

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

New coach sales up 16 percent in first half of 2016

WASHINGTON — Sales of new motorcoaches continued to grow during the first half of 2016, surpassing sales for the same period last year by nearly 16 percent.

Combined private and public-sector sales of new MCI, Prevost, Setra, Van Hool and Volvo motorcoaches totaled 1,230 from January through June of this year, up from 1,063 during the same six-month period in 2015.

At their current pace, annual coach sales could top 2,000 for only the second year since 2008, when sales totaled 2,017.

Sales of new coaches dropped to 1,654 in 2009 and to 1,131 in 2010 and have been gradually increasing since then, reaching 2,141 in 2015.

The sales numbers were com-

pared for the American Bus Association Foundation's Coach Manufacturer Survey.

Here is a breakdown of the sales figures for new motorcoaches sold by quarter in 2016:

- In the first quarter, 558 coaches were sold, up from 440 in the first three months of 2015.

- In the second quarter, 672 coaches were sold, compared with 623 during the second quarter of 2015.

- Forty-five-foot coaches made up the bulk of the purchases during the first half of 2016, with private and public sales totaling 1,036.

- Thirty-seven 40-foot coaches and 157 30- to 40-foot coaches were sold during the six-month period.

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Sales of new motorcoaches have been rising over the past five years after falling off during the Great Recession. Southeastern Stages of Atlanta is among the operators purchasing new motorcoaches in recent months. The company bought two Prevost X3-45 intercity commuter coaches for use in South Carolina.

Fatal church-bus crash in S.C. raises safety questions

ROCKINGHAM, N.C. — A fatal crash near here involving a “private carrier” church bus operating as a for-hire charter has raised concerns about whether such vehicles meet federal safety regulations and can legally — and safely — operate commercial trips.

The accident occurred last month when a 1993 MCI motorcoach carrying a junior college

football team blew a tire on U.S. 74 near Rockingham, causing the vehicle to veer into the median.

It struck a guardrail and a bridge support column, which peeled back part of the motorcoach's left side. Four passengers on the bus were killed and several others were injured.

The motorcoach, owned by the Sandy River Baptist Church in Chester, S.C., was carrying the

Ramah Academy football team on a 122-mile trip to play its season-opening game against the University of God's Chosen in Raeford, N.C.

Ramah Academy Coach Bakari Rawlinson said he met the driver, Brian Andre Kirkpatrick, the night before the trip. He paid the fee out of his own pocket, unaware that the bus was not authorized to conduct charters.

“If they would have told me it was a not-for-hire bus, if they would have told me this bus had issues or if they had told me anything that might draw suspicion, we wouldn't have been on that bus,” he told WBTV in Charlotte. “He gave us a very fair price that was cheaper than the competition in the area.”

That immediately raised questions about the trip arrangements

from the media and the motorcoach industry.

“Why would your church haul a football team that far and back for free?” asked Bob Garrett, president of the Motorcoach Association of South Carolina. “Churches are not supposed to be for-hire carriers.”

Garrett, who became an industry spokesman in media coverage

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When seatbelts are required, will people wear them?

WASHINGTON — With three-point seatbelts soon to become mandatory equipment on new motorcoaches, a question remains: What if passengers don't buckle up?

A National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration rule requiring new vehicles to be equipped with three-point seatbelts takes effect on November 28.

And federal guidance for pre-

trip safety briefings has been amended to add language that encourages passengers to buckle up for safety.

But it remains to be seen if enough passengers will comply to make a difference.

Installing more belts and reminding people to use them can only improve safety, said Scott Tallman, safety manager of Krapf Bus Companies in Kennett Square, Pa.

“Absolutely. Seatbelts save lives,” Tallman said. “Lap and shoulder belts, when used properly, reduce the severity of injury and lower your likelihood of being ejected.”

But what if the belts are not buckled?

“I think people are better off with them. That is a no-brainer. Any time you stay in the vehicle in an accident you are going to be

safer,” said Rick Thielen of Thielen Bus Lines in Redwood Falls, Minn.

“We spend an awful lot of money, around \$15,000, to equip a bus with seatbelts, but if people don't wear the belts it is not going to improve safety.”

Thielen is a board member of the Minnesota Charter Bus Operator's Association, which defeated a state attempt this year to make bus

drivers responsible for seatbelt use by passengers younger than 15.

While students seem to be accustomed to buckling up, adults are not, he said.

“I recently took a group of students to a neighboring town and a lot of them did wear their belts. When you get into adults, you don't see them worn that often. I think people naturally feel safe in

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States, business groups sue to block new overtime rule

SHERMAN, Texas — Twenty-one states and a coalition of more than 50 business groups have filed separate lawsuits seeking to overturn a sweeping federal regulation designed to qualify millions more Americans for overtime pay starting in December.

Attorneys general in Texas and Nevada filed their lawsuit on behalf of their states and 19 others, arguing the Labor Department rule violates the U.S. Constitution and exceeds congressional authority.

The business coalition, led by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, made similar allegations in its lawsuit.

Both suits were filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas, Sherman Division.

The new rule focuses primarily on updating the salary and compensation levels needed for executive, administrative and professional workers to be exempt from overtime, according to the Department of Labor.

In short, it doubles the amount salaried workers must make to be exempt from overtime from the current \$23,660 to \$47,476.

The rule would incrementally phase in the new threshold over the next three years, beginning with a 50 percent increase this December

to \$35,984.

Each year following, the salary threshold would be raised by \$74 per week until Dec. 1, 2019, when it reaches the \$47,476 threshold. It will then be updated every three years by indexing it to salary growth in the lowest income region of the country.

Supporters of the rule say the current overtime threshold, which was set in 2004, is horribly outdated and needs to be raised.

However, many employers have complained it will drive up their costs and cause them to cut workers' hours, slow hiring of full-time staff and turn salaried work-

ers into hourly employees.

"We have heard from our members, small businesses, nonprofits and other employers that the salary threshold is going to result in significant new labor costs and cause many disruptions in how work gets done," Randy Johnson, a senior vice president at the chamber, said in a statement.

The National Retail Federation, which is part of the chamber suit, said research it commissioned indicates that the regulation will force businesses to limit hours or cut base pay for workers to offset added payroll costs.

"Retailers are already strug-

gling to implement this new government mandate before the swiftly approaching deadline, and the automatic update included in the rule would make them do this same dance every three years," David French, the trade group's senior vice president for government relations, said in a statement.

In addition to Texas and Nevada, plaintiffs in the suit filed by states include Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah and Wisconsin.

Employees testing positive for drugs at 10-year high

MADISON, N.J. — Following years of declines, the percentage of employees in the combined U.S. workforce testing positive for drugs has steadily increased over the past three years to a 10-year high.

An analysis by Quest Diagnostics of nearly 11 million workforce drug test results revealed a fifth

straight year of increases in detection rate of amphetamine and heroin and showed that marijuana positivity has increased 47 percent since 2013.

The Quest Diagnostics Drug Testing Index examined illicit drug use by analyzing millions of urine, oral fluid and hair laboratory-based tests performed national-

ly by the company for employers in 2015.

Nearly one in 11 job applicants were unable to pass an oral fluid drug screen, while overall positivity in the workforce was highest in hair drug tests, which give a more complete drug-use history.

"Our nationally representative analysis clearly shows that drug

use by the American workforce is on the rise, and this trend extends to several different classes of drugs and categories of drug tests," said Barry Sample, senior director for science and technology at Quest Diagnostics Employer Solutions.

