

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Absentee Voting

States make it easier than ever

Attention drivers and others who spend lots of time on the road: Online registration and more voter-friendly laws are making it easier than ever to cast your ballot when you can't be home on Election Day.

If you are under the impression that voting for your favorite candidate is too laborious of a task because you'll be on the road Nov. 6, think again.

Online developments and laws for residents who can't get to their local polling places have made being a part of the democratic process less intimidating than in the past in most states.

"Absentee voting is much more accessible than it was a decade ago or even five years ago," says an official with Long Dis-

tance Voter, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. "The Internet has made it easier because of the ability to register online in many states."

Most states have two categories of pre-election voting: absentee ballot and early voting. Absentee voting is usually done by mail, though some states allow you to deliver a ballot in person at a designated location.

Early voting takes place at an election office or satellite polling location. It's sometimes referred to as early in-person voting, in-person absentee voting, one-stop voting or advance voting.

The District of Columbia and 32 states offer "no excuse" provisions for pre-election voting,

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Healthier drivers

Truck stops become health bastions

DALLAS — There are lots of things in life that can be bad for your health.

Overeating.

Avoiding exercise.

Getting too little restorative sleep.

And driving an over-the-road bus or truck.

Spending long hours behind the wheel, eating frequently in restaurants or fast-food joints, and not exercising enough aren't generally seen as the stuff of great health.

For drivers who recognize the risks their job presents, and are looking for help, they may just find it at the truck stops where they fuel up.

Gyms are being installed at an increasing number of truck stops across the U.S.

Besides the obvious benefits of getting into shape, there's an additional incentive for over-the-road drivers to shape up — their job might depend on their health.

Every two years, drivers must pass a physical exam required by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

During the exam they're checked for conditions that might cause them to become incapacitated — suddenly or gradually — while driving, including severe heart conditions, high blood pressure and respiratory disorders.

While there are no weight restrictions, a commercial driver who has been diagnosed with obstructive sleep apnea and isn't undergoing treatment will not get a medical certificate. Sleep apnea,

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Oh, Joy

More state weigh checks may be coming

It's not going to happen tomorrow, but motorcoach operators should be aware and wary that states across the U.S. are considering instituting requirements that all buses go through their weigh stations — like over-the-road trucks.

Some states currently include buses at weigh stations but that number could expand as a result of a weight-limit warning issued this past summer by the Federal Motor

Carrier Safety Administration. (See Sept. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The warning came after the fatal crash of a megabus.com coach in Illinois. The crash investigation pointed to a front-tire failure as the likely cause of the incident that killed one person and injured 47 others.

The FMCSA bulletin urged motorcoach companies to take steps to prevent tire failures by properly loading passengers and

cargo, and increasing pressure in tires on the rear axles to the maximum marked on the tires when buses are carrying heavy loads.

In its bulletin, which went to state motor carrier enforcement agencies across the U.S., the FMCSA noted that fully loaded double-deck coaches may be susceptible to overloading.

According to the agency, one common double-deck, three-axle

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Clash looming

ADA mandate vs. holiday travel demand

On Oct. 29, more than 30 large, fixed-route motorcoach operators are supposed to have 100 percent of their fleets accessible — 100 percent of the time — to individuals with disabilities. (See Oct. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

But less than a month beyond that date, a very practical test of the accessibility requirement will occur when tens of thousands of travelers attempt to board buses during the Thanksgiving holiday.

Thanksgiving has always been a "peak travel day" for the industry. Other high-traffic periods include the last day of college terms, the days around Christmas, and holiday weekends when many more people than usual travel.

Industry leaders and large fixed-route carriers that are required to meet the 100 percent accessibility deadline are concerned the industry will be unable to accommodate the extra passengers

during those times because of the accessibility requirement.

And that could impact scores of tour-and-charter bus operators that supply the line-run operators with extra buses during peak travel periods.

Peter Pantuso of the American Bus Association said some large carriers are applying to the U.S. Department of Transportation for time extensions to comply with

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Unbelievable

Rule violator lauded by USDOT secretary

WASHINGTON — There's fresh evidence for those who believe it doesn't make one wit of difference whether a Democrat or a Republican occupies the White House, the lunacy just rolls on unchecked and unabated.

Last month, Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood touted to high heaven the USDOT partnership with a public transit agency that has demonstrated time and again it is one of the most flagrant,

habitual and unrepentant charter rule violators in the U.S.

Writing in his blog, LaHood effusively related how River Cities Public Transit of Pierre, S.D., is "meeting the future with help from the (Federal Transit Administration)."

His posting came barely a month after the Federal Transit Administration posted a ruling on its website that found River Cities Public Transit had once again vio-

lated the federal charter service rule. (See Oct. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

For much of the past decade, River Cities Transit has blatantly violated federal charter service rules, both current regulations and the weaker preceding version.

And, for the better part of the past decade, the FTA has continued to dole out millions of dollars to River Cities Transit, blithely

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Charter rule question is raised by San Francisco 49ers shuttles

SAN FRANCISCO — An internet tour company that arranges shuttle bus service to San Francisco 49ers football games wants the Federal Transit Administration to make a determination whether game-day bus service provided by San Francisco's public transit agency violates the federal charter service rule.

Accelar of Sunnyvale, Calif., filed a formal request with the FTA, saying it believes express service provided by San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency to Candlestick Park for 49ers home games should be classified as charters — and therefore illegal — under the federal charter service rule.

In a response sent to the chief counsel of the FTA, San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera questioned whether Accelar has legal standing to request an advisory opinion from the FTA, and contended the service does not violate the charter service rule.

The assertion that Accelar has no legal standing is based on the fact Accelar is not registered as a private charter provider on the list maintained by the FTA to facilitate and enforce the charter service rule.

Herrera asserts that because Accelar is not on the list it has no legal standing to request an opinion from the FTA.

It is clear from past cases the FTA will

not consider a federal charter service "complaint" filed by a private operator that is not registered on the FTA list, but it is less clear whether the agency will respond to a request for an "advisory opinion" from an operator not on the list.

Regarding the issue of whether the shuttle service provided by San Francisco Muni is charter work, the FTA generally has been very clear in cases involving similar shuttles: Bus service provided by public transit agencies to professional football and baseball games are charters and violate the rule.

Herrera, like others who have represented public transit agencies elsewhere, claims that because 49er games have been scheduled and played at Candlestick Park for nearly 30 years, and because San Francisco Muni has provided service to them during that time, the games are not "for a limited duration" and, therefore, the service is not in violation of the charter rule.

The FTA has consistently said, however, that sporting events are not regular service and, therefore, violate the federal charter rule.

Kumar Shah, president and CEO of Accelar, said he is unconvinced by Herrera's assertion that Muni is not operating a charter service.

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Big New York Thruway toll hike is delayed; action after election?

ALBANY, N.Y. — The New York Thruway Authority apparently has tabled a controversial proposal to increase tolls by 45 percent for buses and trucks.

Broad opposition to the increase appears to have been a factor in the authority's decision to park the increase — for now.

News outlets throughout the state are suggesting the authority's action doesn't mean there won't be an increase, but they also report the delay has given some people hope a more modest increase may be in the offing.

"In the interim, business groups continue to blast the state Thruway Authority for what they say are its profligate ways and seeming indifference to how such an increase would harm upstate New York," reported the *Albany Times-Union*.

The tabled proposal would have boosted the toll to \$86.71, from \$59.42, for a three-axle motorcoach traveling from Newburgh, about 60 miles north of New York City, to Buffalo, a distance of about 375 miles.

Officials of the Thruway Authority have said little about their next move.

"We're still having some discussions with the board of directors about some of the input we received in some of the hearings we conducted statewide," Executive Director Thomas Madison told the *Binghamton Press & Sun-Bulletin*.

"We expect in the not-too-distant future to schedule a meeting and to move forward with some form of a toll adjustment."

He added that he has not received any "specific direction" from his board on the size of an increase.

Madison told the *Kingston Daily Freeman* the authority has identified \$100 million in operational savings and cut \$300 million from capital construction plans as part of a financial restructuring.

Godfrey LeBron, president of the Bus Association of New York, spoke against the toll proposal at a public hearing in late August.

A toll increase as large as 45 percent "goes against the state's desire for good public policy," LeBron said.

"Buses have proven to be an excellent way to travel — while reducing congestion, pollution and energy resources. If, as a society and government together, we are looking to put good public policy in place, it makes sense not to place such a discriminating and selective burden on the bus industry."

LeBron, who is vice president of Paradise Travel of Hicksville, N.Y., also contends such a large increase would discourage tourism in New York.

"We already get requests from customers to travel via New Jersey and Pennsylvania

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THE DOCKET

Study points to CSA shortcomings

Reforms also are suggested

ARLINGTON, Va. — New research finds that while some scores in the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Compliance, Safety, Accountability safety ratings program are accurate predictors of crash risk, others work in the opposite direction.

The report by the American Transportation Research Institute uses statistical analysis to examine how scores in CSA's five public BASICs relate to actual crash involvement.

It found a strong correlation between score and risk in three Behavior Analysis Safety Improvement Categories.

Scores in the Unsafe Driving, Fatigued Driving and Vehicle Maintenance BASICs are positively related to crashes, the report says.

But there is a negative relationship between score and risk in the Driver Fitness and Controlled Substances and Alcohol BASICs, says the report. In fact, the higher the score the lower the risk.

"ATRI's research identifies a key weakness in FMCSA's Safety Measurement System," said Scott Mugno, vice president of safety for FedEx Ground, in a statement.

