnighted.

Again, you, the bus company, are in control of your terms of service. If we follow the customers' terms, then we face the possibility of not getting paid.

When was the last time you bought an airplane ticket and gave the airline "your terms," and they honored them? How is your customer relationship different?

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Why is the motorcoach industry so afraid to say "NO?"

Jon Burke, CFO

*Kewl Tours & Charters
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School bus association responds to union allegations

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The National School Transportation Association, which represents school bus contractors across the U.S. and Canada, has issued a no-nonsense response to an allegation-filled statement issued last month by the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO.

In its statement, the Transportation Trades Department asserts that school transportation is being made unsafe by inconsistent rules and inadequate oversight.

In responding to the AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department, the National School Transportation Association said it wanted to clarify the record of the school bus industry in general and of private companies providing outsourced school transportation in particular.

While the NSTA said it agrees that the service its members provide — ensuring that students are able to access their education safely and efficiently every school day — is too often given short shrift, it strongly disagreed “with the (AFL-CIO) statement’s reckless characterizations of the industry and of private contractors.

“It is curious that (the Transportation Trades Department) den-

igrates contractors, since it is contractors who have worked to address many of the issues raised in the (AFL-CIO) statement,” said the school bus association.

Incorrect assertions

“For example, (the Transportation Trades Department) complains that school transportation and its employees are exempt from FMCSA and OSHA rules and oversight. In fact, contractors and their employees ARE covered by these agencies, and NSTA has long advocated for equal standards for all school transportation operations.

“As far back as 2002, NSTA promoted idle-reduction strategies adopted by our members to address the main cause of excessive diesel exhaust. We have worked with (USEPA) from the beginning of Clean School Bus USA to reduce emissions, and many of our members have retrofitted or replaced their older buses for the benefit of both passengers and drivers.

“One of the most attractive benefits of privatization is the replacement of a district’s old fleet with the contractor’s new buses, buses that are ergonomically better

for the driver, safer for the students, and healthier for everyone.

“The employees of private contractors ARE able to collect (unemployment insurance) benefits during school vacation periods. That’s another of the advantages that employees gain when school districts privatize.

Checking drivers

“The criminal background checks that contractor employees undergo are required by the state in many cases, and by the school district customer in others. The public demands that school bus drivers be thoroughly investigated before assuming responsibility for students, and our member companies take every precaution to ensure student safety.

“For more than a decade, NSTA has worked to improve the efficiency of criminal record checks at both the state and federal levels.

“In 2003, NSTA met with officials at the federal Office of Special Education Programs to bring to their attention the failure of school districts to include transportation providers in special needs transportation decisions, and to provide adequate training for drivers of stu-

dents with special needs.

“As a result, OSEP sent a memorandum to all states reminding them of their responsibilities and directing them to instruct local districts to include school bus drivers in special needs training. We agree that this is still too often neglected, which is why our members provide their own specialized training for their employees.

“School transportation is without doubt the most highly regulated surface transportation mode at both the state and federal levels. The school bus industry has been a partner, not an adversary, in developing those regulations.

As a result, average annual school bus fatalities (have) dropped by 320 percent since the 1980s, to a remarkable 20 fatalities a year, compared to 800 annual fatalities among an equal number of students who do not ride the bus to school.

“School bus contractors have been in the forefront of these safety efforts. Our members take their responsibilities seriously: to their passengers, to their school district customers, and to their employees.

“They know that their employees are their most valuable resource, and that the difference be-

tween a successful school bus company and an unsuccessful one is the company’s workforce.

Why contractors

“School districts turn to contractors for many reasons: to reduce costs, to improve service, to upgrade the fleet, to eliminate headaches. Independent research, as well as our own surveys, show that in more than 90 percent of conversions (from school district-provided transportation to that supplied by a contractor), districts save money through privatization; but what’s more important is the value they receive.

“That value is the product of the contractor’s commitment to high standards of safety, efficiency, and service — a commitment that reaches employees as well as students and the entire community.”

To read the complete AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department allegations, go to www.ttd.org, click on “Policy Library,” click on “Policy Statements,” click on “2010 Statements,” and scroll down to the statement entitled “Safe School Transportation at Odds with Inconsistent Rules and Inadequate Oversight.”

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FirstGroup, Greyhound see modest growth for half-year

ABERDEEN, Scotland — FirstGroup plc, parent company of Greyhound Lines, First Student, First Transit and BoltBus, has released preliminary numbers for the six months ended Sept. 30, showing modest growth but matching management expectations.

The numbers, said FirstGroup in a statement, confirm the company is “on track to deliver moderate earnings growth target for the full (fiscal) year.”

FirstGroup said Greyhound “continued to deliver growth, despite the challenging economic conditions and continued high unemployment in North America, with like-for-like passenger revenue increasing by 1.6 percent during the period.

“A relentless and rigorous management of the network has delivered revenue per mile ahead of (the) prior year and enables the business to achieve an improvement in operating margin performance,” FirstGroup noted.

The standout performer among FirstGroup’s North American operations during the half-year ended Sept. 30, was First Transit. “Our transit business continued to per-

form well with U.S. dollar revenues increased by 4.5 percent during the period. Following a period of new business wins, First Transit successfully commenced the start up of a number of new contracts during the first half... With good opportunities for further profitable expansion with minimal capital investment, we remain encouraged by the prospects for this business.”

First Student, however, was hurt by school budget cutbacks.

“Full-year revenues in our student business are expected to remain broadly in line with prior year. School boards continue to experience budgetary pressure as a result of lower tax revenues... In this lower-revenue growth environment we continue to prioritize cost reductions and efficiency improvements to protect operating margins,” FirstGroup said.

For its businesses in the United Kingdom, FirstGroup reported that its U.K. bus unit continued to perform steadily during the first half of the fiscal year, with like-for-like passenger revenues increasing by 1.3 percent.

FirstGroup also said cash generation remained strong.

Older drivers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

as a thorough analysis of the best knowledge, information and research currently available on the topic of older drivers, and it synthesizes that information into a comprehensive compendium.

The authors located and assembled documented information going back 36 years, identified all ongoing research, and presented their results and conclusions in the study.

“The synthesis findings suggest that older persons who are currently commercial drivers pose no greater safety risk than their younger and middle-aged counterparts,” the study states.