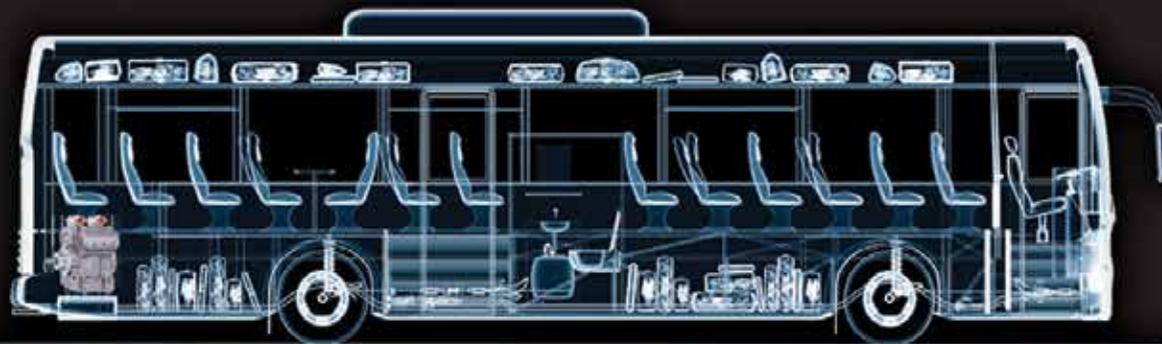
The study examined test results according to three categories

of workers: federally mandated, safety-sensitive workers, including pilots and bus and truck drivers; the general workforce; and the combined U.S. workforce.

"The 2015 findings related to post-accident testing results should be of concern to employers, especially those with safety-sensitive employees," Sample said.

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THE DOCKET

Windshield safety devices allowed under federal rule

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has issued a final rule allowing certain vehicle safety technology to be mounted on windshield interiors.

The rule, which takes effect Oct. 23, stems from a section of the 2015 FAST Act highway bill that directs FMCSA to amend its regulations to allow for the “voluntary mounting on a windshield of vehicle safety technology.”

Current regulations state that

antennas and other devices cannot be mounted more than six inches below the upper edge of the windshield and must be outside the driver’s lines of sight to the road and highway signs and signals.

The new regulations add an amendment to allow such devices as video event recorders, speed-management systems, lane-departure warning systems, collision mitigation or warning systems, active cruise control systems, and transponders and sensors.

Such systems can be mounted within the area swept by the windshield wipers.

The devices covered in the amendment must be mounted no more than four inches below the upper edge or seven inches above the lower edge of the area swept by the windshield wipers, and must also be outside the driver’s sight lines to the road and highway signs and signals.

FMCSA clarifies in the rule that the amendments do not man-

date the use of any of the aforementioned devices, but only allows the devices to be voluntarily mounted where they would have previously been in violation of the regulations.

Additionally, any windshield-mounted technology under a temporary exemption when the FAST Act went into effect on Oct. 1, 2015, is included in the amendments to the regulations.

“The agency believes the potential economic impact of these

changes is negligible,” FMCSA said. “The amendments do not impose new or more stringent requirements, but simply codify the temporary exemptions granted (last year).

“More importantly, the amendments do not mandate the use of any devices/technologies, but simply permit the voluntary use of the devices/technologies while mounted in a location that maximizes their effectiveness without impairing operational safety.”

Opponents and supporters of ELDs await court ruling

CHICAGO — Following oral arguments on a lawsuit seeking to derail the federal government’s electronic logging device mandate, both supporters and opponents are anxiously awaiting a final ruling.

The Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association sued federal regulators earlier this year, asking the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit to overturn the rule.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, which issued the ELD rule, responded to

that suit recently, saying, in essence, that the ends justify the means. FMCSA also labels as “meritless” the claims filed by OOIDA.

A three-judge panel of the court heard oral arguments last month and is expected to issue a ruling later this year.

FMCSA announced the rule Dec. 10, 2015. It is scheduled to become effective in December 2017.

In addition to OOIDA, plaintiffs in the suit include truck owner-operators Mark Elrod of Indi-

ana and Richard Pingel of Wisconsin. OOIDA has 157,000 members in the U.S. and Canada.

FMCSA statistics indicate that the new mandate will require 3.51 million truckers and motorcoach drivers to switch to ELDs to track hours-of-service compliance.

The plaintiffs successfully challenged the U.S. Department of Transportation’s previous attempt to mandate ELDs in a 2011 lawsuit, and a spokeswoman for OOIDA said the association is “confident they will do so again.”

However, backers of the man-

date said the judges appeared supportive of the federal government’s position.

Rich Pianka, deputy general counsel for the American Trucking Associations, which backs the ELD mandate, told a trucking publication that the judges “showed little sympathy” for OOIDA’s arguments in favor of overturning the rule.

“In particular, the panel was extremely skeptical of OOIDA’s argument that the devices be ‘automatic’ precluded any user input whatsoever, at one point suggest-

ing that this was tantamount to arguing that Congress mandated a ‘square circle,’” Pianka said.

He added that the panel “appeared similarly unconvinced by OOIDA’s claim that ELDs will result in no compliance improvements whatsoever. We look forward to the Seventh Circuit’s decision in the case and fully expect the rule to be upheld.”

OOIDA filed its latest suit in March, arguing the mandate violates truckers’ Fourth Amendment rights to privacy and protections against illegal search and seizure because it effectively calls for truckers’ locations to be tracked in real time and could lead to the harassment of drivers.

The plaintiffs also argue the rule doesn’t benefit safety and places an unfair cost of compliance on small carriers.

OOIDA President and CEO Jim Johnston had said an ELD mandate could have “the single largest, most negative impact on the industry than anything done by FMCSA.”

FMCSA disagrees, saying the mandate will improve hours-of-service compliance, create a level playing field for all carriers and improve highway safety. FMCSA said it had asked drivers what harassment meant to them and addressed those issues in its rule-making, plus added civil penalties for using ELDs to harass drivers.

In its court brief, the agency also said that truckers should have lower expectations of privacy, given the “long tradition of close government supervision” of the industry.



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Using N.Y. toll revenue for canals is unconstitutional

NEW YORK CITY— It is unconstitutional for the New York State Thruway Authority to use millions of dollars in toll revenue paid by commercial truckers to maintain the state's canal system, a federal judge ruled.

The opinion by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York in an appeals decision determined the Thruway Authority's diversion of toll revenue from truckers for the canals violates the constitution's Dormant Commerce Clause.

"Obviously commercial truckers do not use the barge canals; they haul freight on the highway," Chief Judge Colleen McMahon wrote in the decision.

"The truckers may wish to enjoy bike paths, hiking trails, and museums on a vacation, but they are irrelevant while sitting in the cab of an 18-wheeler. The state of New York cannot insulate the Canal System from the vagaries of the political process and taxpayer preferences by imposing the cost of its upkeep on those who drive the New York Thruway in interstate commerce."

The tolls in question are charged on the Governor Thomas E. Dewey Thruway system, which stretches about 570 miles between Albany and Buffalo.

The Thruway Authority contributes more than \$61 million an-

nually, or roughly 10 percent of toll revenue, to maintain the canals, including the Erie Canal, which was once crucial for transporting goods but is now obsolete and mainly a tourist attraction.

The ruling marked a significant victory for American Truck-

ing Associations and three motor carriers that were plaintiffs challenging the Thruway Authority's practice.

"ATA believed that the courts and Constitution were clear — revenue from tolls must be spent maintaining the roads they're col-

lected on and not diverted to finance bike paths and waterways for recreational kayaking and canoeing," said Chris Spear, ATA's president and CEO.

"We hope today's ruling will not only end this practice in New York, but dissuade other states

from financing their budget shortfalls on the backs of our industry."

ATA deputy general counsel Rich Pianka added that "The residents of the state and those communities — not trucks passing through the state — should bear the burden of supporting the canal."

NYC planning 75 miles of bike lanes

NEW YORK CITY — Mayor Bill de Blasio and Department of Transportation Commissioner Polly Trottenberg announced plans to add 75 miles of new bike lanes to New York City streets, with 18 fully protected bike lane miles, by the end of 2016.