"The conclusions in ATRI's study support what many motor carriers have found to be true in their operations — namely, that scores in the CSA Driver Fitness BASIC do not bear a statistical correlation to crash risk," he said.

"However, the industry has always supported CSA where it does reduce crash risk and ATRI's study validates that there are portions of CSA that are working as intended."

The Unsafe Driving BASIC provides the strongest indicator of risk.

A carrier with a score of 99 is about three times more likely, on average, to be involved in a crash compared to a carrier with a score of zero, the report says.

On the other hand, as the Driver Fitness score rises, the relative crash risk declines.

This led the ATRI researchers to conclude that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's method for calculating the percentile scores is incorrect.

"It is likely that FMCSA's severity weighting methodology places too much weight on safety irrelevant violations and too little weight on safety critical violations in (the Driver Fitness and Controlled Substances and Alcohol) BASICs."

Based on the findings, the in-

stitute suggested the agency consider changing the way it relays CSA information to the public.

Rather than using the percentile scoring system, the agency should show the carrier's relative safety status by placing it in one of three categories based on increasing risk.

The first category would be for carriers that have enough data in at least one BASIC, but no score. The second would be for carriers with scores in at least one BASIC, but no "Alerts" reflecting severe violations.

The third category would be broken down into five sub-groups, based on the number of "Alerts" a carrier has.

The agency could continue to use percentile scores for internal purposes, but this approach to public data would address concerns about taking the wrong message about a carrier's safety risk from the BASIC data now on the agency's website, the report says.

Separately, it was reported that the FMCSA CSA program tops the American Transportation Research Institute list of top 10 critical issues facing the North American trucking industry.

It was the first time CSA has topped ATRI's annual survey of more than 4,000 trucking industry executives.

Informal checks may get CSA credit

WASHINGTON — Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration officials reportedly are exploring ways for motor carriers to begin getting credit for "good" inspector screenings and violation-free wireless inspections.

The agency is aware of motor carrier concerns that when drivers are screened but not given a formal inspection, neither they nor their carrier receives credit in the Compliance, Safety, Accountability program for no violations, according to Bill Quade, the agency's associate administrator.

The same is true for wireless inspections, Quade adds.

"Because it's like an inspection, it's a snapshot of key elements of your compliance," Quade said of wireless inspections. "The screening can be seen the same way. Capturing it is a challenge, but it's a challenge we should be

willing to undertake."

"If I drive by a wireless inspection eight times, 10 times, and there's nothing on the infrared screen that says my brakes are bad, do I deserve a little credit for this? Probably. How much? When? How do we mark that? How do we note it? We are willing to look at those types of issues, and say eventually, yes."

However, Quade cautions that carriers should not expect any formal actions in the next round of CSA changes expected early next year.

Carriers report it's a fairly common practice for inspectors to do spot checks of drivers' licenses, registrations, medical cards and maybe even browse through log books — and then send drivers on their way without doing any paperwork.

Those who contend that opera-

tors should get credit for these checks say it is a legitimate issue and important.

The reason it's significant is that CSA scores are comparative, based on measures that are basically a ratio of the number of violations to the number of inspections.

Before the advent of the CSA program in 2010, such brief screenings were not regarded as a significant concern. But, with carriers now closely watching their CSA safety scores, every good inspection can mean the difference between an overall good safety rating and an unwelcome letter or visit from FMCSA auditors.

The issue is especially significant for small bus and truck operators.

That's because there is no opportunity to have clean inspections in the same proportion as small operators have bad inspections.

Bus, truck operators benefit by FMCSA PSP innovation

WASHINGTON — It isn't often the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is seen as innovative and cutting-edge.

But in the world of bumbling, multilayered, stand-in-line-until-your-arches-collapse government bureaucracies, the FMCSA Pre-Employment Screening Program stands out.

It is one of far-too-few eGovernment portals that take citizens directly to government services and data through a self-pay fee system.

In the case of the FMCSA PSP system, bus and truck operators, with the driver's consent, can access three years of crash history and five years of roadside/destination inspection history for a commercial driver.

The system bypasses bureaucracy and delivers driver background information directly to bus and truck companies.

For a fee of \$10 per request, or \$100 a year (discounted for small companies), bus and truck operators have nearly instant access to driving records of potential hires.

No federal appropriation was required to set up the service, and it doesn't come out of the agency's budget. The service is paid for entirely by the access fee.

"The 'no-cost' contract (with a private supplier) has created a

'win-win' public-private partnership," the FMCSA said in a prepared response to questions about the service.

"For the FMCSA, the agency was able to fulfill a statutory mandate with minimal impact on agency resources. For the (commercial vehicle) industry, PSP allows it to instantly access driver safety records via a secure online portal."

Currently, only two federal agencies, the FMCSA and the Federal Election Commission, reportedly use such a pass-through process. But the FMCSA suggests that other entities could benefit from a similar process.

According to a study conducted earlier this year by NIC Inc., a private company that provides e-Government services, 67 percent of those surveyed said they would rather pay a \$1 to \$5 fee to use a web-based government service than stand in line at a government agency office.

NIC, the company that runs the FMCSA PSP system, automated a formerly paper process that was only available through a formal Freedom of Information Act request, which is a costly and time-consuming process.

To learn more about the Pre-Employment Screening Program, go to www.psp.fmcsa.dot.gov.

FMCSA expands PSP scope

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has introduced an expanded version of its Pre-Employment Screening Program, making it easier for more bus and truck operators, with the driver's consent, to access PSP records.

A PSP record includes three years of crash history and five years of roadside/destination inspection history for a commercial driver.

PSP is now available to eligible intrastate motor carriers and companies directly involved in the pre-employment screening

and hiring of commercial drivers.

The program expansion means important driver safety data is more easily available to companies that are responsible for hiring the drivers that get behind the wheel of many large trucks and buses.

FMCSA also launched an iPhone application for PSP.

Account holders can access a PSP dashboard on an iPhone or iPad, and review a PSP record in a mobile-friendly format.

The application is available for free download by searching "DOT PSP" in the Apple iTunes store.

Critics of CSA have been trying, for the past two years, to figure a way that carriers could accumulate clean inspections to balance the tickets operators receive.

In response to concerns, the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alli-

ance appointed a working group last year to study ways carriers and drivers could get extra credit for actions ranging from installing safety technologies to voluntarily implementing company hair testing for drugs.

Congress acts

Military can now obtain CDLs easier

WASHINGTON — Congress has passed legislation that will let states issue commercial driver's licenses to military personnel in the state where the soldier or sailor is stationed, instead of in their home state.

The Military Commercial Drivers License Act of 2012 is expected to ease the transition of recent veterans into jobs as commercial drivers in the private sector.

Rep. Larry Bucshon, R-Ind., sponsored the House version of the bill, which was identical to a Senate measure, along with Mike Quigley, D-Ill., and John Carney, D-Del.

The bill removes a thorny barrier which many members of the military face: the barring of the issuance of a CDL to an individual who is not a legal resident of the state.

By carving out an exception for individuals who are stationed, temporarily or permanently, in a state due to military service, the bill moves toward the goal of ensuring that no one who has served will be unable to get a CDL because of where they live.

The legislation was supported by a wide array of groups and organizations.

The lead sponsor of the Senate version was Sen. Olympia Snowe, D-Maine.

Co-sponsoring the bill were Sens. Mark Begich, D-Ark.; Scott Brown, R-Mass.; Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio; James Inhofe, R-Okla.; Johnny Isakson, R-Ga.; Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn.; Jerry Moran, R-Kan.; Patty Murray, D-Wash.; Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., and Marco Rubio, R-Fla.

Snowe said it was "unacceptable that so many veterans, especially those recently returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, have found themselves unable to successfully enter civilian professions for which they have already received world-class training."

A number of states also are adopting programs or initiatives aimed at helping military personnel train for jobs as commercial vehicle drivers. (See June 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

One of the latest is West Virginia where the state National Guard and the state departments

of education and transportation are assisting veterans with experience driving large vehicles and other equipment obtain their commercial driver's licenses.

A pilot program in West Virginia will let 20 National Guard members get the necessary physical exams and additional CDL classroom and skills training for free at the Fred W. Eberle Technical Center in Upshur County.

Division of Motor Vehicle examiners also will travel to the center to administer license tests instead of requiring participants to travel to the DMV. It means the veterans will receive licenses in weeks instead of months.

Meanwhile, the nonprofit American Jobs for America's Heroes campaign is stepping up efforts to find jobs for unemployed National Guard members.

The campaign is being implemented at the request of and in collaboration with National Guard headquarters in Washington, and is supported by a nonprofit group called Center for America, which works to educate and motivate Americans to expand skills and

California operators win CHiPs 'STAR' awards

ONTARIO, Calif. — Two California motorcoach operators have been named 2012 winners of the private motor carrier safety award presented by the California Highway Patrol.

One of the winners, Pacific Coachways Trailways of Garden Grove, has won the award both times it has been given.

The award was created two years ago by the California Highway Patrol to recognize private carriers — both bus and truck operators — that make safety the top priority in their operations.

The STAR Award, as it is called, stands for Safe Transportation Achievement Recognition.

The initial awards were presented during the California Highway Patrol 2010 Commercial Vehicle Safety Summit, an educational seminar. The summit was not conducted last year because of budget restrictions.

Through the campaign, companies can post open jobs at no charge for the National Guard's estimated 60,000 unemployed members.

Steve Nowlan, president of the Roswell, Ga.-based Center for

cause of budget restrictions.