At the same time, the study authors acknowledge that aging has the potential to reduce driver skills, but they suggest that continued reliance on medical testing and evaluations should heavily influence decisions regarding older driver fitness.

“Some decline, which varies greatly from individual to individual, in the visual, cognitive and psychomotor abilities needed to drive safely is inevitable with normal aging, with the diseases that are more common among older people, and with the medications used to treat them,” the study observes.

“Therefore, as the number of older persons, including professional truck (and bus) drivers grows larger, it is important that crash data continue to be monitored for any trends that differ from these findings.

“The need for minimum qualifications for medical fitness to drive — that are evidence-based and are fairly and consistently applied — is widely recognized.

“However, the literature review and interviews conducted for this study show no reason that older commercial drivers should be treated differently by CDL testing and licensing jurisdictions.”

One interesting finding revealed by the study is that the preponderance of research that has been done on older drivers has focused on significantly older individuals than one typically finds in the commercial driver population.

Even for the general driving population, it is uncommon to find studies showing a significant increase in crash risk for persons age 70 or younger, the study says.

“The literature review also suggests that even with the physical and cognitive changes in older persons, older drivers can often compensate for those changes by making better decisions and demonstrating better judgment while driving,” the study found.

One 1995 analysis of active holders of commercial driver licenses of all ages showed that drivers over age 60 made fewer errors and had fewer near misses than their younger counterparts.

“Although this study was conducted in a driving simulator, feedback from industry indicates that these data support the general view of the older commercial driver,” says the new study.

The 1995 research also strongly suggests that healthy, active older commercial drivers need not provide an exaggerated risk to traffic safety.

Although counterintuitive, both the research and the (annual federal) large truck crash data support this stance, says the study.

Most important is the evidence showing that loss of function for any driver underlies a higher risk of crash causation, regardless of age.

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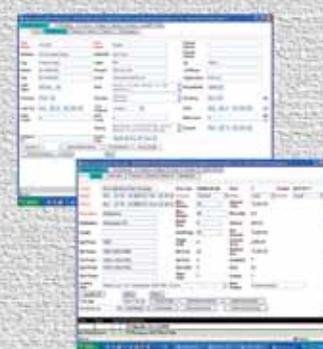
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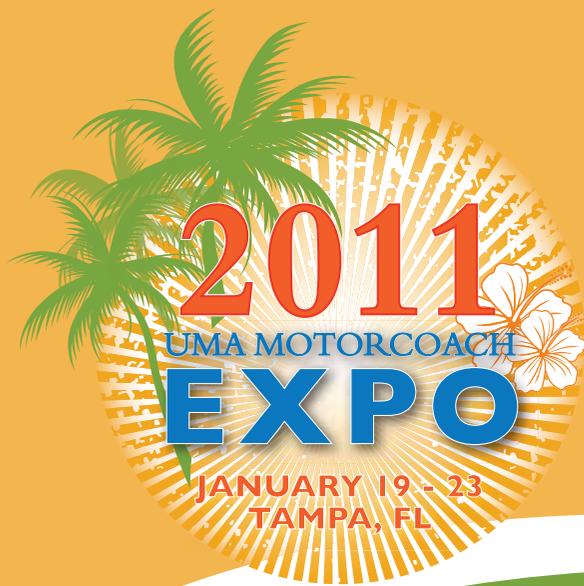
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Welcome Reception

- The Welcome Reception is the official start to Expo! It's the perfect place to meet up with old friends and colleagues, and for new attendees to come and feel welcomed. This casual gathering is a great kick off for getting down to business.

Motorcoaches Drive Tourism: A Tourism Cares Fundraiser – New for Expo 2011!

- UMA has partnered with Tourism Cares, the official tourism industry philanthropy group, to host this inaugural event at the Hard Rock Hotel on Wednesday, January 19th immediately following the Welcome Reception. Tourism Rocks gives Expo attendees the chance to extend their evening of fun and networking, while supporting a good cause. The cost is \$40 per person in advance (\$50 on-site) with all proceeds going to Tourism Cares. Everyone who registers to attend will receive a \$10 meal voucher and \$20 in free play for use at the Hard Rock Hotel. Transportation provided.

Leadership Luncheon – New for Expo 2011!

- The Leadership Luncheon (formerly the Operator Lunch) gives attendees and exhibitors the opportunity to have lunch together to discuss the day's events, and also serves as the platform to honor two companies who have emerged as industry leaders.

8th Annual Vision Awards Banquet

- This annual black-tie optional event is where the entire motorcoach community comes together to toast the industry's finest. Awards are given to companies who are industry visionaries in Industry Safety, Green Initiatives, and Overall Company Vision. The evening concludes with the ever-popular cigars and cordials social.

7th Annual Ray Dupuis Memorial Golf Tournament

- Each year Expo finishes with the annual Ray Dupuis Memorial Golf Tournament, named in honor of an industry professional who left a memorable legacy. The Golf Tournament lets attendees spend a relaxing time on the green with colleagues while finishing up the business of the week.