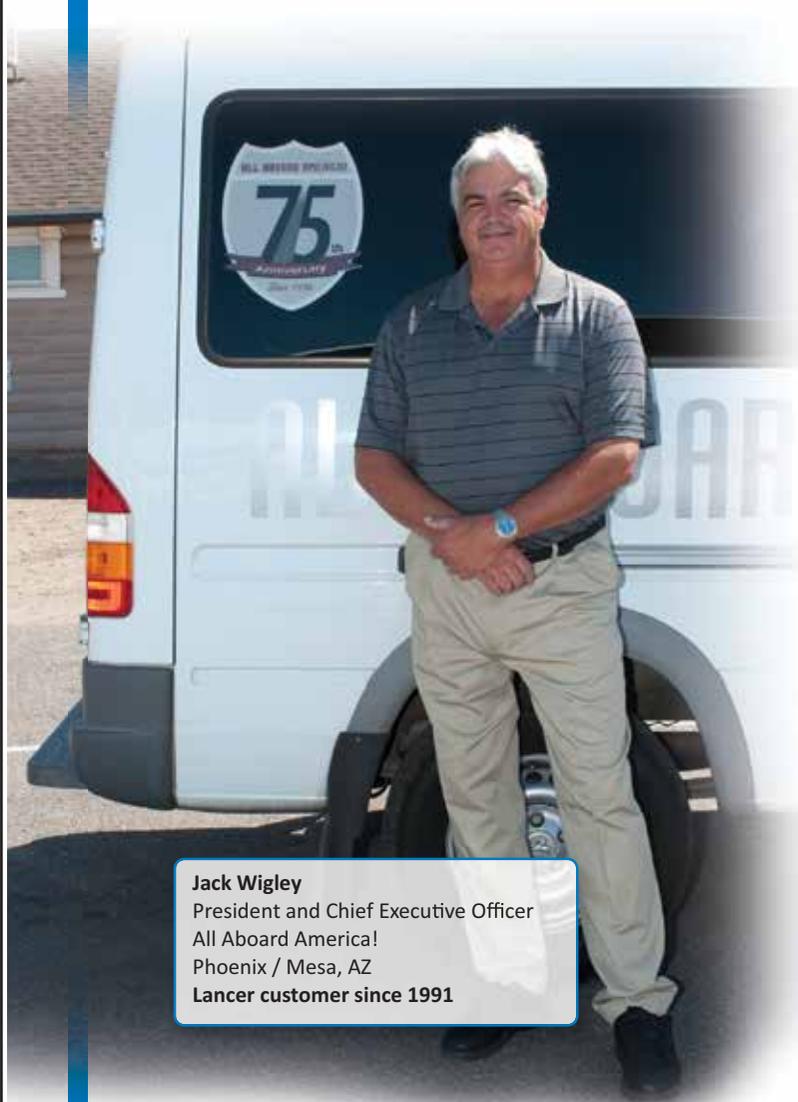
The announcement is part of the mayor's Vision Zero plan to expand the protected bike network across the city's boroughs.

The plan puts the city on track to exceed its initial 15-mile expansion of protected bike lanes, which it hopes will reduce fatalities and injuries on the streets.

"Our Vision Zero goal has always been to make sure that with the massive growth in its popularity, cycling remains safe," Trottenberg said.

By the end of the year, the DOT will have expanded bike lanes by at least 75 miles with only 14 of those being signed/shared lanes. The city will have installed more exclusive bike lanes this year alone than it has in all previous years.

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18 transportation infrastructure projects win grants

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation has announced grants totaling more than \$759 million to support 18 transportation infrastructure projects in 15 states and the District of Columbia.

The first round of grant awards were part of the Fostering Advancements in Shipping and Transportation for the Long-term Achievement of National Efficiencies program, or FASTLANE.

From 2016 to 2020, the FASTLANE grant program is authorized to award \$4.5 billion in dedicated funding for projects of national or regional significance

that address major issues facing the nation's highways and bridges.

DOT said the grants establish broad, multiyear eligibilities for freight infrastructure.

Some of the major projects include \$165 million to the Virginia Department of Transportation for the Atlantic Gateway project to improve mobility across the Eastern seaboard; \$54 million to the Arizona DOT for Interstate 10 improvements from Phoenix to Tucson; \$60 million to the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development for I-10 freight corridor rehabilitation and expansion; \$62 million to the Oklahoma DOT for

U.S. 69/75 improvements; and \$42 million to the Massachusetts Port Authority for Boston's Conley Terminal Intermodal improvements.

Other FASTLANE project grant awards include:

- SR-11 Segment 2 and Southbound Connectors, California DOT and San Diego Association of Governments San Diego County, \$49.28 million.

- Arlington Memorial Bridge Reconstruction Project, National Park Service and District of Columbia DOT, \$90 million

- Port of Savannah International Multi-Modal Connector, Georgia Ports Authority, Savan-

nah, Ga., \$44 million

- I-390/I-490/Route 31 Interchange, Lyell Avenue Corridor Project, New York State Department of Transportation, \$32 million

- South Lander Street Grade Separation and Railroad Safety Project, Seattle, \$45 million

- I-39/90 Corridor Project; Wisconsin DOT, Janesville, \$40 million

- Truck Parking Availability Systems, Florida DOT, \$10.77 million

- Cedar Rapids Logistics Park, Iowa DOT, \$25.65 million

- U.S. 95 North Corridor Ac-

cess Improvement Project, Idaho DOT, Kootenai County, \$5.1 million

- Maine Intermodal Port Productivity Project; Maine DOT, Portland, \$7.71 million

- Cross Harbor Freight Program; Port Authority of New York and New Jersey; Jersey City and New York, \$10.67 million

- Coos Bay Rail Line Tunnel Rehabilitation Project, Port of Coos Bay, Lane, Douglas and Coos counties, Ore., \$11 million

- Strander Boulevard Extension and Grade Separation Phase 3, Tukwila, Washington, \$5 million.

New York cities offered zero-emission vehicle grants

ALBANY, N.Y. — Municipalities in New York State are being offered \$3 million in rebates if they purchase or lease zero-emission vehicles such as electric and hydrogen vehicles.

The rebates will be provided through a record \$300 million Environmental Protection Fund investment in New York's fiscal 2017 state budget.

The funding will help New

York meet its commitments under the Multi-State ZEV Memorandum of Understanding, which aims to put 3.3 million ZEVs on the roads in the participating states by 2025.

The rebates will also advance the state's goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 40 percent by 2030 under Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's Reforming the Energy Vision strategy.

"New York is a leader in the

fight to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change," Cuomo said. "This funding will help reduce our carbon footprint by creating climate-resilient communities and is another step toward a cleaner, greener and more sustainable New York for all."

Under the program, administered by the state Department of Environmental Conservation, municipalities will be eligible for re-

imbursement of up to \$5,000 per vehicle for purchasing or leasing eligible clean vehicles and up to \$250,000 per facility for installation of eligible electric vehicle supply equipment or hydrogen fuel cell infrastructure.

DEC will accept applications for rebates on a first-come, first-served basis through March 31, 2017, or until the funds are exhausted.

A total of up to \$750,000 will be available for clean vehicle rebates. Municipalities that purchase a new clean vehicle on or after April 1, 2016, are eligible for the rebate.

Rebates of \$2,500 are available for vehicles with a 10- to 50-mile electric range. Rebates of \$5,000 are available for vehicles with an electric range greater than 50 miles.

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Chicago cracking down on party buses, drunken riders

CHICAGO — Party bus drivers will soon be held responsible for the behavior of their rowdy and inebriated patrons.

The Chicago City Council is cracking down on party buses in response to complaints by downtown residents that buses are dropping drunken passengers at bars and nightclubs so they can drink even more.

The crackdown requires drivers of the vehicles to take corrective action that ranges from evicting inebriated offenders to terminating the trip and returning all passengers to the point of origin.