At this year's summit here, Pacific Coachways Trailways won the motorcoach, medium-fleet size award. That's the same category it won two years ago.

The motorcoach, large-fleet award winner this year was Bauer's Intelligent Transportation of San Francisco.

Both Bauer's and Pacific Coachways have been in business for 23 years.

In presenting the awards, California Highway Patrol Commissioner Joe Farrow said the patrol was pleased to recognize the two companies for "their exemplary commitment to safety."

The STAR Award program has three categories for bus operators: 1-10 buses, 11-25 buses and operators with 26 or more buses. The award was not presented this year in the small operator category.

America says the program offers benefits to companies that participate, including:

- Job postings are plugged directly into the National Guard Employment Network.
- Register at www.CenterForAmerica.org/register.html.



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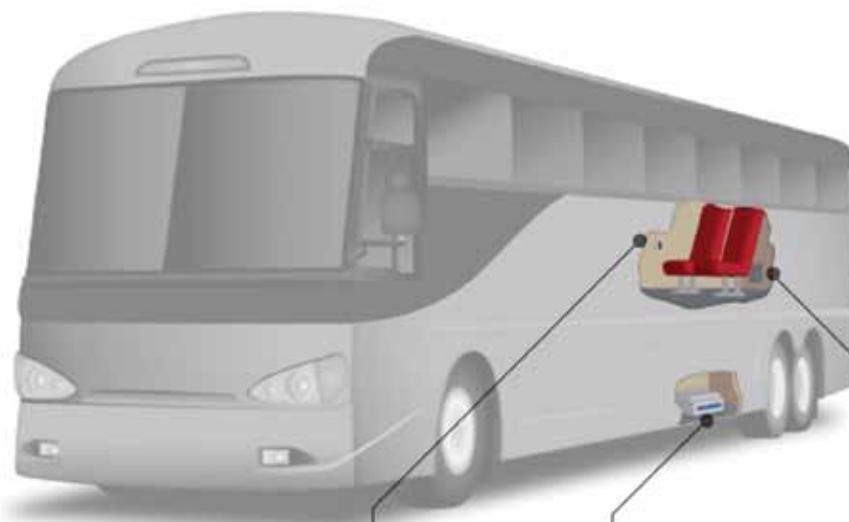
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Casino waiver sought in Kansas

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The United Motorcoach Association has appealed to officials in Kansas to exempt motorcoach and tour operators from having to purchase an expensive license to bring groups to Kansas casinos.

In a letter to Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback and Kansas Racing and Gaming Commission Executive Director Richard Peterson-Klein, UMA President and CEO Victor Parra asked that coach and tour operators be designated as “non-gaming suppliers.”

Currently, companies delivering groups to Kansas casinos are required to have what is called a Level 1 Gaming Supplier License.

Parra pointed out in his letter that the \$5,000-\$10,000 cost to obtain the license “would adversely

impact motorcoach and tour operations by causing charter groups, tours and scheduled-service operators to choose casino and gaming venues outside of Kansas.”

Kansas is surrounded by states that also have casinos, including two that have casinos right across the state line.

Parra’s letter suggested the license is a form of regulation that’s prohibited by federal law.

“The preponderance of motorcoach operating companies are regulated by the United States Department of Transportation; more specifically, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration,” wrote Parra.

“Each registered passenger carrier must file evidence of \$5 million of liability (insurance) and

subject themselves to rigorous safety audits.”

He noted that a section of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century contains a provision that says “no state or political subdivision thereof... shall enact or enforce any law, rule, regulation, standard, or other provision having the force and effect of law relating to... the authority to provide intrastate or interstate charter bus transportation.”

Parra also noted that were a waiver granted from the Level 1 License, all payments to motorcoach operators, for example, those made by casinos, still would be tracked and recorded under state regulations. That’s an important consideration to states that attempt to track every penny handled by casinos.

Pennsylvania: Targets ‘irresponsible’ drivers

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Drivers in Pennsylvania who fail to take care of debts owed for incidents of bad driving could soon be out of luck when it comes time to renew their driver’s license.

The state senate voted 46-3 to advance a bill to the governor that is supposed to help the state col-

lect about \$90 million for victims of driving-related offenses through restitution.

House lawmakers had earlier approved the bill — HB1617 — by unanimous consent.

State law requires a minimum 50 percent of payments made by a defendant to be applied to restitution.

The measure would allow Pennsylvania courts to suspend the driver’s license of any defendant failing to pay full restitution for such incidents as crashing into a building.

Sponsors of the legislation say it gives the courts another tool to make people responsible for their irresponsible actions.

Arkansas: Roads tax on ballot

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Arkansas voters will decide next month whether to raise a statewide tax to pay for new roadways.

In the Nov. 6 general election, voters will determine the fate of a proposed constitutional amendment for a 10-year, one-half percent state sales tax increase to finance a \$1.8 billion bond issue to build a four-lane highway system connecting all corners of the state.

Also on the ballot will be:

- A proposed initiative to authorize the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes.

- Two proposals to allow casino gambling in the state.

Construction under the ballot measure would focus primarily on creating a statewide four-lane grid

and adding capacity to existing four-lane highways.

Some of the larger and more expensive projects planned include widening Interstate 540 to six lanes from Fayetteville; widening Arkansas 18 from Jonesboro east to I-55; expanding U.S. 412 to four lanes between Walnut Ridge and Paragould; widening U.S. 67-167 between Jacksonville and Cabot; widening I-40 from Little Rock to Conway; replacing the I-30 bridge over the Arkansas River; and widening U.S. 70 from I-30 to Hot Springs.

The highway proposal was referred to the ballot by the Legislature in 2011.

It is supported by Gov. Mike Beebe, a Democrat.

Tennessee: Highway to open

LEBANON, Tenn. — A road construction project that has been on the books in Tennessee for 26 years will officially be completed Nov. 2.

That’s when 78-mile-long State Route 840, from Lebanon to Dickson, opens.

Residents of Middle Tennessee have watched the slow development and building of the road-

way since 1986. It will connect many of the communities through southern Middle Tennessee.

Gov. Bill Haslam and Tennessee Department of Transportation Commissioner John Schroer have invited former governors and transportation commissioners from the past quarter century to attend the grand opening.




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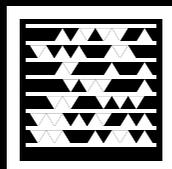
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Tips for better managing rising health insurance costs

By Linda Doell

Health insurance costs for small- to medium-sized businesses continue to go up, and companies are responding by passing along the higher costs to their employees as a way to cope with the increases.

In the 2012 Employer Health Benefits Survey, the Kaiser Family Foundation/Health Research & Education Trust found that annual premiums for family health coverage had gone up 4 percent this year, to \$15,745, outpacing the country's general inflation rate of 2.3 percent.

The survey also found that smaller businesses were less likely to offer health coverage.

The survey included 2,121 respondents from 3,326 randomly selected public and private companies.

Of those that responded, 61 percent offered health benefits to

their workers.

Smaller companies were less likely to offer coverage, with 50 percent of employers with three to nine workers offering insurance.

So, what can you do to reduce health care-coverage costs at your business? Here are some possibilities.

Reduce coverage

Worker health coverage can be a staggering cost. So, adjusting what coverage is offered can help control costs.

Higher deductible plans are generally less expensive than those with less out-of-pocket costs.

Insurance carriers also offer lower rates for less coverage, or for covering just employees.

For worker-only coverage, the survey found those costs increased 3 percent this year to \$5,615, and workers on average pay \$951 toward the coverage.

Offer wellness programs

A 2003 U.S. Health and Human Services report showed that while 80 percent of workplaces with 50 or more employees offered some kind of health improvement program, the programs varied widely from business to business.

Some employers chose to focus on one health risk factor such as smoking, while others offered a wide range of resources.

Businesses have reported saving money by paying out less for sick time and health care costs when they've offered wellness programs.

One large company, for example, estimated it saved \$949 in health care costs for each employee who quit smoking during a 12-month smoking cessation program it offered. Those savings were a 9.5-to-1 return on its investment.

In recent years, employers have begun to make workers who

smoke pay more in employee contributions for their health care costs.

Apply for tax credit

The U.S. General Accountability Office, in a survey, found that most small businesses that may qualify for a federal health care insurance tax credit haven't applied for it because of the requirements for the program put into place under the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare.

The GAO study showed that up to 4 million small businesses could have applied for the tax credit to offset the cost of offering health insurance to their workers, yet only 170,300 took advantage of the program.

Of those small businesses that did apply, most received only a partial subsidy because they, or their workers, didn't fit the criteria for the full subsidy.

In looking into the issue, the

GAO learned that for many small business owners, the tax credit wasn't a large enough incentive to go through the application process. Still, it is an avenue worth exploring for your business because it could save money.

Shop around

Just because you've been using one insurance company doesn't mean there isn't a better deal to be had with another.

The Kaiser report showed 54 percent of employers who offered health benefits had shopped around for new coverage. Of those, 18 percent switched carriers and 27 percent changed the type of plans they offered.

While health insurance can be costly, it can be made a bit more affordable.

Linda Doell is a journalist with more than 20 years' experience as a reporter, editor and blogger.

Legal mistakes small businesses make; how to avoid them

By Mark Di Vincenzo

The most common legal mistake that small- and medium-size businesses make is not thinking enough about legal issues.

The five widespread mistakes that follow all have that in common.

Generally, legal matters are an afterthought — if they are given any thought at all — and it often costs businesses a lot of time and money to clean up the mess that results.