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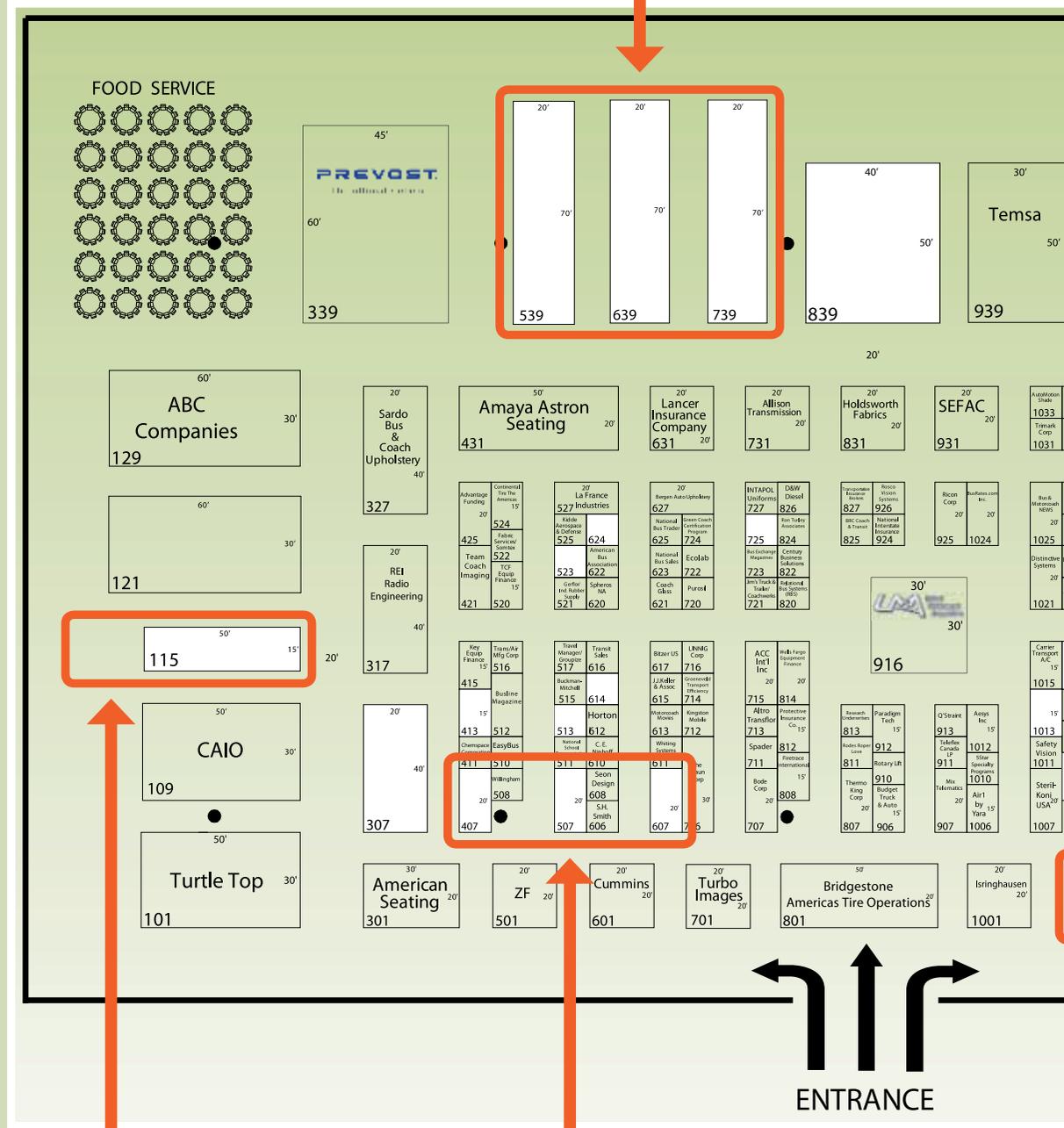
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The value I receive in walking the UMA Expo floor is the **variety of exhibitors on the show floor**. Whether I'm looking for flooring needs, lights, insurance, there's so many vendors to see.

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Excursion Trailways, Fort Wayne, IN
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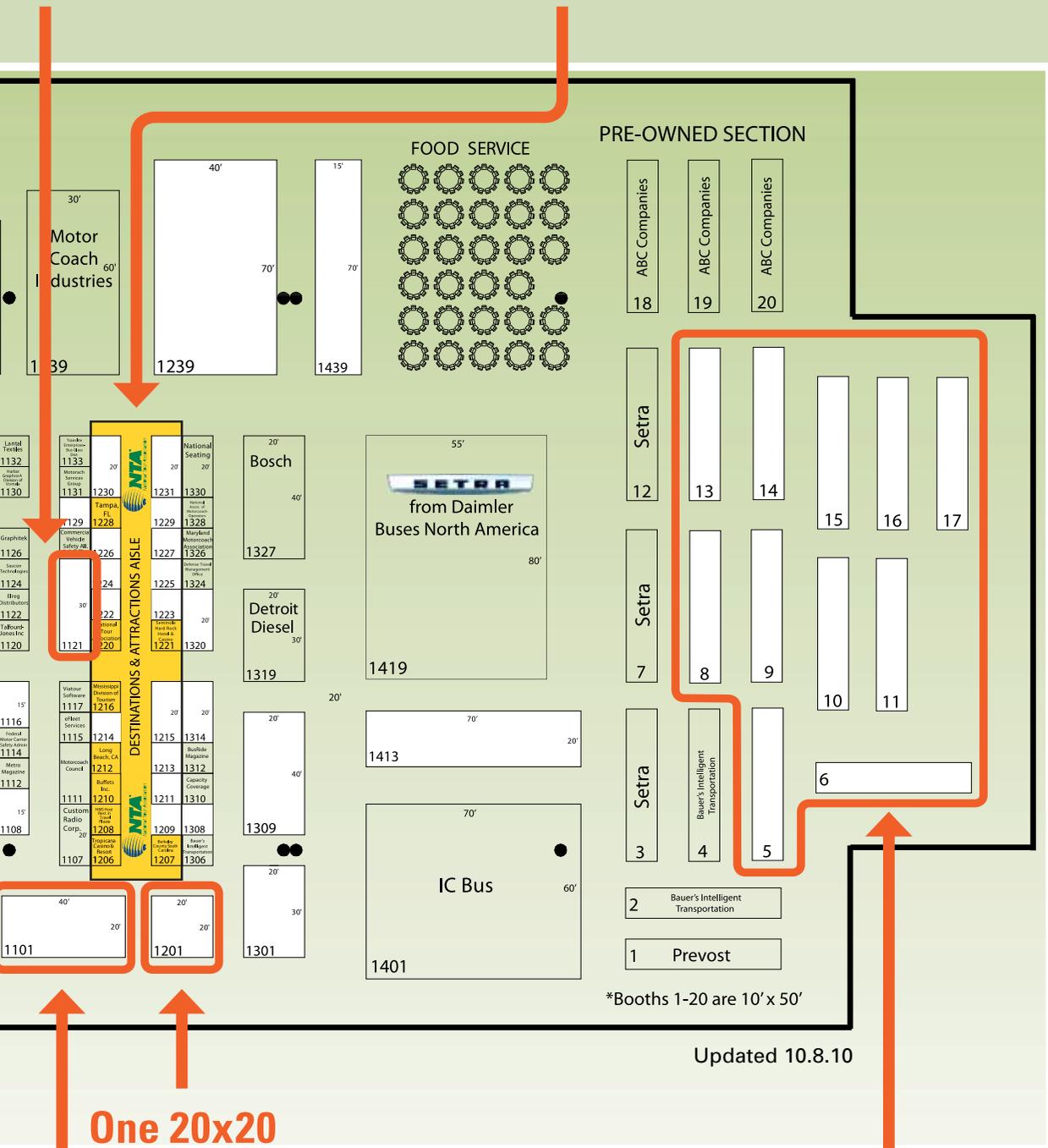
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Randy O'Neill
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Roger Handren
Michelin – Greenville, SC
EXHIBITOR



If you are in the motor coach industry, **UMA is a can't miss event because everybody in the industry is here.**

Daniel Koehler
National Interstate Insurance Company – Richfield, OH
EXHIBITOR

More information is available at www.motorcoachexpo.com

IC Bus introduces first fully-integrated small shuttle

CHICAGO — IC Bus has unveiled what it says is the industry's first fully-integrated small shuttle bus.