During a committee hearing on

the issue, Chicago city alderman Brendan Reilly described an incident over Labor Day weekend to justify holding party bus drivers, and ultimately company owners, responsible for the behavior of their customers.

“Two trolleys were side by side in the lane of traffic and the guests on each trolley were taunting each other and yelling at each other and threatening one another and ultimately, a firearm was discharged,” Reilly said.

“The police were very responsive and they managed it. But they also had to deal with 80 very drunk trolley passengers. These trolleys,

at a certain point, might literally turn into a rolling tinderbox full of inebriated individuals who are then delivered to the doorstep of bars and nightclubs.

“The people are already inebriated and over-served. This becomes an issue not only for the venue’s security team but ultimately the Chicago Police Department,” he said.

Reilly called party buses a “major drain” on already strained police resources. He noted that the crackdown was inspired by the “grave concerns” expressed by police commanders.

“There was a total lack of ac-

countability when it came to the driver managing his or her vehicle. A lot of shrugs and ‘Not my problem’ when confronted by officers about the condition of their guests,” Reilly said.

The ordinance approved by the committee would prohibit charter/sightseeing passengers under the age of 21 from consuming or possessing alcohol. Passengers would also be prohibited from engaging in disorderly conduct, possessing drug paraphernalia, discharging a weapon, hurling projectiles from the vehicle, committing indecent exposure, littering and unlawfully possessing or using marijuana.

If passengers commit any of those acts, the driver would be required to take “corrective action,” defined as demanding that the passenger refrain from that behavior or leave the vehicle.

“If the recipient...does not comply with the demand, ‘corrective action’ means to promptly terminate the charter/sightseeing service and return any passengers to the point of origin or make a prompt report of the unlawful act(s) to the Chicago Police Department,” the ordinance states.

The ordinance would hold the owner of the sightseeing company responsible for driver violations.

Pennsylvania road funds being diverted to state police

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Money from increased fees and gas taxes that drivers have been paying since 2013 on the promise to fix Pennsylvania’s crumbling roads and bridges is increasingly being diverted to support the state police, the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* reports.

Government officials, legislators and construction industry members said the practice needs to stop, especially as the nation’s

highest gas tax — ushered in by the 2013 transportation funding overhaul known as Act 89 — generates billions in new revenue for roads.

Pennsylvania’s unfunded transportation needs outweigh expected 12-year revenue by about \$6 billion, and that number will only grow if state police continue to receive money that would otherwise be spent on maintenance and infrastructure projects, PennDOT Secretary Leslie Richards said.

“What’s at stake is the actual promise of delivering on Act 89, which obviously is huge,” she said.

But a better way to properly fund infrastructure improvements and public safety services eludes policymakers. The 2016-17 fiscal code lawmakers passed and Gov. Tom Wolf signed seeks to reduce the state police’s allotment from the Motor License Fund over several budget cycles.

But lawmakers and state officials have yet to come up with an alternative funding source for the nation’s 10th-largest police agency. The agency covers more than 36,000 square miles, including nearly 1,300 municipalities that rely solely on state police for law-enforcement coverage, and another 400 that rely on it part time.

“Working together we can come up with a solution,” Wolf spokesman Jeffrey Sheridan said.

“What that solution is, I don’t know at this time.”

Pennsylvania’s \$6.5 billion Motor License Fund captures gasoline taxes, vehicle registration and licensing fees and other revenue. It gets the new revenue generated by Act 89’s taxes and fee increases — a funding stream expected to total at least \$2.3 billion annually for transportation infrastructure projects by fiscal year 2017-18.




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Hiring tech-savvy employees can boost your bottom line

By Carl Morgan
Tigerbay

It is often the case today that a tour operator with fewer than 10 people feels like it simply does not have the capacity to hire someone to manage its technology system.

The truth of it is there is an “all hands on deck” need for the entire team to be focused on selling product and senior players don’t see, or have the time to explore, the value in hiring someone based on their technical skills.

I am concerned that this is not only an outdated approach, but also a costly mistake, and one that will become more so as other travel players and new kids on the block do make investments in tech-savvy teams.

Fresh thinking is needed when hiring new talent in 2016 and beyond. If high-performing websites and apps are crucial to the success of a business, then how can it af-

ford not to embrace those people who best understand how to make the most of the technology?

In an age when a niche operator’s website and digital presence has to be at least as good as the biggest tour operator — easy to find, visually impactful, simple to navigate and to make bookings on — it has to stay a step ahead of the pack.

Literacy is crucial

“Digital literacy” (Internet-enabled device knowledge) and “technology literacy” (how to work with suppliers of technology) are crucial. Understanding the digital universe, keeping up with audience browsing and buying trends, following Google and SEO changes, design aesthetic and more are key.

Therefore, hiring someone with “literacy” is every bit as important as hiring for his or her tour operator know-how.

Smaller businesses can no longer afford to think that by outsourcing their technology they don’t have to worry about its upkeep. They need to think more broadly about the sort of person they are looking to hire; someone who, on the one hand, is tech savvy and understands how tour operator product sells online but, on the other hand, also understands the tour operating business and its traditions.

There is no doubt that this is a new breed of employee; a person who has not traditionally been seen to fit into the tour operator mold. Quite often they are more expensive to employ.

However, tour operators need to seek out these hybrid team players if they are going to embrace and maximize the benefits tech suppliers offer. They need to understand that just because someone is not necessarily a natural fit doesn’t mean they are not

the right fit.

I think tour operators should be going out of their way to find individuals they might not normally consider, individuals who are far more at home behind a screen than they are in front of a customer, who understand user acceptance testing, apps and even gamification.

Adding revenue

Because when they do they will reap financial reward. Hiring these people is not just about looking after technology, it is about adding significant sales and significant revenue opportunities. And these benefits come without any real change to a tour operator’s business other than using its technology platform more smartly and more to the benefit of the business.

I estimate that a small tour operator needs to spend, at a minimum, 10 percent of its time on

managing its tech strategy — pushing it harder, selling via mobile and apps — each week. It should be time dedicated to technology by people who totally understand what they are doing.

Very few small operators are doing that at the moment. This is a shame.

I have personal evidence that businesses that do manage and push their technology see real conversions in sales and efficiencies that easily realize an increase in revenue of 35 percent.

So, just imagine how quickly niche players could find themselves ahead of the pack if they were to be more tech-minded in their hiring. That could be the difference between surviving or not, and in an increasingly competitive market, I think that is a pretty compelling reason to look outside the norm.

This article first appeared on Tnooz.com.

Self-driving cars could result in millions of job losses

By Shawn Langlois
MarketWatch

When the self-driving-car revolution firmly takes hold, there will be carnage, according to Wolf Richter of the Wolf Street blog. Not the car-crash kind — though that is a prevalent fear — but on the employment front.

“The magnitude of this problem is breathtaking,” he wrote. Citing government figures, he says that 4.1 million jobs are at risk, including chauffeurs and drivers of trucks, cabs and ride-share vehicles.

“These people can’t easily switch to writing software. There’s no room for them in manufacturing. Even the fast-food sector is getting automated, as are many other jobs, including writing stories for the major wire and news services,” Richter said.

“It all might be happening faster than society is prepared to deal with it. And we’re not even talking about it.”

The potential savings will outweigh the human cost, as companies fight for profit margins, he explained. Drivers are one of the biggest expenses for transportation

companies. And they have to sleep and take vacation. Not so their autonomous replacements.

But Uber, a company expected to benefit from the advancements in a big way, said recently that it wouldn’t be phasing out drivers entirely.

“We believe ride-sharing will be a mix — with services provided by both drivers and self-driving Ubers,” according to the Uber blog.

Nevertheless, it’s clearly a concern of Uber drivers, who aren’t exactly thrilled about the notion of losing their jobs to some software.