The fact is, small and medium businesses make a lot of legal mistakes, but here are the most common ones.

They don't know the law. There are lots of laws, and business people can't be expected to know the

ins and outs of all of them. But they should have some understanding of the facets of business law that affect them, such as contractual law, employer-employee law, copyrights and trademarks, and securities laws, among others.

They don't understand the documents they sign. And they often don't understand the obligations they have as a result of signing those documents.

One attorney offered this example: "I had a client whose business was going under, and he said, 'I'm leasing this copier. Can I get out of the contract?' Well, the contract clearly states that he is obligated for several more years. It's really hard when business people

don't know what they're signing."

They cut corners on legal advice. A lot of small and medium businesses have no choice but to be frugal, and they may choose not to hire a lawyer when that would be the wise thing to do.

"This is huge, absolutely huge," said an attorney who works with businesses that don't have in-house legal counsel. "Some business folks are penny wise and pound foolish, and they don't know what they don't know, and it creates big problems for them."

They do business without adequate legal documents. This applies to contracts with customers, as well as operating agreements, which are equivalent to "a prenup for a busi-

ness or a will," said the attorney.

"You should want to have control over what happens to your business if something does not go as planned, just as you should want to have control regarding your marriage or your estate."

Small businesses are more likely to enter into oral contracts with customers because they are happy to get some business and may think they will jeopardize the business if they require the customer to sign a contract. This is foolish.

They neglect intellectual property issues. This includes registering copyrights, trademarks, and logos. Business people need to make sure they are protected by protecting their intellectual prop-

erty, including and especially if they have partners.

"I had a client who was a partner in a company that went under," said an attorney, "and some time later he wanted to use the trademark, but he couldn't because the trademark was in his partner's name alone, not in both names and not in the name of the business."

If you're running a business, you can't overlook or neglect these and other legal matters. One legal mistake can cost you your business, so make sure you do the necessary research or hire someone who will do it for you.

Mark Di Vincenzo is a journalist with 24 years of experience and an author.

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State unemployment funds: Still in the red, still a burden

Puzzled why your state keeps raising unemployment insurance taxes even though the economy continues to expand — albeit at a slow pace?

The reason is fairly simple: More than \$26 billion in lingering debt and billions more in mounting interest have forced a number of states to scale back unemployment benefits, raise taxes, tap general funds and even turn to the private bond market as they look to shore up unemployment insurance trust funds that plunged into the red during the Great Recession.

And now, years removed from the depth of the crisis, there's concern some of funds are being refilled so slowly — if at all — that certain states could be in an even worse position when the next downturn comes, compounding a problem that's plagued them for years.

On Sept. 30, 18 states and the Virgin Islands paid about \$2 billion in interest to the federal government to cover debts remaining from tens of billions in loans taken during the worst of the Great Recession to cover shortfalls in trust funds.

The payment, and the debts themselves, have gained little no-

tice outside a small circle of analysts, state officials and federal actuaries.

But the fact is that states still have \$26 billion in debts, and some say the longer the red ink remains, the harder it will be for them to climb back into solvency.

"The states have a fundamental problem: They're not funding these trust funds appropriately," says Mike Evangelist of the National Employment Law Project. "You just keep digging the hole deeper, you keep losing more. It is a compounding problem."

Designed to cover unemployment benefits, the trust funds ebb and flow with the economy. The funds comprise taxes on both employers and wages, and ideally would remain flush during a strong economy and be drawn down when unemployment spikes.

But that didn't happen before the Great Recession, or downturns before it.

As the National Employment Law Project found, 31 states cut unemployment insurance taxes by at least a fifth from 1995 to 2005. Making matters worse, the average contribution to funds hit historical lows from 2000 to 2009.

Heavy borrowing

All told, states borrowed nearly \$50 billion from Washington during the recession to cover jobless benefits. That figure's been halved in the years since, but many still have significant debt, and many are still borrowing.

And, as the economy continues to grow slowly, with the threat of another dip into recession always present, some are sounding the alarm that this is just the latest example in a long trend of mismanagement.

Some states weathered the Great Recession's toll on their funds with stimulus-backed, interest-free federal loans. But those ended in 2010, and a year later states still owed nearly \$40 billion.

Today, many big states have substantial debts. California, for example, has nearly \$10 billion, while New York has \$3.1 billion. North Carolina stands at nearly \$2.5 billion, while Ohio and Indiana are carrying more than \$1.7 billion each.

Historically low interest rates have kept costs manageable. But many states have automatic business tax hikes that go into effect if

states fail to pay back their debts.

Benefits being cut

Others have slashed benefits: Florida linked benefits to the state's unemployment rate in an effort to cut costs, reduce benefits and replenish its fund. That's meant some of the most restrictive unemployment benefits in the country, but it has also helped to reduce its debt by more than \$1 billion since August 2011.

"They're imposing sacrifices on claimants because of the debts," said Wayne Vroman of the Urban Institute, who has studied state unemployment trust funds. "States are being quite slow in paying things off, and in some cases they're putting off their payments."

An increasing number of states have also turned to a relatively novel — and controversial — approach to cover their debts: the private bond market. So far, six states have issued bonds for their debt, totaling nearly \$10 billion, on top of the \$26 billion owed to the federal government.

More are expected to take that approach. The hope is that they'll get better terms from private investors, and so far, credit rating

agencies have viewed the bonds favorably. But some say the private market simply offers a false sense of fiscal security.

The Urban Institute's Vroman calls the number of states turning to the private market "unprecedented."

"Basically they've swapped one form of debt for another," he says. "The problem is what the states are doing to their own funds."

Not enough reserves

And that remains the problem. Just as insufficient reserves cost states ahead of the Great Recession, some are now in an even weaker position should another downturn take hold.

"The fact is that there's going to be another recession in the near future, and we'll be right back where we were," Evangelist says. "You just keep moving backward."

The news isn't all dire. There are states that have reduced their debts. New Hampshire, for example, was facing a nearly insolvent fund during the recession and instituted an emergency surcharge to close the gap. The charge was repealed last month. Others managed to avoid borrowing entirely.

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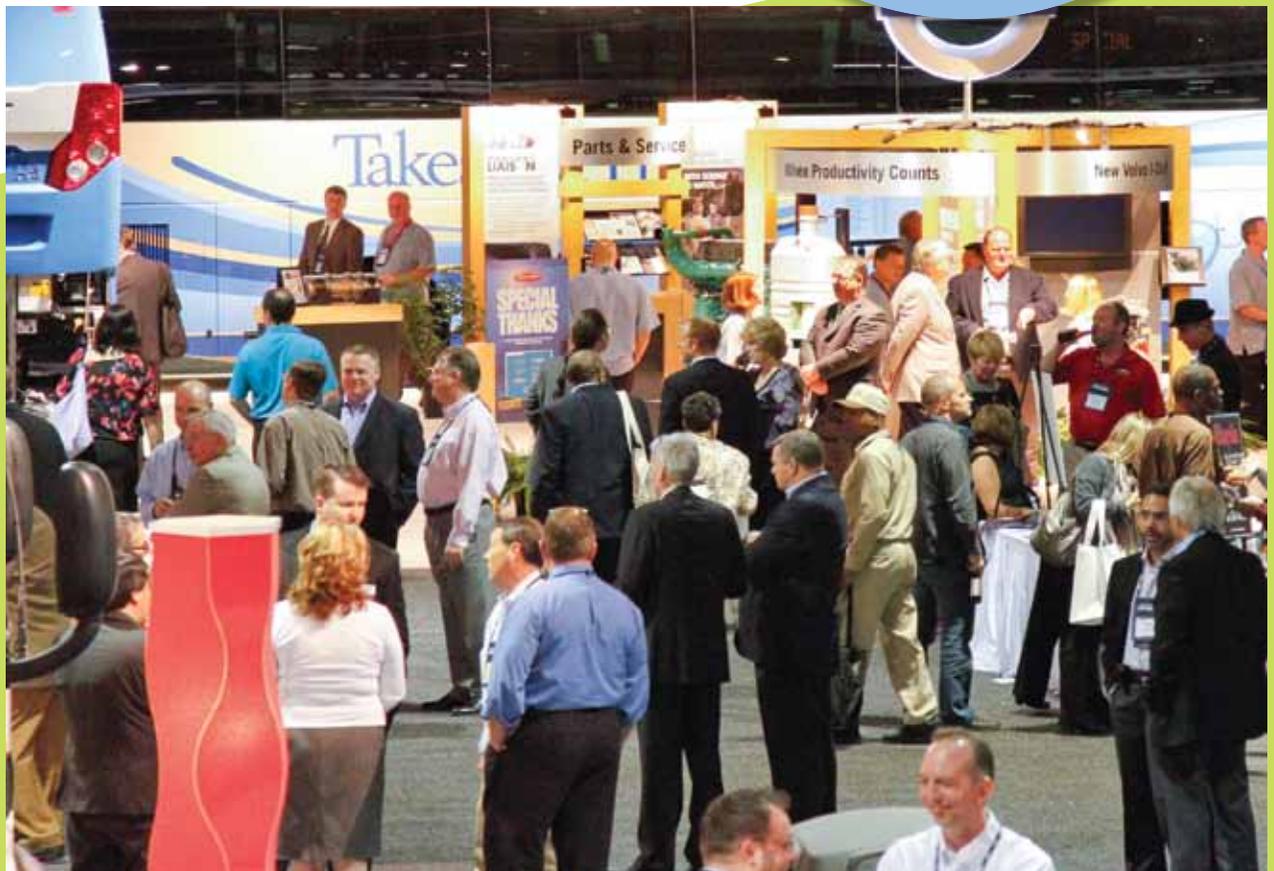


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ADA clash

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the Americans with Disabilities Act to “address the huge swell in the number of coaches that are required during peak holiday periods.”