By fully integrated (not integral), IC means its new AC Series shuttle is an IC product from the ground up — it has an IC chassis, a MaxxForte 7 diesel engine from parent company Navistar, and it's manufactured in an IC plant in Texas.

What that means for operators, says IC, is "you're covered from bumper to bumper" by one manufacturer.

Virtually all cutaway buses sold in North America are assembled by body builders on chassis built by specialty chassis manufacturers, or by truck builders that sell their chassis to body builders.

IC believes it will achieve a competitive advantage by offering a cutaway bus built on its chassis with its engine, assembled in its

Ford shoots down Lincoln Town Car

CHICAGO — During the next two to three years, limousine operators will see one of the most dramatic product transitions ever, according to one limo industry publication.

The industry's bread-and-butter vehicle for years, the Lincoln Town Car, is disappearing and is being replaced by a cross-over-utility-styled vehicle, the Lincoln MKT.

Additionally, Lincoln plans to produce a livery MKT model with a beefed-up chassis that can be stretched up to 120 inches by Ford QVM manufacturers.

Executives from Ford Motor Co. and its Lincoln division made the announcement late last month at the LCT Leadership Summit here. While the news was anticipated, it "now sets in motion one of the most sweeping product transitions the industry has ever experienced," wrote LCT Magazine Editor Martin Romjue.

"Most notable about the MKT decision is Lincoln's departure from the traditional sedan body style that has defined successive versions of the Lincoln Town Car Executive L for decades," reported Romjue.

"But Ford managers made the bottom line very clear: The new 'taller' and 'longer' MKT...will offer more legroom, headroom, cargo space and overall durability and flexibility — most notably a version with an all-wheel-drive power train that makes the vehicle more palatable to run in snowier northern climates," Romjue noted.

plant, and serviced by its dealers.

"It's fully backed by an extensive, experienced and unparalleled dealer network," said a company spokesman.

IC also says the lifecycle of the AC model is "twice as long as similar small shuttles."

The AC Series has maximum

seating for 31 in its 96-inch-wide body. Three wheel bases are available — 158, 169 and 195 inches. The GVWR ranges from 16,500 to 19,500 pounds.

It features Freedman seating (forward facing or perimeter); an Allison 1000 Series transmission; ABS; all-steel body; parabolic sus-

pension; lighted, stainless-steel stepwell, keyless entry; LED lighting, and polished aluminum wheels.

Options include IC Air (roof or skirt mounted); air-ride driver seat; air-ride suspension; tilt steering wheel; cruise control; rear luggage compartment, and wheelchair lift.

"It's a game changer for how

you purchase, maintain and operate your fleet," said the IC spokesman.

The AC Series bus, along with IC's HC Series buses, are expected to be on display at UMA Motorcoach Expo in Tampa, Fla., Jan. 19-23.

For more information, go to www.icbus.com.

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Finding financing in a world filled with uncertainty

By Brad MacLiver
Washburn & Associates

Uncertainty has become an accurate description for the economy, future legislation, healthcare costs and the like.

If your motorcoach business is seeking financing, you know how this uncertainty is affecting the perceptions of lenders.

Although the loan process involves debt ratios and other financial calculations, with the current economic uncertainty there is a greater "perceived risk" and this additional risk must be addressed by the operator who is seeking financing.

Several years ago it was acceptable to submit a loan request based on the past performance of the company, with the assumption that everything in the upcoming months and years was fairly predictable. Those times have changed.

Addressing uncertainty

When submitting a loan request for your motorcoach business today, you will need to provide well-thought-out business, marketing and financial strategies.

How will healthcare costs affect your business over the next five years?

What will the financial position of the company look like after paying higher taxes?

Is there pending legislation that will affect the motorcoach industry?

What are the expectations for new fuel taxes?

How will the economy, taxes, healthcare costs, and the like affect your customers?

You can be sure that if you avoid addressing difficult questions, the lender won't.

No specifics, no loan

Unfortunately, many loan requests are submitted with simple uncorroborated statements, such as "the company's expected sales growth," without any explanation of how that growth will be obtained.

These ill-defined statements appear to be nothing more than blue-sky predictions that make the company's financial projections work for the borrower, but they don't do anything other than motivate the lender to write a rejection letter.

Half-baked plans, blue-sky pre-

dictions and sales hype will not get your motorcoach business funded.

If your local bank has said "no" to your efforts, do not stop your quest for capital.

It is estimated that 80 percent of business financing is not completed with banks. There are a large number of private finance companies, which can have more flexible terms than banks due to the fact they do not have the same federal regulatory constraints the banks are faced with.

To find the right finance company for your motorcoach business it may save time and expenses to enlist the services of a financial consultant who has associations and relationships with a large number of funding sources.

Going outside the box

Alternative financing is available when your business requires financing other than a traditional loan. Some of the options include: equipment sale leaseback, accounts receivable finance, or merchant account advances. Also, if you are holding a real estate note, business note, or large equipment notes, you may be able to sell all or

a portion of that note to obtain the capital your business requires.

Acquisition financing for buyers of a motorcoach business can be considered for either a single location, or multiple locations. Acquiring several businesses in the same industry is referred to as an industry roll-up. A principal reason for an industry roll-up is to achieve economies of scale in purchasing, marketing, information systems, logistics, distribution, and top management.

Consolidated businesses can have less risk from recessions, new government regulations, or other aspects of the industry that may reduce profits when the companies remain as separate entities.

And, as you know, lenders like financing situations where there is less risk.

Tips, tips, tips

1. Lenders may misperceive risk associated with your motorcoach business, or the industry in general because they lack specific information. Without accurate and detailed information, lenders can make an incorrect judgment.