“We don’t expect Uber to move to driverless cars in New York City anytime soon, but they can expect we would launch an aggressive campaign, the likes of which they have yet to see, to halt such a move,” Jim Conigliaro Jr., founder of the Independent Drivers Guild, which represents 35,000 Uber drivers in the New York City area, said in an email.

Uber started its self-driving pilot program in Pittsburgh recently, outfitting Ford Fusions for its “most loyal” users when they request an UberX ride. The car comes with a human sitting in the

front seat to take over if something goes wrong.

Still, the naysayers — and there are plenty — just aren’t buying it.

“Right now it is ALL HYPE and false hope to raise funds, billions and billions of funds,” writes one of the blog’s commenters, echoing a popular refrain.

But Richter stood by his stance. “There will be delays, setbacks, and gruesome accidents,” Richter wrote. “Some people will call for putting an end to this. And others will refuse to get into those cars. But this is happening.”

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Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION

ISSUE NO. 317

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10:15 _{AM} – 11:15 _{AM}	FMCSA Update	
11:15 _{AM} – 12:00 _{PM}	Back to Basics: Applications & Driving Histories	
12:00 _{PM} – 1:00 _{PM}	Lunch	Lunch sponsored by: ABC Companies
1:00 _{PM} – 1:45 _{PM}	Recognizing Modern Drug Abuse	
1:45 _{PM} – 2:45 _{PM}	Breakout Group Discussions (8 Groups)	
2:25 _{PM} – 3:20 _{PM}	Knowledge and Solution Sharing	
3:20 _{PM} – 3:30 _{PM}	Break	
3:30 _{PM} – 4:30 _{PM}	TWA Flight 800 Presentation (Optional)	
3:30 _{PM} – 4:30 _{PM}	ELDs: The Enforcement Perspective	
4:30 _{PM}	Shuttle Departs NTSB for Hotel	
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8:00 _{AM}	Shuttle Departs Hotel for NTSB	
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9:00 _{AM} – 9:45 _{AM}	Legal Issues in Transportation: Social Media	
9:45 _{AM} – 10:00 _{AM}	Networking Break	Break sponsored by: Transportation Insurance Brokers
10:00 _{AM} – 11:00 _{AM}	NSTB Update	
11:00 _{AM} – 11:45 _{AM}	Safety & Compliance Jeopardy	
1:45 _{PM} – 2:45 _{PM}	Box Lunch Served	
2:45 _{PM} – 3:20 _{PM}	Shuttle Leaves for Hotel & Dulles International Airport	

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UMA Safety Management Seminar

Dates: December 7-8, 2016 **Location:** NSTB Training Center

Registration Fees: UMA Members - \$295.00

Per person Non-UMA Members - \$445.00 (Not a member? Visit www.uma.org to join and start saving today!)

Cancellation Policy: There is a \$50 processing fee for all cancellations. This fee is assessed on a per person basis. There is no refund after November 25, 2016. All refund requests are at the discretion of UMA management.

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Shuttle service to and from the NTSB Training Center will be provided each day. Transportation to Dulles International Airport will be provided on Thursday afternoon.

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Maybe we could have saved the life of poor No. 473

By Dave Millhouser

I found him.

Assuming you memorize these columns, you'll remember good old No. 473.

Government statistics claimed that regulatory enforcement had theoretically saved 472 lives, and I wondered about the fate of No. 473.

Now we know. He apparently was killed in a car accident. Despite the fact that automobile fatality statistics have remained relatively stable in recent years, it's still far more dangerous to travel by car than by bus.

The August 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News* pointed out that United Motorcoach Association members reported increased business, with improved revenues and profits.

Great news. What could go wrong?

One industry executive pointed out that, "With all the regulations imposed on us, when you compare 2010 with 2014 you find 4,000 fewer coaches, 300 fewer operators and a 150 million fewer passenger trips since 2007, when the industry was comparable to the airlines in passenger travel."

This may not be entirely the re-

sult of regulatory zeal, but then again, the government insists that the economy has been steadily improving.

Think about it — 4,000 fewer buses. How did 150 million people get where they were going? Some simply didn't travel. A few flew, one unfortunate took Amtrak, but the rest traveled by automobile.

Likely that's where No. 473 met his demise. Feel free to question my mathematical reasoning, but it's probably more reliable than the rationale that arrived at 472 lives saved by regulations.

There is an old saying that "the surgery was successful, but the patient died." A case can be made that the added burden regulations imposed didn't prevent deaths, it just transferred them to someone else's turf.

While surviving operators are doing well for now, the industry is shrinking, and we need to give serious thought to how to reverse that. Think about it: population continues to grow, while we slowly shrivel.

If you're reading this, your reaction may be bland. After all, you are (so far) one of the survivors. The burden of regulatory overreach is an irritant to large carriers, but they're smart enough to know that it's slowly over-

whelming their smaller competitors.

According to one observer, "Right now, many operators are having record revenue years but the industry is in free fall all around them and they either do not know it or don't care."

A case can be made that minority owned companies are being impacted in greater proportion than is fair. This is in part due to the fact that they are often newer, and smaller, than their competitors.

Regulators are unwitting partners in eliminating competition. Since many larger companies are unionized, behind the scenes there is also a political dimension that is rarely discussed.

The same gentleman suggested that operators visualize our industry in three, five and 10 years, and communicate that vision to their association leadership.

State and national organizations view the current situation as good. After all, their members are thriving.

They may be wrong.

Reductio ad absurdum would imply that eventually we will shrink to a single bus line that is quite profitable. Good for them, bad for the rest of us, and the traveling public.

If you are currently doing OK and are tempted to enjoy the ride

(pun intended), consider the transit industry.

After WWII most city transit was privately operated. Many things collaborated in the private sector's demise, but one was that operators were seduced into getting in bed with government.

Ask yourself how many private transit operators remain (and how they are treated).

Local and national associations spend a lot of time trying to repair things by responding to perceived threats.

But are we like coach operators who are constantly repairing breakdowns when they should be doing preventative maintenance?

I'm not sure what that would look like, but I can see a few places where we've stumbled and perhaps could learn from.

Our industry, which legitimately claims to be the safest mode of travel on Earth, long ignored pleas by the public for improvements that would make us even safer.

Instead of grunting "compartmentalization" every time they yelled "seatbelts," we should have been testing ways to improve the safety in crashes and arriving at considered, rather than emotional, fixes.

We have more to lose than face-

less bureaucrats and should be in the forefront of visibly pushing for practical innovation and creating a simpler, fairer and more efficient regulatory environment.

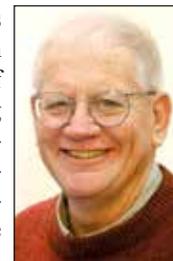
Operators should be acting in tandem with suppliers (who are hurt most by a shrinking industry). Early on the scuba industry recognized that if it didn't actively regulate itself, the government would do it in the form of ham-handed rules that would stifle the industry's growth.

It worked and they created a safe sport with minimal outside interference.

Our industry has actual experience, and skin in the game. We should be proposing, not reacting. We should be bragging about our safety record, not defending it, and visibly pursuing new standards that promote safety rather than paperwork.

We owe it to the memory of poor No. 473.

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



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Mission possible: helping operators sell more charters

By Christian Riddell
Motorcoach Marketing Council



Christian Riddell

It has been said that to educate is easy, but to actually implement change is quite a bit more difficult.

For the past three years I have been attending local, regional and national association meetings, teaching classes on the importance of marketing, especially marketing within the motorcoach industry.

Teaching is easy. You stand in front of a room and deliver a message that is relevant to the audience. I have always tried to make the message timely and entertaining, while also emphasizing the sore spots most operators know they need to be doing better at.

But the Motorcoach Marketing Council is not just about education. Truth is, it's about trying to change cultural norms in this industry.

And, as anyone knows who has

ever tried to change culture, that is one of the biggest challenges any organization faces.

So what are the cultural norms that we are trying to shift?