In the past, he said, it was common practice for the large scheduled-service carriers to meet demand during peak travel periods by leasing buses from tour-and-charter companies, which are not required to own wheelchair lift-equipped buses.

Meeting demand

“The challenge is going to be, how do you meet the incredible demand that takes place during these peak periods and supply the customers who need transportation, if the buses you don’t own have got to be lift equipped and there’s no availability in the marketplace?” he asked.

Pantuso said the intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act was to provide accessible service to individuals with disabilities, and carriers are doing so by using wheelchair lift-equipped buses.

But if carriers are unable to lease extra lift-equipped buses during peak travel periods, “you are leaving potentially millions of people behind who won’t have access to motorcoach transportation,” he said.

“You’re not leaving anybody behind who doesn’t have access to the bus because they need a wheelchair lift-equipped bus. You’re



leaving a lot of people behind who just need basic transportation,” he noted.

In July, the ABA tried one approach to resolve the problem in a letter to U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood.

The letter argued the extra holiday service, using leased buses, or “extra sections,” should be considered demand-responsive and thus exempt from the 100 percent accessible requirement.

“ABA’s position is that only the first section on a given schedule is the “scheduled” or “fixed-route” bus since it is the only bus that will depart regardless of demand and the only one that operates along a prescribed route, according to a fixed schedule regardless of passenger demand. Any extra sections would be provided based solely on the demand of passengers on that day at that time, and therefore those extra sections are demand-responsive service for the purposes of the

ADA rule,” the ABA letter said.

Roundly rebuffed

That argument was soundly rebuffed in a response from a USDOT attorney. He wrote:

“When an individual buys a ticket for a bus that is scheduled to leave a location at a certain time and proceed along a route to a specified destination, that ticket is for fixed-route transportation, even if that ticket is for transportation occurring at a heavy traffic time. . . . Service along a prescribed route according to a fixed schedule is the hallmark of a fixed-route system. . . .” said the USDOT letter.

Patuso said it could be a dismal holiday season for some bus travelers if the extensions are denied.

“The average traveling public doesn’t know the details of compliance and regulations and rules,” he said. “They’re going to show up on the Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving, and expect a trip as they have for years and years.

“Where there may have been almost an unlimited amount of vehicles to accommodate them (in the past), there may only be one this time.”

He added that those travelers are not the only ones who may lose out.

“It’s a tremendous amount of lost revenue and business opportunity to the charter-and-tour businesses, many of whom have chartered to all the fixed-route carriers and scheduled carriers and sometimes commuters during those peak periods,” he said.

coaches.

“I suspect the FMCSA letter got all the states stirred up and I suspect many questioned ‘why aren’t we inspecting coaches?’” said one industry executive who monitors industry safety issues and the FMCSA.

“I look for more to jump into the fray.”

The issue surfaced in late September at the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance Annual Conference and Exhibition in Portland, Maine.

Officials from two states, North Carolina and Kentucky, indicated publicly they were looking at the issue.

Contacted later, officials from the North Carolina Highway Patrol Motor Carrier Enforcement Administration were vague about their plans, telling *Bus & Motorcoach News* they “might look at a pilot” program to check motorcoaches at state weigh stations.

North Carolina has eight weigh stations, two on Interstate 40, two on I-95, and one each on I-40/I-85, I-85, I-77 and I-26.

The North Carolina officials indicated it would be a year or longer before anything happens.

Kentucky also is considering the idea and its timetable is believed to be medium term as well.

One impediment to quick action by states is a requirement in the latest federal highway and public transportation law that says states must provide accommodations to passengers if buses are weighed and taken out of service.

That mandate could cool the ardor of states to jump on the weighing-coaches bandwagon. Just three sidelined megabus.com coaches could easily result in a crowd of more than 200 unhappy individuals.

Still, overweight coaches are a significant safety risk.

According to the FMCSA, a tire on a motorcoach loaded beyond its weight rating, operated at highway speeds for a significant period of time, is more likely to overheat and fail, potentially placing the safety of passengers and other motorists at risk.

‘River Cities team is meeting that challenge thanks in part to \$5 million in support from our Federal Transit Administration.’



Ray LaHood

LaHood’s leap

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ignoring the agency’s repeated violations and failing to exercise any meaningful oversight or show any investigative initiative, despite numerous complaints. (See March 15, 2007, Jan. 1, 2008, and June 15, 2009, issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Instead, the agency has erected mountainous barriers to private operators bringing charter service complaints.

But all that didn’t deter LaHood from lauding the chronic rules’ violator.

“When most Americans think about public transit, they think about cities and dense populations,” said LaHood. “Legacy subways and elevated trains in older systems like New York and Chicago, light rail in fast-growing cities like Charlotte and Phoenix.

“But this morning I toured the recently modernized River Cities Public Transit Facility in Pierre, South Dakota. This system has a remarkable service radius of 100 miles, and that means a service area of bus and transit vans covering more than 31,000 square miles.

technology to better monitor and track vehicles and keep them on schedule,” extolled LaHood.

Cha ching, cha ching

“The FTA has also provided money to help replace aging buses and minivans and to improve transit for the area’s veterans.

“If you’re waiting for a bus in the cold of a high plains South Dakota winter, a system that keeps its vehicles well-maintained and as close to on-schedule as possible is an absolute lifeline.”

And, of course, LaHood, who won’t be around after Jan. 20, regardless of who wins the election, couldn’t pass up an opportunity to hype the money tree that is Washington and the FTA.

“When people need to ride transit to get to work, school, medical services, and elsewhere, the Obama Administration has been there to help. We know that investments in public transit are good for communities and good for the economy.

“Transit opens up new economic opportunities for generations to come and reduces fuel costs for local taxpayers. I saw it today in Pierre; we’ve seen it in cities, towns and rural areas across the nation.

Weight enforcement

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

coach (Van Hool) has a gross vehicle weight rating of between 53,000 and 61,000 pounds.

“A fully-loaded, double-deck motorcoach at or near the maximum number of passengers, and a maximum luggage load, could exceed this GVWR, one or more gross axle-weight limits, or the tire weight ratings,” said the FMCSA.

It also is widely thought that several models of single-deck, conventional 45-foot motorcoaches also may exceed their gross vehicle weight rating when fully loaded.

The FMCSA said its “Motorcoach Safety Advisory Bulletin” is meant to raise awareness of the issue within the bus industry, and it urged companies to take action to prevent potential safety risks.

While the warning was aimed at motorcoach operators, the bulletin also appears to have prompted many state motor carrier safety units to consider weighing

Cha ching

“Local public transit is tremendously important for many residents living and working in Pierre and the surrounding region. Serving 11 different counties, including seniors, people with disabilities, veterans and the Cheyenne River and Lower Brule Sioux tribes, is a real challenge, but the River Cities team is meeting that challenge thanks in part to \$5 million in support from our Federal Transit Administration.

“And this morning I was thrilled to see the difference those grants are making to the people in central South Dakota,” LaHood wrote.

“Ridership on River Cities Public Transit has grown more than six-fold over the last five years, making the upgrades to the system more important than ever before.

“The transit facility used FTA funding to create maintenance space to service nearly 100 buses and other transit vehicles in the River Cities fleet. It also has a new dispatch center with upgraded computer scheduling and GPS

BIG cha ching

“This summer, President Obama signed into law a new transportation bill. This bill, called MAP-21, does good things for transit across the country. . . . In total, it provides \$21 billion for improving transit systems across the country, funding a true needs-based approach for bringing our bus and rail systems into a state-of-good-repair,” LaHood asserted.

“The FTA’s commitment to public transit in South Dakota and across the U.S. is just one part of this administration’s commitment to investing in a 21st century transportation network that meets the needs of all Americans.

“Working together with partners like River Cities Public Transit, we will continue doing exactly that.”

One long-time industry executive summed up LaHood’s web posting with a single word: “Unbelievable.”

Others might contend it’s just business as usual in the nation’s capital.

If bus inspections are a waste, why do we fail so often?

By Dave Millhouser

"Get out there...and get hurt" said my coach.

I wasn't very good and the other team had a star who was running all over us.

The kicker (pun intended) was that the refs were letting him get away with murder. He was all knees and elbows, with officials either missing or ignoring it.

My job was to be clobbered, visibly, in front of a ref, and draw a penalty.

Athletes know the rules aren't what's written...they're what the officials are "calling." My coach wanted to force them to recognize significant bad behavior.

We have a similar situation in the motorcoach industry.

Many complain that destination and roadside inspections are inconvenient, and contribute little to improving safety. I'm one of those who agree that you can't "inspect" your way to safety.

Since most private bus inspections occur at destinations, some carriers avoid them, leaving the hassle to folks who try to play by the rules. Many operators feel inspectors have a pathological need to find "something" to justify their

existence.

Recently, a bus executive told a friend that the inspections were "witch hunts."

My friend pointed out that, unfortunately, the inspectors were finding witches.

Roadcheck, for example, is an annual event which is well publicized beforehand. This year, 8.6 percent of the coaches inspected were put out of service. That was down from 12.3 percent in 2007, but would you fly if those statistics prevailed in the airline industry?

These are "out-of-service," not tiny weenie, offenses.