Provide lenders an appreciable

amount of clear, concise and detailed information to assist them in making the decision you desire.

2. Even when there is reliable statistics to address the common elements of risk, be prepared to address the lender's perceptions of the economy, the industry, legislation, and so on. Reducing the uncertainty reduces the risk and increases the potential for financing.

3. Garbage in, garbage out. Don't take short cuts in presenting information that will persuade a lender to fund your motorcoach business.

4. Any statement of fact, or relevance, needs to be accompanied by supporting documentation.

5. It is understood that everyone dislikes compiling a mountain of paperwork, but if the additional documentation is what navigates the lender to a "yes" decision then that is what you will need to do during these times of uncertainty.

MacLiver is vice president of acquisitions for Washburn & Associates of Dutton, Va., and Colorado Springs. He also operates www.BusinessFundingSecrets.com, a website and free monthly newsletter providing tips and techniques regarding business financing.

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Doing reasonably well? Now may be time to buy coaches

By Dave Millhouser

Our employer was kind enough to lend Oakie and me a big motorhome, and we had taken it from Orlando to the Florida Keys to meet friends for a couple of days of diving.

Before leaving, we asked the shop guy how to start and stop the generator, and were told that the procedure was beyond our meager skills; we should just leave it running.

On the return trip, after five consecutive days of generator operation, and traveling 700 miles, I asked Oakie (several times) if we should stop and get fuel.

Since that would involve spending our OWN money, each time he said "no."

We pulled into our facility on Sunday morning, drove through the gate and the engine died. You guessed it, it was out of fuel. Timing is everything.

The motorcoach industry is going through interesting times, unique in our history. The economy remains something of a mess, the regulatory environment is growing increasingly complex,

and costs keep rising.

Many operators are in pain, and troubled companies are being forced from the business, while there are fewer new entrants.

For contrarians, opportunity may be knocking.

A bright spot seems to be the arena of coach financing. Interest rates are at historic lows, and money is starting to flow because lenders have figured out they can't make money without making loans.

One sophisticated operator told me he was buying new coaches because his business was doing well, and interest rates were low.

Please bear in mind there are two parts to that last sentence: He said he was doing well BEFORE he considered buying equipment. Timing.

Adding debt (regardless of the interest rate) can only hurt if your business isn't ready for it.

A veteran lender told me that every business should have at least two people smarter than the owner — a lawyer and an accountant. A smart accountant can help you decide if you're ready to either add, or replace, coaches.

If your company is holding its

head above water, now may be the time to rejuvenate your fleet. New engines and other mandated technology are about to significantly increase coach prices, and perhaps complexity. Any gains you make in your market are likely to grow exponentially as the economy recovers.

Some things to ponder if you're considering buying buses — all stolen from finance people smarter than me. (I'm pretty sure it's not plagiarism if I don't remember who I stole them from.)

Finance companies want to make loans but they haven't forgotten the pain of the past few years. Your personal credit will have to be in good shape too; so you may want to postpone having another child. ;-)

The quality of both the loan application content and the presentation is key to being approved. Don't be tempted to apply for a loan using a printout from QuickBooks.

Many lenders feel the way you present the data says as much as the numbers themselves. Your accountant can package your company in the most flattering (legal) way.

Lenders will let you know if

you're not ready. Prepare before applying, rather than asking them to insult you. Your pay history needs to be flawless, otherwise you have a "Kick Me" sign taped to your back.

There seems to be a polarization these days: Strong credits get favorable deals, while weaker operators have difficulty borrowing at any rate.

You're going to be asked for more information than in the past (Big Brother is watching the lenders), and down payments are running higher. On the other hand, interest rates on some loans are lower than a snake's tummy.

The lowest rates seem to be on the shortest loans. Financing a coach for five years gets you a better rate than seven or eight.

Your accountant (they keep popping up here) can help you weigh the balance between high payments/rapid equity growth versus lower payments/increased cash flow.

My druthers would be the five-year plan because if cash flow is too much of a consideration — unless there is a huge long-term opportunity — it might not be time yet.

None of this is useful to you if

things aren't going well. If that's the case, rather than spin your wheels, spend time working with your accountant (again?), to

shore things up, and present them in the most favorable way. It's not likely interest rates are going to spike anytime soon.

Despite our perfect timing, Oakie and I were left with a dilemma. The dead coach was stalled in front of our company's main entrance, and the next day our boss would figure out we'd brought that baby back dry.

Oakie's solution was brilliant. He went into the yard and fired up a used bus, snuggled up to the rear bumper of the motorhome, and shoved it into a parking spot. No way our boss would figure it out (unless he reads this).

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



Dave Millhouser

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Nominees wanted for safety award

TAMPA, Fla. — At UMA Motorcoach Expo here in January, the United Motorcoach Association will honor an individual who has demonstrated effective leadership in the field of motorcoach safety.

The award, sponsored by Daecher Consulting Group of Camp Hill, Pa., is given annually at Expo's Vision Awards banquet. UMA Expo 2011 will be Jan. 19-23.

"A demonstrated commitment to safety is the leading criteria for this honor," said Matt Daecher of Daecher Consulting.

Other criteria includes involvement in the industry for at least five years; active in industry initiatives and organizations, and demonstrated achievements for his or her company and/or the industry.

Nominations for the 2011 award are being sought. The deadline for submitting nominations is Dec. 31. A panel of industry professionals will review the nominations and select the winner.

To obtain a nomination form, go to www.safetyteam.com/safetyleader or send an email to vsknepp@safetyteam.com.

BusRates

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in the headquarters of its owner, the United Motorcoach Association.

UMA purchased controlling interest in the business in January 2009, from founder Mark Greer, to bolster the services it offers its members and to help them grow their charter business.

What's behind the growing interest in the charter search website?

"A lot more people are buying off the internet now and that's certainly part of it," explains Elliott.

But, he notes that one of the keys has been the game plan the company developed to get its name and services in front of potential computer-savvy customers.

The goal of the plan was to make certain that when someone searched for operators that provide charters, BusRates.com would always be among the first few businesses to pop up.

"We have it now where of the 100-most-common search terms for bus charters, BusRates.com comes up in the top three on all of them," Elliott said. "We hit all of the search words on the head and that's why we are ranked so high."