A focus on marketing

The first thing to know is that most businesses are confused about the difference between sales and marketing, and that isn't just confined to our industry. Sales, in any industry, is about responding to, or selling to, existing demand.

Marketing, on the other hand, is about creating new demand for your product or service.

As many of you who have heard me speak can attest, I try to shine a light on the fact that, as an industry, we have a few fundamental issues we need to address. One of those is demand for our product.

While there are segments of our industry that remain strong, there are an alarming number that are shrinking.

Let's look at the senior market as an example. As a generation of people who were accustomed to using our services for vacations,

Marketing Minute
GoMotorcoach
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outings and other events are aging out as consumers, we are not replacing them at a corresponding rate.

I talk to a lot of operators who say things like, "We don't need to increase demand; we are so busy dealing with existing demand."

The reality, however, is that when that coin flips and there is not enough existing demand to fill up the dispatch sheets, it will be too late to begin to think about building demand.

Sales vs. taking orders

Most of you probably know that I started my career in this industry as a salesperson for a motorcoach company. What that really meant was that I was responsible for drivers, dispatch, manager-on-duty shifts, driving, cleaning buses, dumping toilets and anything else that needed to be done.

Oh, and answering the phone as well as trying to do outside sales in all my spare time.

When I ask a room full of operators how many of their companies have sales or marketing staff, almost every hand will go up. When I get a bit more specific by asking how many of those people are ONLY responsible for sales or marketing, and don't take inbound calls or have any other role in the company other than sales, fewer, if any, hands go back up.

We suffer, as an industry, from a belief that sales is about answering the phone and sending out quotes. A true salesperson is responsible for the growth of an organization, working hand-in-hand with marketing to strategically grow a company.

If we seem to have a recurring hole in our dispatch sheets, they go and fill it up. If we have a certain type of equipment that is sitting, they get it rolling. If we have a type of business that is more profitable than others, they go and get more of it.

Sales is about being proactive, not simply reactive.

A culture of follow-through

I recently did a survey at a meeting that shed some light on the issues around our follow-through and close rates as an industry. The numbers showed that most of the companies were closing somewhere south of 50 percent of their quotes, and many were closing less than 30 percent.

In a competitive market, this may seem easy to explain: "They got a cheaper price from another provider and went with them."

The reality is actually a bit more sinister.

Another question we asked about was follow-up. Let me just say that, if you have a knot in your stomach right now, you are not alone. Nearly all of the companies we spoke to failed to follow up with the quotes that had not been booked, and only a tiny percentage had even asked for the booking.

This issue is about as distilled as it could possibly be. These are people who have a transportation need; they know enough to ask about your services, and they will, in most cases, eventually book with someone.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15 ►

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Marketing Minute

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

To think that we are closing less than half of these people should be a top-of-the-list priority for any organization.

Commoditization of our services

When you book an airline ticket, how do you do it? If you are like most people, you hit up a service like Hotwire or Travelocity. You type in your dates and details, push the button, and the magical Internet fairies scurry around and come back with a page of the options listed neatly in order of price.

United, Delta, American, Jet Blue, Southwest ... all the big players are there. Now, think about the last time you booked. Did you give any consideration to whether one airline was more concerned about your safety than the others? Did you think about their pilot training or how their flight attendants dressed?

If you are like most people, you didn't. You believe that because they are operating under government regulations that keep them doing what they need to be doing, you'll be safe on any one of them. So, you picked one that seemed to work well for your

schedule and budget, and you clicked the button to book it.

I can only imagine that while this is certainly the reality of how you and I buy airline tickets, there is a marketing team, somewhere, working for one of these airlines, trying to figure out how to show that they are more invested in our safety than their competition.

They are spending big money to try to help us see that differences exist and that those differences should matter to us as consumers.

As we sit in meetings, there is no doubt that, while that level of industry-wide safety and "standardization" may indeed exist in the airline industry, it is not the same here.

We all know of operators who are cutting corners (or worse), and we know that the investments in our own businesses, equipment, drivers and safety put us head-and-shoulders above our competitors.

But do our customers know that? Do they know that choosing an operator who is not doing what we are doing is about their safety? Do they know that just because an operator says it will take the job at half our rate it doesn't mean they actually got a good deal? Do they understand the difference between a modern fleet and an aging, tired,

worn-out bunch of buses? Do they know that the way we train our drivers matters and that often a good driver can make or break a trip?

The truth is, in most cases they don't, but they should.

The mission

As a nonprofit organization with a total budget of around \$150,000, we have set the bar high with our goals. Our mission is to help operators sell more charters, to more people, for more money.

This mission requires more than just tools or training; it requires us to help change a culture. This particular culture has been doing quite well by employing salespeople who are also drivers, spending a statistically minuscule amount of their annual budget on increasing the demand for their service, sending out quotes with very little follow-up, and spending a great deal of time competing on price.

Culture is a difficult thing to change, but we are starting to see the needle shift. More and more companies are talking about what they need to do differently. They are realizing that while change like this is not easy, it is necessary to ensure a healthy tomorrow.

And yes, there are those who are starting to use the tools, ideas and principles that the council has been developing. Consequently, they are beginning to see real, measurable change in their businesses.

Do we believe that the phones will stop ringing tomorrow? No, most certainly not.

We believe that right now represents a critical moment in the history of the motorcoach industry, one that will separate those who are willing and able to change from those who are not.

We believe that the opportunity to prepare for a future of motorcoach travel that looks different than it does today is now. Perhaps Bobby Unser, the famous racecar driver, said it best: "Success is where preparation and opportunity meet."

The future is bright for this industry, particularly for those who take steps to "future-proof" their businesses. Those who make the necessary changes *today* will indeed sell more charters, to more people, for more money, *tomorrow*.

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

Operation Safe Driver Week Oct. 16 to 22

GREENBELT, Md. — Law enforcement agencies throughout North America will engage in heightened traffic-safety enforcement and education during the week of Oct. 16-22.

The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance's annual Operation Safe Driver Week will focus on combating unsafe driving behaviors by commercial motor vehicle and passenger-vehicle (car) drivers.

Unsafe driver behaviors continue to be the leading cause of crashes. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's "Large Truck Crash Causation Study" cites driver behavior as the critical reason for more than 88 percent of large truck crashes and 93 percent of passenger-vehicle crashes.

CVSA's Operation Safe Driver program was created to help reduce the number of crashes, deaths and injuries involving large trucks, buses and cars due to unsafe driving behaviors.

To find out about Operation Safe Driver Week enforcement events, visit <http://cvsa.org/contact-page/contacts/law-enforcement-lead-agency-contacts>.

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New coach sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

• Private operators purchased the largest number of new coaches — 989 — while 241 were bought by public-transit agencies.

Missing from the ABA Foundation report are sales of Temsa and Caio coaches.

Sales of new smaller coaches

— those between 30 and 40 feet long — have risen significantly this year, possibly reflecting the increased popularity of smaller specialty tours.

Sales of smaller coaches totaled 157, up from only 23 during the first six months of 2015.

“The increase in sales of smaller vehicles points to a shift the industry has experienced over the

past few years as tours have become more specialized, catering to smaller groups with more customized agendas,” said ABA President and CEO Peter Pantuso.

Adapting to trends

“The great thing about the motorcoach industry is that we can quickly adapt to trends and get to where the people are and get them

where they want to be,” he said.

Cummins continued to be the dominant engine in new motorcoaches and buses delivered during the first six months of 2016, going into 601 new models sold by MCI and ABC/Van Hool.

By comparison, 385 Prevost and Volvo coaches were delivered with Volvo engines, which are only available in those brands. Detroit

and Mercedes engines, which are essentially power-plant twins, went into 261 new MCI, Setra and Van Hool coaches.

Allison continued to be the dominant transmission.

All of the new buses sold during the first six months of 2016 had Allison transmissions except for nine with ZF and six with Volvo transmissions.