The point is that, if we think these things are silly, we need to pass these inspections at a higher rate. Regulators will then look elsewhere for witches. If 8.6 percent of the good guys are failing predictable inspections, imagine what is happening elsewhere.

Assuming good operators don't deliberately dispatch bad buses, then the real solution is better in-house inspections.

In ye olden days, mechanics were under the coaches much more frequently. Chassis' needed greasing, brakes and clutches were manually adjusted, air tanks bled, engine oil had to be changed more

often. While under the bus, technicians looked at other things, and caught problems before they caused road failures.

An unforeseen consequence of mechanical improvements seems to be that many coach parts get scrutiny only when they're exhibiting symptoms. If roadside inspectors can find this stuff, then we can too — before it becomes a problem on the road.

When witches can't be found, the hunting will end. If inspections find few offenses, then perhaps officials' attention will be re-directed to areas more efficient in preventing accidents.

Surely you can think of more, but two leap to mind.

Aggressive driving contributes to a huge percentage of accidents, and the only way to control it is to patrol. Law enforcement needs to stop and ticket coach drivers that speed, tailgate or change lanes abruptly. Citing drivers rapidly gets them off the road, since few insurers tolerate more than three tickets in three years.

Since speeding has a high correlation with accidents, ticketing drivers can be one of the most effective means of reducing crashes.

Admittedly that's hard work,

and can be inconvenient if a load of passengers is involved (but not much more awkward than putting a coach out of service in an inspection). It's not as visible as mass inspections, but a whole lot more effective in preventing accidents.

In a society that prizes safety above all, is it too much to ask?

Second, one of the proven predictors of accidents is bad behavior by drivers. How can management know which drivers are problems if they aren't ticketed?

With modern technology, there is no reason citations issued to commercial drivers can't be brought to employers' attention virtually instantly (rather than depending on the driver to inform them), or services that monitor for tickets.

This would offer the opportunity to either train, or discharge, drivers before a tragedy. Society holds the bus operator fiscally responsible for accidents without offering some critical tools for prevention.

Currently we find ourselves in a situation similar to the recent experience of the National Football League. None of the NFL teams was happy with the work of the interim officials. It was not an issue

of competitive advantage; the incompetence seemed to be spread evenly.

The problem was that the overall quality and credibility of the game was put at risk, and the chances for tragic injuries were increased.

The current regime of inspections is what "the officials are calling" and we all are living with it. One way to change it, and point regulators towards more effective ways of improving safety, is to beat them at their own game, and make the inspections irrelevant... by passing them.

If we do, we have achieved the moral high ground, and are in a position to insist on more effective enforcement measures.

Lest you are wondering, my coach had stumbled onto my singular talent... I was great at getting knocked down.

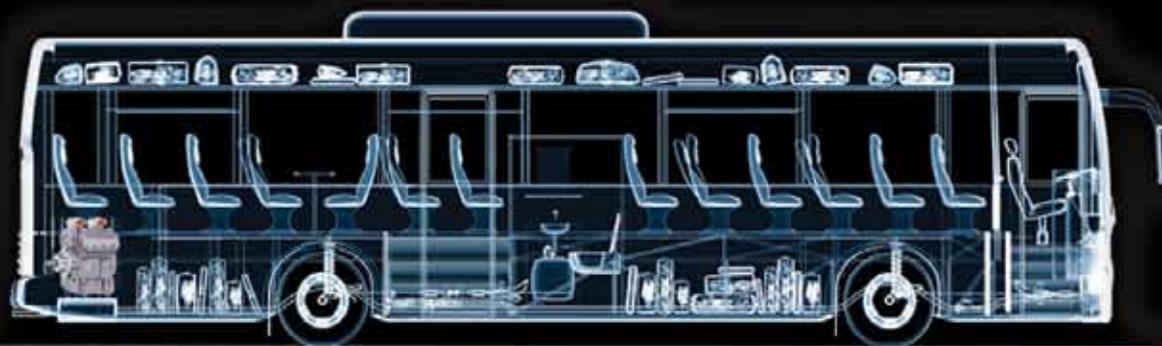
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Dave Millhouser

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YO! Bus is off to a bumpy start in New York Chinatown

NEW YORK CITY — After more than a decade fighting the so-called Chinatown operators in the Northeast, Greyhound Bus Lines appears to be taking a fresh, if-you-can't-beat-'em-join-'em approach.

The nation's largest intercity carrier announced a new brand, called YO! Bus, that will use bold red buses that incorporate Chinese symbols in its logo.

And, like the Chinatown operators, the new operation plans to pick up passengers at a curbside location in Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Finally, just like the Chinatown carriers, it's controversial — even before officially starting operations.

So controversial, in fact, Greyhound was forced to scuttle the launch of its copycat carrier in late September due to community concerns about its proposed pick-up spot — on Essex Street right alongside popular Seward Park.

Greyhound currently has no set date to start the service. Its *www.yobus.com* website has been taken out of service.

"We continue to engage in discussions with the city and community leaders regarding a Chinatown stop in New York City and are hopeful such discussions will get YO!

Bus launched in the near future," said Kim Plaskett, Greyhound director of marketing.

YO! is the newest of several efforts by Dallas-based Greyhound to capture niche markets and, in some cases, to respond to new competition.

The services it has launched during the past four years also have been designed to tap into a customer base that likes the low cost and convenience of the Chinatown buses and wants such amenities as Wi-Fi, extra legroom and plug-ins for electronic devices.

In 2008, Greyhound created BoltBus, jointly operated by Peter Pan Bus Lines, with service from New York City to Washington, D.C., and other northeastern cities.

Trailways operators request hours-of-service exemption

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration announced it has received an application from Trailways operators for an exemption from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations hours-of-service record-of-duty status provision.

The Trailways companies want to be exempted from the regulations [49 CFR 395.8(c)] that re-

quires every commercial motor vehicle driver to record his or her duty status for each 24-hour period using methods prescribed in that section.

The BoltBus slogan, "Bolt for a Buck," refers to its pricing policy that offers one seat on each bus for \$1, with most seats in the \$5-\$25 range, depending on when the ticket is purchased.

Greyhound's NeOn brand, also created in 2008 and operated in conjunction with New York Trailways, and Greyhound Express, launched in 2010, target the new demographic of bus passengers and offer fares starting at \$1.

Greyhound Express has been introduced into nearly 70 markets across North America and the company says it is boosting ridership.

In its buildup to the aborted launch of YO! Bus, Greyhound announced the service would include

ment to enter a change in duty status in their daily log for breaks in driving time of 10 minutes or less for the purpose of picking up or setting off passengers, baggage or small express packages.

If the exemption were granted, such time would not be considered a change-of-duty status under section 49 CFR 395.8(c) of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations.

eight daily nonstop departures each way between the Chinatown neighborhoods of New York City and Philadelphia, with one-way tickets as low as \$12 every day.

A press release about YO! stressed the safety aspect of the service.

"YO! is jointly operated by Greyhound and Peter Pan Bus Lines, two of the safest motorcoach operators in the country. The service offers a safe, modern and affordable travel solution for customers in New York and Philadelphia who like the convenience of a Chinatown stop," the companies said.

"We are committed to providing a fun and safe travel experience for our customers, and YO! embodies these two values," Peter Picknelly, chairman and CEO of Peter Pan Bus Lines,

was quoted as saying.

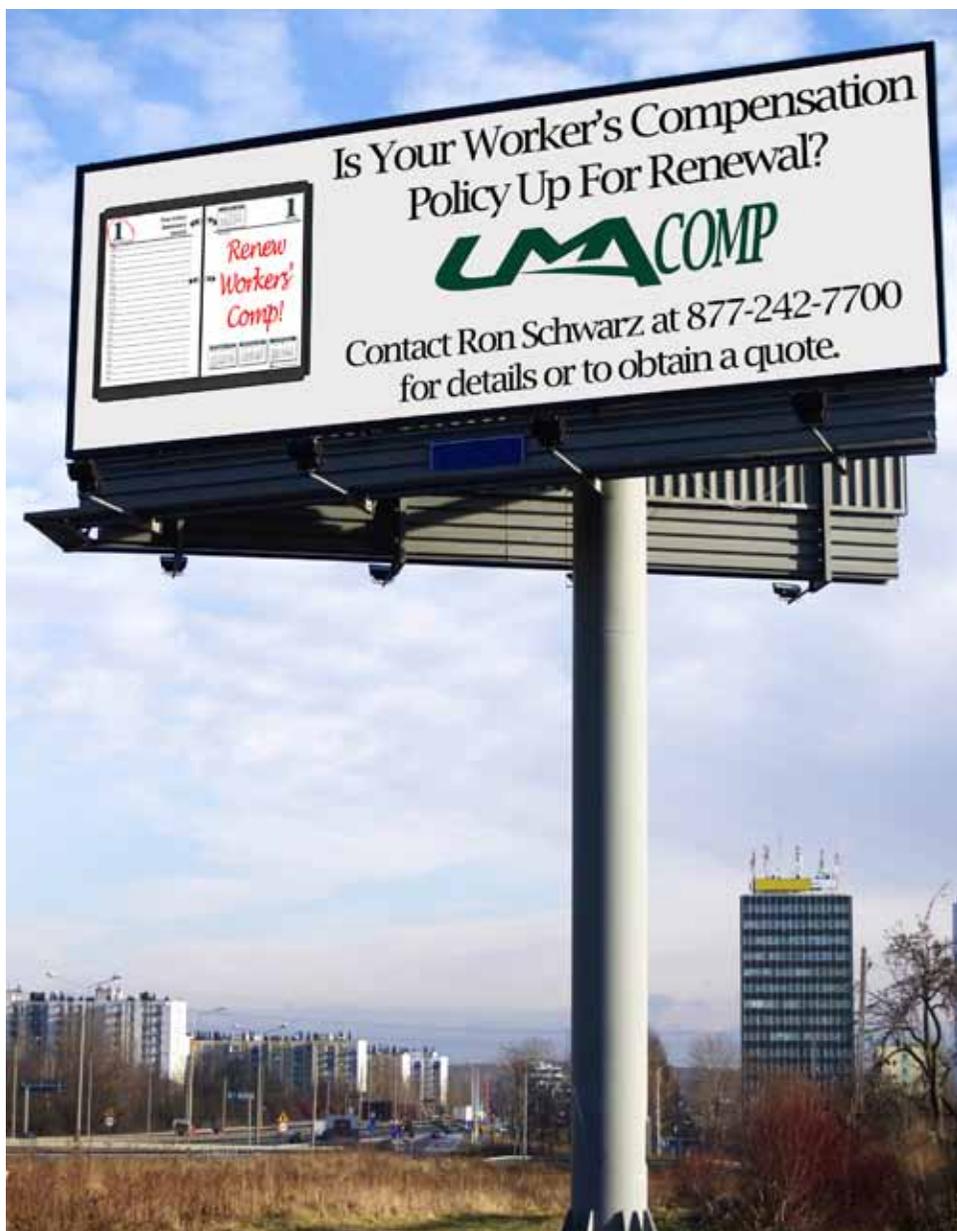
According to Greyhound, the YO! brand name has double meaning, referring to a Chinese word that means "to protect" and to Philadelphia, where the use of "yo!" as an enthusiastic greeting reportedly was born.