Elliott said the company goes a step further to assure that its name also gets a high profile spot from the few search words or phrases where BusRates.com is not among the top responses. The company buys small ads for those words so that its name and web-

site link still show up on the first page.

To maintain the top spots, BusRates.com continually monitors the search words and terms to make sure that its name stays as far out front as possible.

While getting potential customers to visit a website may be the first order, getting them to work the site and eventually use it to make a buy is paramount to success.

And, according to Elliott, that's where BusRates.com excels.

Unlike a bus broker that handles the actual booking for its customers, BusRates.com is something of a phantom middleman that doesn't actually get between the customer and the motorcoach company. Instead, it hooks them up and then gets out of the way.

Travel planners simply go to the website, check the type of vehicle they are looking for — motorcoach, minibus, trolley, limo or whatever — and add the city and state where the charter would begin. Instantly, companies that meet the request appear.

But that's not all. A few more mouse clicks and up pops comprehensive and valuable information about each of the companies, including their U.S. Department of Transportation data and safety history.

There also are reviews of individual companies written by happy and unhappy customers, and company responses to any criticism that a customer might have mentioned in a review.

A few more clicks and detailed requests for quotes go out to as many as 20 carriers at one time. Plans are in the works to trim that

back to possibly 10 carriers because some operators aren't pleased with getting in the mix with so many companies.

Elliott said the services — all of it free to both the customers and the carriers — is a step or two above bus brokers because brokers generally mark up their prices by at least 25 percent.

"By going through BusRates.com, our customers get to deal directly with the carrier and save money, too," he adds.

Plus, carriers get to bid more realistic prices than when they are dealing with brokers.

"Since we are not a broker, we help to provide bus companies the ability to charge their cost for each charter," he notes. "And since most brokers go with the lowest bidding bus company, we allow bus companies to sell their services at their pricing levels."

Elliott said all of the carriers in the BusRates.com database asked to be there. The only criteria to be included is that they own their own buses, are properly licensed and certified by the U.S. Department of Transportation, and carry the required limits of insurance necessary to remain approved by federal and state transportation regulators.

Because all of the services provided by BusRates.com are free, the company earns money by selling advertisements on its website to motorcoach operators and other transportation-related businesses.

"We have bus companies pay for ads on the website so we can keep it free to all of our customers," he said.

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Mich. operator conducts roдео, plans bigger one in '11

CEDAR SPRINGS, Mich. — A Michigan charter operator, Compass Coach, has conducted its first bus roдео and based on its success the company plans to invite other operators to participate in a bigger event next year.

“It was an extremely successful event and we hope to invite more bus companies to attend in 2011,” said Trenton Stange of Compass Coach.

The initial roдео was organized by Compass Coach Safety Director Dale Richardson. Twenty-four drivers from Compass Coach and an affiliated company, American Tour Club of Gladwin, Mich., participated.

Richardson designed a program that included an obstacle course with 11 different driving challenges and a test of Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations. There also was a pre-trip inspection component, and a wheelchair-lift demonstration.

Helping judge the event were representatives from the Michigan State Police Motor Carrier Division and the Michigan Department of Transportation Bus Division, plus John West, regional service representative from ABC Companies.

Dave Bunting from the Michigan DOT said the event was the first motorcoach roдео in Michigan he could remember.

The overall winner was Tom Smith, a driver for Compass Coach, who was awarded a 32-inch, flat-screen television set, a trophy, and the right to brag for the next 12 months.

“I was excited about giving our drivers (and those of American Tour Club) the opportunity to



Driver, Tom Smith, right, was the overall winner. Bud Brovonche participated.



Compass Coach Safety Director Dale Richardson is interviewed by TV station.



Drivers prepare for the written safety test portion of roдео.

showcase their knowledge and skills,” said Richardson.

Stange and Richardson held the roдео in conjunction with Compass Coach’s quarterly safety meeting in an effort to enhance the company driver training program.

The event was conducted in the parking lot of Fifth Third Ballpark, a minor league baseball field in Comstock Park, Mich. Richardson said he already is in discussions with the ballpark operators about using the site again next year.

Breakfast and lunch for drivers, judges and organizers was supplied by Compass Coach; American Tour Club; Educational Tours, a Holt, Mich.-based tour operator, and the NAPA store in Cedar Springs.

A press release announcing the roдео went out to local news organizations a week before the event. Three television stations reported on the roдео, including on-camera interviews with Richardson.

Compass Coach has a fleet of 17 charter coaches. It also operates daily casino trips from western Michigan under the name Lucky-777coach.com.



Cleverly designed banner promoted the roдео.



Two judges watch as coach completes obstacle course.

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Washington state pushes 'trailing nexus' concept

Olympia, Wash. — Never, never, never underestimate the creativity of state government bureaucrats in developing twisted ways of extracting greater tax revenue from businesses — especially businesses located in other states.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled on a number of occasions that one of the requirements for a state to tax an interstate business is what the court calls "nexus."

Safe driver week set

GREENBELT, Md. — The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance has set Oct. 17-23 as Operation Safe Driver week, in which enforcement of road safety rules will be stepped up throughout North America.

The stepped-up enforcement for all commercial vehicles will include safety-belt checks, roadside vehicle and driver safety inspections, and educational programs.

The campaign is being organized by CVSA and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

business has to have some substantial connection (or nexus) with the taxing state.

If the business lacks nexus, the tax violates the U.S. Constitution.

Tax collectors in Washington state appear bent on stretching the concept.

A release from the Washington Department of Revenue declares that an out-of-state business that has nexus for purposes of Washington's business-and-occupation (gross receipts) tax must continue to report and pay the tax even after the business stops whatever activity it had in Washington that created the nexus.

This continuing obligation, or "trailing nexus" as the department calls it, lasts for the remainder of the year in which the activity ceased and an additional calendar year.

For the state sales tax, according to the department, there's a trailing nexus of an additional four years. Yes, four years.

One state laws' expert says he knows of no other state with rules like Washington but, he cautions ominously, "ideas do have a way of spreading."

W. Va. tax

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Kimberly Osborne.

Under West Virginia tax rules, operators who visit the state are required to file annual reports that include detailed information about their businesses, including how many miles their coaches travel in the state.

The information is used to set an appraised value of the business in the state, which is then converted into an assessment of 60 percent of the appraisal. The business then is taxed an average of about 2.25 percent of the assessment.