Church bus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

of the crash, said many churches in southeastern states have purchased buses and motorcoaches.

His association is concerned that many churches are operating older vehicles that are not properly maintained and may be riding on tires not intended for highway use.

In addition, he questions the licensure and training of church drivers, who often volunteer.

WBTV attempted to determine how the team arranged for the charter by calling the church’s pastor, Keith Taylor, to ask if the church had been paid for the bus service or if someone else could have been operating the bus without the church’s knowledge. Taylor said he was not making any statements and hung up.

The crash killed the driver (a member of the church), two college students and an 8-year-old boy who was the son of a coach. The other 42 passengers were taken to hospitals, at least four of them admitted in serious condition.

“Out of nowhere the tire popped and the bus driver couldn’t control it. He tried his best but he just couldn’t,” Raqwon Corbitt-Washington, an injured passenger, told WRAL-TV in Raleigh, N.C.

The driver’s sister told the television reporter, “He just loved helping anybody. He hadn’t been driving long but anytime anybody called for him to drive he would do it.”

The motorcoach, purchased by the church two years ago, had passed its last required annual state inspection and was licensed for interstate trips, WRAL

reported.

However, “If the team was paying the church, (that) would make it a for-hire bus subject to commercial rules and inspections,” reported Time Warner Cable News in Charlotte. “The church isn’t licensed for that with the U.S. Department of Transportation and experts say any kind of chartering, particularly across state lines, automatically increases the church’s insurance liability by millions of dollars.”

The area’s media said church officials declined to talk with them and directed questions to its agent at Southern Mutual Church Insurance.

The church is classified as a “private passenger non-business” carrier on its “company snapshot” on the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration website. The

page indicates no vehicle or driver inspections have been conducted in the past 24 months. The church’s “licensing and insurance public” listing shows “No record found.”

The National Transportation Safety Board said it has launched an investigation into the accident.

“A lot of churches are buying their own equipment, thinking they are saving a lot of money,” said Garrett, vice president of Sunshine Travel & Express in Lancaster, S.C.

“Some of them don’t really need a bus — they like to see their name riding down the road.”

Garrett and his wife, Shirley, started their company in 1999 to support her travel business and own five motorcoaches.

“Churches are listed as not-for-hire carriers so they are not being inspected, but they are

charging people to ride their buses,” he said. “A lot of churches don’t have people with the knowledge to keep that equipment up.”

“I don’t blame them for trying to save money, but when they need a tire they buy one in the size they need and don’t realize the cheapest tire is not rated to go over 55 mph. The last two fatal motorcoach accidents in our area involved church buses that had tire failures.”

A tire intended for a trash truck running city routes also fits a motorcoach wheel, he said. “You can’t expect that tire to run down the highway at 70.”

The quality of church buses ranges from brand new to one step from salvage, Garrett said.

“Some of the megachurches are buying new coaches and those

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ►

Seatbelts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the motorcoach — it is a big, comfortable vehicle.”

The proposed Minnesota law would have subjected motorcoach drivers to fines and court costs of up to \$145 for each unbelted young passenger. Decades ago the state legislature passed a law that exempted school bus drivers from such a mandate because it was considered unsafe for drivers to monitor seatbelt compliance while they should be focused on safe vehicle operation.

In lobbying against the application of a seatbelt mandate to motorcoaches, Thielen said, Minnesota operators found no other state that had passed or considered such a passenger compliance law.

Remaining on the books is a Minnesota law mandating seatbelt usage by motorcoach passengers, he said.

“If law enforcement is so inclined, they can write a ticket to every passenger over 15 who isn’t wearing a seatbelt.”

He does not believe that is a workable approach to seatbelt compliance.

“It is totally unrealistic. I hate to use the word harassment, but I don’t want buses to be pulled over to see if the passengers are wearing seatbelts.”

Thielen believes safety briefings will boost belt usage but thinks stricter federal regulations are in the motorcoach industry’s future.

“The federal government has mandated that passengers in commercial trucks need to be wearing a seatbelt. Sooner or later the feds are going to get around to mandating seatbelt usage if the bus is equipped.”

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration recently announced an amendment to its pre-trip safety guidance recommending that the motorcoach industry encourage passengers to use lap/shoulder seatbelts.

FMCSA stated in the notice that its safety belt action has been presented as a guidance “because of the operational variances in the industry, making it inappropriate to apply one basic regulatory approach universally.”

Therefore, “FMCSA decided to allow motorcoach companies the flexibility to conduct pre-trip safety briefings that are tailored to each individual company’s overall safety and operational procedures.”

The notification lists two new recommendations for pre-trip safety presentations or literature:

“Require all passenger motor carrier operators to (1) provide passengers with pre-trip safety information that includes, at a minimum, a demonstration of the loca-

tion of all exits, explains how to operate the exits in an emergency, and emphasizes the importance of wearing seatbelts, if available; and (2) also place printed instructions in readily accessible locations for each passenger to help reinforce exit operation and seatbelt usage.”

The agency also encouraged operators to update their website guidance to include information on the mandated three-point restraints effective next month.

FMCSA’s amended pre-trip safety list now includes seven topics — emergency exits, seatbelts, making emergency contacts by calling 911 on cellphones, following driver directions, fire extinguishers, restroom emergency push button or switch, and avoiding slips and falls.

The guidance presents several examples for methods of presenting safety information, such as distributing printed information during boarding, providing a driver briefing or playing a recorded safety message over the motorcoach audio or video system.

Presentation timing may vary according to the nature of the trip or service, the guidance adds.

“Demand-responsive motorcoach operations, such as charters and tour services, should present the safety information to motorcoach passengers after boarding and prior to movement of the mo-

torcoach. Fixed route motorcoach service operations should present the safety information at all major stops or terminals, after any new passengers have boarded and prior to movement of the motorcoach.”

Tallman said any educational or enforcement effort that encourages the use of seatbelts is a good idea.

“Each company should establish a policy requiring seatbelt usage by their drivers and strongly encourage passengers to participate,” he said. “Adding this message to a pre-trip safety briefing could save lives.”

On the other hand, the safety benefits of mandatory belt installation and encouraging people to use them may be minimal, said Dennis Streif, vice president of Vandalia Bus Lines in Caseyville, Ill.

“Perhaps they could improve safety in some isolated accidents such as a rollover, but most motorcoach accidents are very minor,” Streif said.

Also, “very few” adult passengers buckle up, he said. “It is difficult to enforce and monitor by just a driver. Adult groups traveling in a charter bus will do what they care to do. A chartered motorcoach is not like a scheduled airplane flight that has people to monitor belt use.”

The safety belt dilemma could be long-lived, said Alan Thrasher of Thrasher Brothers Trailways in

Birmingham, Ala.

“Sure, they will improve safety if they are all worn during the extremely unlikely event of a catastrophic crash. In any minor collision usually the compartmentalization concept continues to work just fine,” he said. “I might see three or four people wear them on a casino trip. I’m told that teachers will get little kids to wear them, but high school, college and adult travelers rarely, if ever, use them.”

Thrasher said he doubts that regulations are a workable solution for buckling seatbelts.

“Regulations do not improve safety — they are only effective if they succeed in changing attitudes and habits. How can any law enforcement agency monitor seatbelt use on a bus?”

He is concerned about potential repercussions following an accident involving unused seatbelts.

“Could a bus company or driver be held liable if a passenger chooses not to wear a belt? How much money will lawyers make debating this question for the next 20 years?”

“Until we have laws and enforcement on par with the FAA and bus attendants to walk the aisle making sure everyone is buckled in under threat of arrest and removal, my belief is that they are too uncomfortable to wear for any long trip.”

Marcopolo sells 40-plus percent of its New Flyer shares

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — New Flyer Industries, corporate parent of Motor Coach Industries, announced that its largest stockholder, Marcopolo S.A., had sold 4.5 million shares of New Flyer.