But some Chinatown residents said "no" to YO!'s plan for a bus stop next to Seward Park, which contains the city's oldest playground. They raised concerns about "increased congestion, pollution, and safety hazards for children and the elderly," *Our Chinatown* website reported.

The city Department of Transportation had approved the location after weeks of study.

With neighborhood newspapers and websites offering blow-by-blow coverage of the controversy, YO! opponents created an internet petition that gained about 1,300 signatures and packed a community meeting about the proposal.

"In a surprising turn of events, the Department of Transportation has reversed its controversial decision to place a Greyhound intercity bus stop near a Lower East Side park, drawing cheers from residents and politicians who spent weeks arguing against the proposal," *The Villager* website reported.



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Expo golf tourney is set, UMA extols registration

ORLANDO, Fla. — The United Motorcoach Association has set the date for the 2013 Ray Dupuis Memorial Golf Tournament, and announced that registration for UMA Motorcoach Expo 2013 is outpacing early registration for this year's Expo.

The Ray Dupuis Memorial Golf Tournament, which is conducted annually in conjunction with UMA Motorcoach Expo and is named to honor an industry professional who left a lasting legacy, will be on the last day of Expo 2013 — Thursday, Jan. 24.

The event will be noon to 6 p.m. at the Jack Nicklaus-designed Grand Cypress Golf Club in Orlando.

The fee is \$175 per player and includes transportation to and from Grand Cypress, boxed lunch, reduced club rentals, and a sleeve of golf balls. Individuals can register for the tournament when they submit their Expo registration. Space is limited. Go to www.motorcoachexpo.com.

The tournament, which is open to all exhibitors and attendees, supports the Clarence Cornell School of Business/Bus & Motorcoach Academy

Scholarship Program.

UMA also announced it had received “an overwhelming response” to its early-bird registration deadline for UMA Expo 2013.

“Not only are our registration numbers outpacing our numbers from 2012, we currently have one of the highest attendee pre-registration counts in UMA recent history,” said UMA Meetings and Operations Manager Maggie Masterson.

“Everyone is clearly excited for what is shaping up to be THE event of 2013.”

Separately, UMA announced it is seeking sponsors for the trivia contest it conducts to promote Motorcoach Expo.

Each week, UMA sends an e-newsletter, called the *Road to EXPO*, to provide attendees information about the trade show, the benefits of next year's integrated show with NTA, and how to get the most out of the Expo experience.

In each issue, UMA polls readers with trivia questions and gives away prizes.

“What better way to reach operators, and ultimately drive traffic to your booth, than to sponsor the giveaway prizes,” said Masterson.

Georgia operators eye opportunity

ATLANTA — A financial morass at Atlanta's public transit agency, the nation's 9th largest, may open up opportunities for private operators in Georgia.

The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority is running a \$33 million operating deficit and currently balancing its finances by dipping into reserves it built during good times.

If nothing dramatic corrects the situation, within the next three years, the reserve pool will dry up and the transit authority will be forced to either cut service substantially, raise fares again, or both.

Meanwhile, MARTA's chairman, Frederick Daniels, has stated publicly the transit authority is committed to privatization, reviewing employee benefits, and enacting other cost-saving measures designed to keep the system from fiscal collapse.

“Fiscally, we can't sustain where we are,” Daniels said after a meeting with auditors. “MARTA's economic model is broken.”

“For each prize donated, your company's name and logo will be highlighted next to the trivia question, followed by the prize you supply.”

The audit by accounting giant KPMG gave MARTA a blueprint for solving its financial woes, including revamping the entire organization. It noted the transit authority is spending \$50 million annually above the national average on health care, retirement, and workers' compensation plans.

The audit pointed to several functions that would save MARTA money by changing or privatizing. They included cleaning services, health care, workers compensation, absenteeism policy, inventory control, and other areas.

The only bus-related activity identified in the audit as being primed for privatization, however, was paratransit services.

The Georgia Motorcoach Operators Association thinks the audit may have missed other opportunities to save money and shift costs.

The association is working on a package of ideas it intends to present to MARTA.

“We expect to be right in their face,” said Jimmy Cantrell, the as-

sociation's vice president. Cantrell operates Daniel's Charters and Tours in Lula, Ga.

sociation's vice president. Cantrell operates Daniel's Charters and Tours in Lula, Ga.

The association also is looking beyond MARTA and Atlanta.

Cantrell noted there are 119 other transit agencies in Georgia and many of them take their cues from the Atlanta transit system.

MARTA is both the big kid on the block, and the giant elephant in the room, and if it says it's considering privatization as a way to cut costs and sustain services, then other transit agencies in the state are seen as likely to follow suit.

“How MARTA goes, the others will, too,” said Cantrell.

The private Georgia operators may find support in the state legislature. Georgia has developed some of the most aggressive public-private partnership legislation in the country.

Two major pieces of so-called P3 (public-private partnership) legislation passed during the past half-dozen years were aimed specifically at the state Department of Transportation.

Companies interested in donating a prize should contact Amanda Zimmerman at UMA. Email azimmerman@uma.org.

Examples of prizes have in-

cluded tickets to Disney World, Universal Studios, and other Orlando attractions; gift cards; company products or discounts, and complimentary hotel stays.

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21-23 Bus Association of New York State Annual Meeting and Marketplace, Info at: www.BANYbus.org.

24-25 The Economic & Clinical Impact of Sleep Apnea, American Sleep Apnea Associa-

tion, Sheraton Baltimore City Centre. Info: www.sasw2012.org.

27 Museum of Bus Transportation Annual Meeting, Hershey, Pa. Info: (717) 566-7100 ext. 119, or www.busmuseum.org.

27-30 California Bus Association Annual Convention & Trade Show, Fess Parker Doubletree Resort, Santa Barbara. Info: www.cbabus.com.

NOVEMBER 2012

29-Dec. 1 Motor Coach Canada Connections West, Grande Rockies Resort, Canmore, Alberta. Info: www.motorcoachcanada.com or email laura@motorcoachcanada.com.

30-Dec. 1 Minnesota Charter Bus Operators Association Annual Meeting, Minneapolis. Info: email mike@reichertbus.com.

Healthier drivers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

more common among those who are overweight, leads to daytime sleepiness, an obvious danger when driving.

While the incentives to get and stay healthy are powerful, the obstacles remain prevalent. So, the changes taking place at truck stops – those long-time bastions of un-

wholesome food and sprawling parking lots – is being seen as a welcome development.

TravelCenters of America, which operates under the TA and Petro Stopping Centers brands, launched a program two years ago, called StayFit, which includes placing small, free gyms in its truck stops, offering healthier eating options and half portions, mapping walking routes near its locations, and building basketball courts in some locations.

“We wanted to remove as many barriers to drivers’ health as possible,” said TravelCenters spokesman Tom Liutkus, who said the company has gyms at 42 of its more than 240 locations, with plans to outfit them all by the end of next year. He noted that the gyms have had more than 30,000 users.

Gym franchiser Snap Fitness has partnered with Rolling Strong, which provides wellness programs aimed at over-the-road drivers, to open gyms at Pilot Flying J locations.

The first one opened south of Dallas in June: A nearly 1,000-square-foot stand-alone building filled with weights and a dozen or so machines. By the end of the year, Snap Fitness plans to install gyms inside Pilot Flying J locations in Georgia and Tennessee.

A monthly membership of about \$30 also gives drivers access to Snap Fitness’ more than 1,300 gyms nationwide, 60 of which have huge parking lots.

Pilot Flying J plans to add a function to its smartphone app to help drivers identify healthy food choices at its locations and fast-food restaurants. The company also has adjusted recipes to make them healthier.

Absentee voting

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

while other states require a valid excuse. Oregon and Washington state offer all-mail ballot voting for elections.