An operator whose travels in West Virginia are appraised at \$100,000 would be assessed at \$60,000, and be taxed about \$1,350. The tax percentage varies slightly in each case because each of the state's 55 counties has a different tax rate.

State officials began looking for motorcoach companies that were not being taxed by reviewing

records of the state Public Service Commission and scouring internet advertisements placed by carriers in nearby states that offered charter services in West Virginia.

Some of the operators who have been targeted said they were told the state found them by looking at advertisements they have on Bustrates.com, a national internet service that puts potential customers in touch with charter businesses.

"Thus, we are now notifying companies that operate in border areas — where there are strong indications they operate in West Virginia — that they need to file annual reports with the property tax division," one tax analyst wrote to a carrier who inquired about the tax after receiving an assessment notice.

Smith of Lighthouse Travel said the annual tax report he has been asked to complete is very detailed, complicated and long. "You should see the information they want," he said. "You need to be a CPA to fill it out."

He said he turned over the

form to his accountant to see if there is anything that can be done about it.

In addition to fingering out-of-state carriers, the sweep by tax officials even identified a small West Virginia operator who knew nothing of the tax and wonders what it is all about.

Jon Brakefield of the two-coach carrier Coal County Coach in Coal City, W.Va., said he pays the state fuel taxes for business he does in the state and was unaware of the need to pay additional taxes.

"I just can't see having to pay a property tax for driving on the Interstate," he said. "I know there's probably nothing I can do, but if there was, then I would do it."

State officials said operators who question the appraised value of their operations in the state can meet with the Board of Public Works in October and December, and if errors are found they will be corrected. The tax bills based on the final assessments then will be mailed to the operators next July.

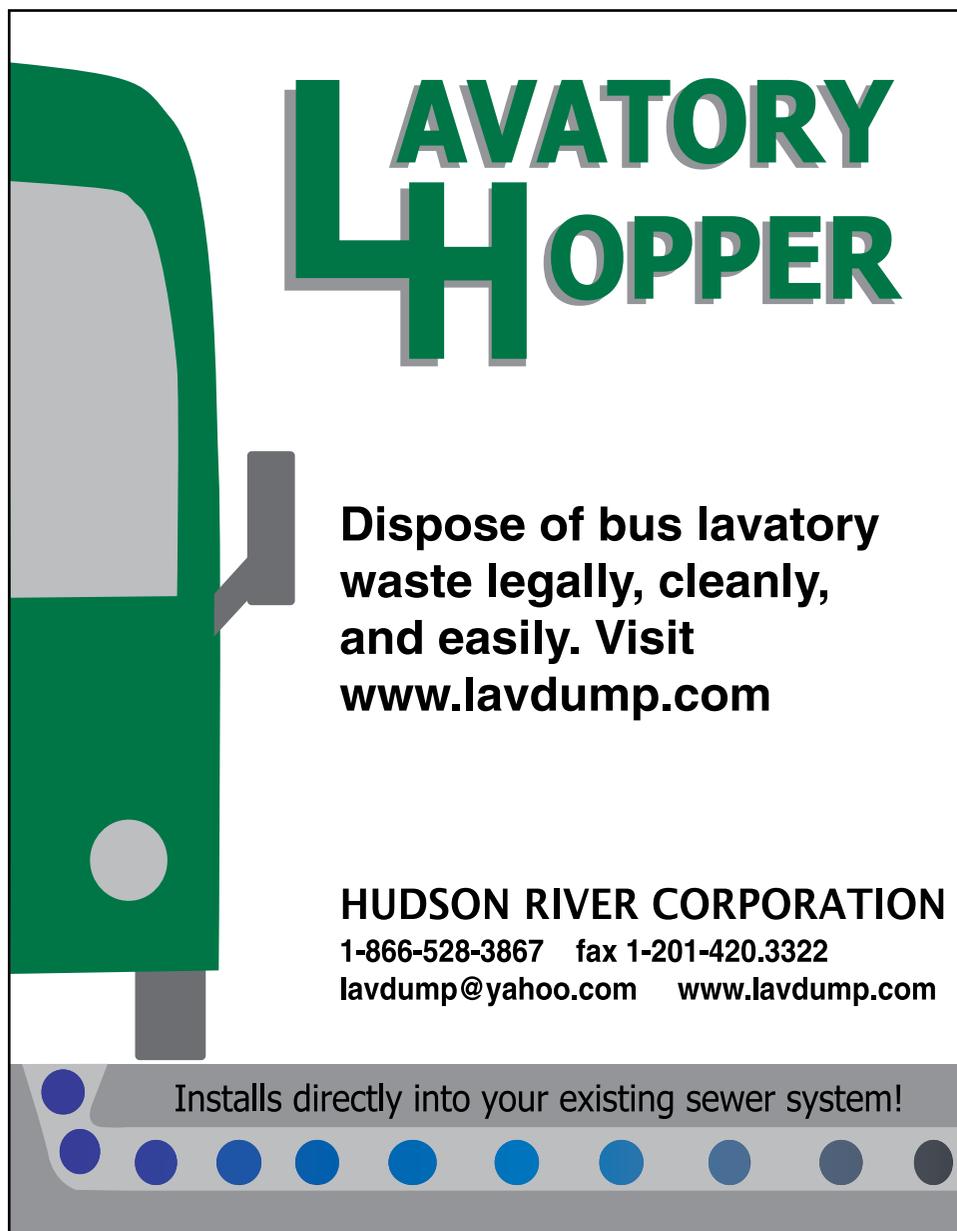
Clinics opened at Pilot Travel Centers

Motorcoach drivers now have three more locations where they can access on-the-road health and wellness services.

Roadside Medical Clinic + Lab and Pilot Travel Centers announce the opening of additional clinics in Oklahoma City, East St. Louis, Ill.,

and Waco, Texas.

For more information and other locations, go to www.roadsidemed.com.



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Manufacturers of tires boosting prices (again)

AKRON, Ohio — It appears another round of tire price increases is in the offing.

Most manufacturers of over-the-road truck and bus tires increased prices in May and June, and several tire makers announced price increases late last month and early this month on consumer and medium truck tires.

Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. raised its medium truck tire prices up to 8 percent effective this month. All Goodyear-owned brands were included in the increase.

Kumho and Hankook will raise prices by up to 6.5 percent on their full lines of passenger, light truck and medium truck tires, effective Nov. 1. The amount of the increase will vary.