The sale represented roughly 7.4 percent of the issued and outstanding common stock of New Flyer.

In a public disclosure, Brazil-based Marcopolo said a secondary share sale was made through a block trade arranged by a syndicate of underwriters led by CIBC Capital Markets. CIBC is an investment banking affiliate of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce of Toronto.

The buyer was not revealed.

The sale leaves Marcopolo with 6.6 million common shares of New Flyer, or about 10.8 percent of New Flyer's issued and outstanding stock.

Shares of New Flyer dipped more than 5 percent in the two days following the sale announcement. Still, the stock remains within 10 percent of its 52-week high.

Marcopolo's initial investment in New Flyer occurred more than three years ago and it remains the company's largest shareholder.

New Flyer said the sale allows Marcopolo to monetize a portion of its holdings for its own capital allocation purposes.

For its part, Marcopolo indicated the transaction was part of a corporate strategy that includes expansion of activity in export markets, reducing expenses and indirect costs, increasing operational efficiency through the adoption of LEAN concepts, and consolidation of Neobus after the acquisition of full control of that company early this year.

In 2014, Marcopolo sold 13,400

buses in Brazil, mostly for the over-the-road and urban segments. Neobus sold 3,000 vehicles, most in the microbus segment.

Marcopolo said its actions would further strengthen its competitiveness in both the Brazilian and world bus markets.

In a statement, New Flyer noted that it and Marcopolo have re-affirmed their ongoing commercial cooperation initiatives under their 2013 memorandum of understanding, pursuant to which the two companies have been exploring opportunities to cooperate

on engineering, technical, purchasing and operational matters, and assessing Marcopolo's technology and products for possible introduction into the Canadian and U.S. markets through New Flyer, as well as New Flyer's technology and products for potential distribution into global markets.

Marcopolo has eyed the North American market for more than a decade.

Paul Soubry, president and chief executive of New Flyer said, "Marcopolo has been an outstanding shareholder and partner of

New Flyer since their investment in the company in 2013. We look forward to continuing our successful relationship with Marcopolo, including continued investigation of opportunities for commercial cooperation under the memorandum of understanding between the companies."

Marcopolo said its chairman, Paulo Cezar da Silva Nunes, will continue as a member of the board of New Flyer.

Marcopolo S.A., based in the southern Brazilian city of Caxias do Sul, manufactures bodies for a whole range of buses, including midsize, transit, urban and school buses, plus intercity and touring coaches. It produces more than half of the bus bodies made in Brazil and exports its coaches to more than 60 countries.

New Flyer is the largest transit bus, motorcoach manufacturer and bus parts distributor in North America with fabrication, manufacturing, distribution and service centers in Canada and the U.S. It employs nearly 5,000.

MCI, the largest motorcoach manufacturer in North America, was acquired by New Flyer late last year.

More international tourists visit Canada

OTTAWA — International tourism to Canada is up significantly this year, with big jumps in visits from residents of the United States, China, South Korea and Mexico.

Figures released by Statistics Canada show international visits were up 11 per cent for the first seven months of 2016 compared with the same period last year, with about 11.2 million people traveling to the country.

Americans, by far the biggest source of foreign tourists to Canada,

made 7.9 million overnight trips to Canada between January and July, up 11 percent. About 3.3 million visitors came from other countries.

The biggest increase — 23 percent — came from China, which is now the third largest source of foreign tourists in Canada after the United States and Britain.

The volume of tourist travel to Canada has almost climbed back to the levels of the early 2000s. In the first seven months of 2001, almost 11.5 million people visited

Canada, a record that has not been hit since.

With a more favorable exchange rate, increased air access, lower visa requirements for several countries and a solid advertising and marketing effort, Canada has become more attractive.

"We are rowing with all oars," said David Goldstein, president of Destination Canada, the agency responsible for marketing Canadian travel outside the country. "We have hit a sweet spot as a destination."

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Daimler planning electric 'Future Bus'

HANOVER, Germany — Daimler has announced plans to introduce three electric vehicles, including a bus, with an eye toward improving urban transportation.

The Mercedes-Benz Future Bus, Urban eTruck and Vision Van — currently concept vehicles — will make urban transportation “more efficient, safer and connected,” said Wolfgang Bernhard, head of Daimler Trucks' global truck and bus division.

“In the coming 10 years, more will change in our vehicles than in

the past 120 years,” Bernhard said.

With studies showing that an estimated 70 percent of the world's population will reside in urban areas by 2050, Daimler is focusing on a three-part strategy to address the growing need to improve efficiency and environmental aspects of transportation for cities around the globe.

The company said its Future Bus utilizes “CityPilot,” an adaptation of the Highway Pilot system that is the basis of Daimler's autonomous trucks.

The company said CityPilot can drive safely through intersections equipped with traffic lights, detect pedestrians on the road and automatically brake in response to them. It also can drive up to bus stops, open and close doors automatically, and even drive through tunnels.

Urban eTruck offers a range of 124 miles and utilizes a lithium-ion type battery, and the Vision Van is part of an expanded strategy to provide enhanced last-mile delivery, which accounts for the majority of the total delivery cost.

Church bus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

will be all right for a few years. If they don't keep up the proper maintenance, they will start to have problems. Most churches in our area buy used buses. They can spend from \$5,000 on up to buy an old motorcoach.

“When New Jersey Transit replaced the vehicles in its fleet some of the old transit buses ended up with churches in this area. I hear they were sold for \$8,000 to \$10,000 but needed \$40,000 to \$50,000 to fix them up. All the parts that normally wear out needed to be replaced. But the churches thought they bought a bus and they were going to ride.”

Garrett also is worried about driver training. Some church bus drivers may have commercial driver's licenses but no experience operating a motorcoach.

“I know of one guy driving a church bus who didn't even have a CDL,” he said. “The churches are

not required to have any of the things we are expected to have, like driver files.”

He knows that some of his drivers do volunteer service for their churches. “They drive their church bus for free when they can, but they absolutely tell their churches that the bus should only be driven for a church activity.”

Leaders of many churches are not aware of federal regulations or the technical details of motorcoach maintenance and operation, Garrett said.

“I am not down on churches. I lead music in a church. They are not doing anything intentionally wrong,” he said. “They just don't know any better. When we try to warn them that things like this accident could happen to them, they just think we don't want any competition.”

However, he suspects that some churches are aware of the regulations but see opportunities to make money.

“Even if they take up a love of-

fering to cover expenses, that would be charging for the trip. They don't see anything wrong with that when we tell them about it.”

Garrett said he hadn't heard of Sandy River Baptist Church until the fatal crash.

“If I knew this guy was hauling passengers, I would have said something because it could have saved those lives,” he said. “These accidents give us all a black eye. Those fatalities go on the statistics for motorcoaches.”

The state motorcoach association often has encouraged federal and state inspectors to pay attention to South Carolina's church bus fleet, he said.

“They say they don't have the manpower to do it. It seems like they don't want to fool with it. I think the government has let the churches down by not having a program to indoctrinate them when they get a bus. I don't know how in the world the government would solve this problem but they need to do something.”

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16-18 California Bus Association 43rd Annual Convention & Trade Show, Westin Mission Hills Resort Golf & Spa, Rancho Mirage, Calif. www.cbabus.com.

23-25 Bus Association of New York Annual Meeting and Marketplace, Otesaga Resort, Cooperstown, N.Y. More information: www.banybus.org.

26-27 Greater New Jersey Motorcoach Association Fall Meeting & Marketplace, Harrah's Resort, Atlantic City, N.J. Info: www.gnjma.com.

30-Nov. 2 Ontario Motor Coach Association Marketplace, Scotiabank Convention Centre & Hilton Hotel and Suites Niagara Falls/Fallsview, Niagara Falls, Ont. Info: www.omca.com/event/marketplace.



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