If you are not online, check with your local election office about pre-election voting requirements, including whether you need some form of identification, for the county you live in.

The election office may be located at your city/town hall or county courthouse or office complex. You also can call the secretary of state office in your state capital.

Here are sources of online voter information and registration:

- LongDistanceVoter.org. Free online voter registration and clickable state-by-state absentee/early voting guidelines.

- Electionland.com.
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Detroit touts reduced costs, maintenance for '13 engines

DETROIT — Executives with Detroit Diesel Corp. say their 2013 heavy-duty motorcoach engines will cost less both to run and to maintain.

In addition, the 2013 Detroit will meet 2014 federal greenhouse gas emission regulations a year ahead of schedule.

Engine refinements aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions will concurrently boost the fuel mileage of the 2013 engines, said Ed Byk, product marketing manager for Detroit.

“The way to improve your greenhouse gas emissions is to improve fuel consumption.”

At a media event earlier this year, Detroit spokesmen told reporters that test engines, containing some of the 2013 improvements, were delivering 6.7-percent fuel efficiency improvements in truck applications.

Meeting the 2014 emissions standards early means Detroit will accrue federal emissions credits. That will enable the company to continue selling engines in market categories where Detroit engines won't initially meet new greenhouse gas rules, such as off-road applications.

Notable upgrades to the 2013 engines include fuel injector nozzle modifications, new crankcase sensors designed to improve on-board diagnostics, and an upgraded fuel system that eliminates one filter, and increases the service interval from the current 50,000 miles to 100,000 miles.

The Detroit DD13 motorcoach engine has a B50 service rating of one million miles, meaning half of the engines can be expected to cover that distance before requiring a major overhaul.

The new-generation DD13 engine, in its motorcoach configuration, became available in new coaches this year.

“The start of production of DD13 engines was earlier this year. We have put 500 coaches on

USEPA increases mandate for '13 biodiesel output

WASHINGTON — Despite the oil boom in the U.S., the amount of biodiesel that U.S. refiners will be required to produce in 2013 was increased to 1.28 billion gallons from the current 1 billion gallons, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced.

The Obama Administration ap-

proved EPA's recommended in-

crease under the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007.

The act requires a minimum one billion gallon volume annually and calls on the EPA to increase requirements after considering environmental, market and energy-related factors.

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there is a lot of similarity and shared components,” Byk said.

The 12.8-liter DD13 is an offshoot of the 14.8 liter DD15 engine introduced five years ago. About 143,000 DD engines of all sizes and configurations, including 50,000 DD13s, have been delivered. Most of those, of course, have gone into over-the-road trucks.

The motorcoach version is available in Van Hool and MCI coaches.

The DD13 is an inline six-cylinder diesel that shares about 65 percent of its components with the DD15 and 15.6-liter DD16. The DD13 cast-iron block, however, weighs about 300 pounds less than the blocks of the larger six-cylinder engines. “There are some internal differences, too, but

Biodiesel is diesel fuel blended with vegetable oils and waste oils from renewable sources.

The Iowa Soybean Association applauded the move, and said the increase reduces U.S. dependence on imported petroleum, strengthens domestic energy security, creates jobs and reduces tailpipe pollution.

It was U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulations for 2007 that prompted development of the DD series of engines, Byk said.

“The Series 60 engine was our bread and butter. With the new EPA regulations on the horizon back in the 2000s, the company made the decision that the Series 60 had been taken as far as it could go. That made the upcoming EPA regulations a good jumping-off point for a clean design.”

All DD engines are assembled at the sprawling Detroit factory here that employs 2,300 workers.

Detroit touts several technologies for the emissions and efficiency advances of the DD engines.

Its “Amplified Common Rail System” utilizes 10 electronic engine controls to optimize fuel injection. “BlueTec” emissions technology combines exhaust gas recirculation, a diesel particulate filter, a diesel oxidation catalyst, and selective catalytic reduction to treat exhaust gases.

Detroit says the DD engines have improved fuel economy as much as 7 percent over the numbers delivered by the EPA 2007 Series 60 engines.

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Tourism Cares' Beckham to retire



Bruce Beckham

BOSTON, Mass. — Bruce Beckham, who co-founded Tourism Cares seven years ago and led its development into the tourism industry's leading charitable organization, has announced he's retiring as executive director and CEO effective June 30.

Beckham will work with the Tourism Cares executive committee and board to recruit and transition to a new director.

Tourism Cares was formed by Beckham and others in 2005 via the merger of the National Tourism Foundation, founded by the National Tour Association in 1982, and the Travelers Conservation Foundation, founded in 1999 by the United States Tour Operators Association.

It's an independent, industry-wide nonprofit that "gives back" through volunteer restoration projects at tourism sites needing care and rejuvenation, grants to cultural sites, and scholarships and other programs for tourism students.

Under Beckham's guidance and through his ability to foster partnerships and bring facets of the industry together, Tourism Cares has thrived and is now the official philanthropy of some of the travel industry's best-known groups — USTOA, NTA, ASTA, RSAA and IATAN.

Over the years, more than 3,500 tourism industry volunteers have traveled — at their own expense — to more than 20 sites across the U.S. for restoration projects.

In addition, more than \$500,000 in scholarships have been awarded to students studying travel and tourism, and more than \$2 million in grants have been given to tourism-related sites in 42 states and 31 countries.

Tourism Cares also created the industry's first global outreach educational and preservation program in Cusco, Peru, in partnership with the tourism industry there.

Dan Sullivan, president of Col-

lette Vacations and chairman of Tourism Cares, said: "Bruce's leadership has mobilized the travel industry to recognize the need for conservation and preservation of our treasured sites and the education of our future workforce."

"In particular, the restoration projects he and his dynamic team have organized, starting at Ellis Island in 2003 and continuing across the country over the last 10 years, have broadened the organization's support throughout the entire industry. We have big shoes to fill."

Arthur C. Tauck Jr., chairman of Tauck Inc., and chairman emeritus and a co-founder of Tourism Cares, said Beckham had worked "tirelessly to take an idea from its embryonic stage and develop it into an organization that has become synonymous with philanthropy across the travel industry."

New York Thruway

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

to avoid paying Thruway tolls," he said.

LeBron told *Bus and Motorcoach News* the proposed tolls would have a "massive" impact on scheduled motorcoach operators, such as Greyhound, megabus.com, and Adirondack/New York Trailways, which has a fleet of 125 coaches and is the state's largest scheduled bus operator.

The 570-mile Thruway's eastern terminus is New York City. From there it heads north to Albany and Schenectady before turning west to Utica, Syracuse and Buffalo, where it bends southwest toward the Pennsylvania border. About 496 miles of the route are tolled.

The Thruway serves 37 of New York's 62 counties and the majority of the state's population, according to the Thruway Authority. It collected \$634.1 million in tolls from 245.2 million transactions in 2011.

Trucks and buses account for 10 percent of trips on the Thruway but contribute 37 percent of toll revenues.

The huge toll hike was proposed in May, when the Thruway Authority was presented a consultant's financial plan for years 2012 through 2016. Increased toll revenues are needed, the report said, to enable the authority to meet its debt coverage ratio and fund "the need for reconstruction and rehabilitation of the aging infrastructure."

Consultants projected annual traffic increases of

0.4 to 1.4 percent on the Thruway, resulting in tolls totaling \$671 million in 2016, leaving the authority \$374.2 million short of required revenues over the five-year period. The report stated that revenues would need to be increased by annual increments ranging from \$85.6 million in 2013 to \$92.8 million in 2016.

Commercial vehicles were singled out for toll increases because of the effects of their weight. According to the consultants, "One legally-loaded, 80,000-pound gross weight (typically 5-axle) commercial vehicle causes wear-and-tear on the road equal to 9,600 passenger vehicles."

After the 45 percent increase for trucks and buses was proposed, a firestorm of criticism erupted.

One New York assemblyman proposed legislation transferring toll-setting decisions from the Thruway Authority to state legislators and the governor.

LeBron believes the toll issue will remain on the back burner until after the November election. Then he expects state legislators to push plans to raise revenue through digital billboard advertising on the Thruway and encourage passenger bus travel by making vehicle weight a factor in toll rates.

Current rates are based on vehicle axles and height, resulting in identical tolls for passenger coaches and potentially heavier three-axle trucks.

"We don't want to pit us against the truck industry, but at the end of the day a 45-percent increase is ludicrous," LeBron said.

49ers shuttles

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

"Our belief is that it is a charter service; No. 1, because the private industry is capable of providing the service, and No. 2, the service that Muni runs on game day is very different from the service they operate on a regular basis," said Shah.

Muni's regular service to Candlestick operates once or twice daily, and stops outside the stadium. But it runs up to 60 buses, and uses a stop inside the stadium grounds, on game days, according to Shah.

"For them to suggest on the basis of that that it's not a charter service, we don't believe that holds water," he said.

Shah acknowledged that Accelar is not registered on the FTA list because it functions as a developer of

"websites, Internet solutions (and) portals for the bus and motorcoach industry," rather than as a coach operator.

Accelar operates under a contract with the San Francisco 49ers to provide "49er Experience" packages that include transportation and other offerings such as game tickets, tailgate services, party tickets, programs and memorabilia giveaways, he said.

According to Shah, Muni and private charter operations combine to provide transportation to less than 15 percent of fans at 49er games.

"Our intent is to make the service more attractive and more accessible to a larger number of fans all across the Bay Area," he said.

"We continue to believe that the public agency and the private motorcoach industry could both benefit from capturing a larger share of the market."

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