People

BRANFORD, FLA. — *Raymon J. Land III*, owner of **Fabulous Coach Lines** in Branford, is a finalist in *BusinessWeek's* America's Best Young Entrepreneurs.

The award honors business executives, age 25 and under, from across the nation. Voting ends Oct. 21, and the top five vote-getters will be announced on the Small Business channel Oct. 28.

Land started his company in high school after finding charter buses lacking when he had hired them for class trips. He bought his first bus, a used, 49-passenger Van Hool, online for \$25,000 — using a loan and \$5,000 of his own savings — and set up the fabulous-coach.com website in 2004.

Land says company revenue reached \$3 million last year, and he forecasts \$4.5 million this year. His company employs 77 and has more than 40 vehicles.

The latest price increases were primarily triggered by rising prices for raw materials.

Bridgestone, Firestone, Goodyear and Michelin all increased bus and truck tire prices from 3 to 8 percent in May and June. (See May 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Motorcoach Council bid for grant hits snag

DENVER — The bid by the Motorcoach Council to win a large grant from the Pepsi Refresh Everything Project has been put on hold. (See Oct. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Owing to a “technical difficulty,” the council’s grant application is not being voted on this month and will have to wait until December for another chance.

“Pepsi has invited us to submit a new application in November,” said Pamela Wolff, director of strategic partnerships and alliances for the council.

“Unfortunately, although applicants have a pre-

liminary indication they have been accepted, Pepsi does not announce the final grant competitors until the day the voting begins.

“We are only delayed, however... We will not give up on this opportunity and will use this month to prepare and to submit our application again,” said Wolff.

Pepsi is awarding grants of up to \$250,000 each month to help fund ideas that positively impact communities. The council grant application touted the “green” benefits of motorcoach travel.

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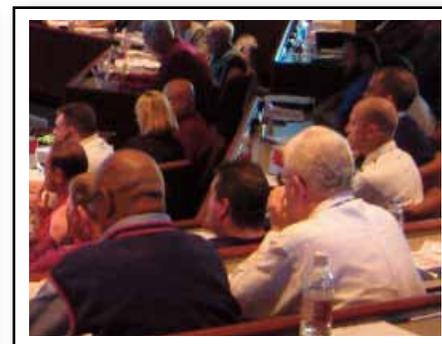
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NOVEMBER 2010

8-9 International Conference on Commercial Driver Health and Wellness, Baltimore. Info: Go to www.trb.org.



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Greyhound rehab project recycles buses, components

NAPPANEE, Ind. — A major bus refurbishing project involving 250 Greyhound coaches was officially launched here late last month with a ceremony at the plant set up to handle the job.

Greyhound Lines contracted with ABC Companies earlier this year to refurbish the 250 MCI 102DL3 coaches. (See June 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

ABC leased a former recreational vehicle plant in this northern Indiana community specifically for the project and has converted it into a remanufacturing center. Scores of laid-off RV assembly workers have been hired to do the work.

Citing the unique combination of Nappanee's skilled workforce and state of the art facilities, Lee Loper, the ABC vice president who is managing the Nappanee Refurbishment Center, pointed out that the current downturn in the region's RV business made the location both ideal and available.

Most of the coaches being rehabbed have more than a million miles on them, and Greyhound is investing in both improving passenger comfort and extending the useful life of the buses.

Coaches built for operation in

North America typically are designed to run for millions of miles, and Greyhound has a history of refurbishing its fleet. A half century ago, many of its original Scenicrulers successfully traveled more than three million miles while undergoing several such programs.

ABC has completed similar projects for Greyhound in the past.

"We are pleased to be working with ABC to improve the Greyhound passenger experience," said David Leach, Greyhound president and CEO. "The new amenities and design of the Greyhound motorcoach will provide our customers with a more comfortable travel experience."

The new refurb program includes installing factory rebuilt engines, transmissions, axles, bearings, brakes and A/C compressors.

The new differentials and engine electronic control modules are set up to improve fuel mileage.

The undercarriage is cleaned, new suspension parts fitted, and reinforcing kits are installed in the engine compartment. All systems are checked, and repaired as needed to meet original specifications.

The coach interiors are being stripped, new rubber flooring is installed, and seats are refurbished

with leatherette covering and are re-installed in the bus configured to maximize leg room. Grab rails and step treads are upgraded with bright yellow trim for safety, and an improved driver's safety compartment is installed.

Body damage is repaired, the coaches are painted with a Dupont Elite base/clearcoat specifically formulated for Greyhound, and the company's new retro-look graphics package is applied.

Among the passenger amenities being added are Aesys electronic destination signs, WiFi systems and 110-volt outlets at each seat.

When completed, it would be difficult for most passengers to distinguish a refurbished coach from a new one.

Loper said the program was jointly designed by ABC staff and Greyhound's engineering department. "We worked together to decide what made sense, with a great deal of emphasis on safety. Greyhound has lots of good ideas on all sorts of things that enhance the customer experience and protect its passengers."

Walking into the facility has the same feel as a new coach factory.

Production Manager Matt Irving explained that the line is set up like a manufacturing plant, with each process being performed at its own station by a team of workers dedicated to that task.

Currently, the facility is completing one bus per day with a workforce of 120, and the program is expected to last 12 to 18 months. The total price tag for rehabbing the 250 coaches is believed to be between \$30 million and \$40 million.

Loper and Irving are working to accelerate the production pace to one and a half to two per day.

Irving said the program is not only thorough but efficient.

"We recycle 96 percent of the materials we take off the buses. We've been at this for four months, and have yet to fill a trash dumpster."

Loper feels that with new coaches becoming more costly, refurbishing will make sense to many operators, and ABC wants to fill that need.

In addition, ABC is looking at the possibility of retrofitting seatbelts and wheelchair lifts.

"We're saving the energy and resources needed to build new coaches by maximizing the life of existing ones. We're recycling 96 percent of the materials we take off, and helping Greyhound operate vehicles that remove cars from the road, eliminate emissions, and save fuel. That's 'green.'"



Engines, transmissions go as rehab of Greyhound coaches begins.



Drive and tag axles, plus rear suspensions, are replaced/rebuilt.



The exterior of the coaches get a complete makeover.



Rebuilt seats with leatherette coverings highlight interior upgrades.



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