

Fall foliage tours hold up well

Peepers ignore weak economy

Despite a gloomy economy, the brilliant hues of changing leaves in New England have given motorcoach and tour operators a welcome boost this fall.

Changing colors, it seems, sell themselves.

Leaf peepers, as fall tour goers are known in New England, are drawn from throughout the country. Europeans, too, were enticed this year by a weak U.S. greenback compared to the euro.

From what Tom McCaughey, president of the New England Bus Association and owner of Flagship Trailways in Rhode Island, has heard, fall motorcoach tours in the area did very well this season.

"The leaves are quite a draw, in spite of the slow economy," McCaughey said. "I haven't heard of any companies offering incentives to boost business."

"Fall is a busy time of the year up here," he noted. "We also have a lot of college trips."

It's so busy, in fact, that McCaughey said he has seen several bus companies from other parts of the U.S., including the Midwest and Florida, providing fall foliage tours throughout New England. "After all, there's not a lot going on in Florida in October," he said. McCaughey, who was inter-



Secondary roads are popular for motorcoach foliage tours.

viewed by telephone while he was in Portland, Maine, said: "Local people here seem to think things are going pretty well. My sense is it (the fall foliage business) is holding up just fine."

Flagship Trailways recently finished three nine-day tours that originated in Rhode Island and visited Cape Cod, historic areas north of Boston, into New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont, then west to upper New York and Cooperstown (home of the Baseball Hall of Fame), Niagara Falls, across the Canadian border to Ontario and then to Buffalo.

One of the groups was from Texas, McCaughey said, and the others came from Chicago, though he thinks some in the tour were

from farther west. "They're mostly older groups who could not get enough of the scenery," he said. "We take some of the back roads and they drink in all that foliage."

Another motorcoach operator, who asked that his name not be used, said the economy was having some impact on leaf peeping because people have less discretionary income.

At Premier Coach Co. in Burlington, Vt., Chip Desautels said the economy had a significant effect on tour business earlier this year. "There was some apprehension going into the fall," he said, "but they (foliage tours) held up quite well. Even in a down economy, the changing colors in New England

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Coach tours blossoming in Branson

BRANSON, Mo. — It's November and that means one thing to this Missouri Ozarks entertainment mecca — it's motorcoach tour season.

"October is really good," says Melody Byrd, group sales and marketing director for Legends in Concert. "Nov. 1, it really blossoms."

On an average day in November, between the three shows at Dick Clark's American Bandstand Theater, 25-30 motorcoaches will show up.

"It is a huge business for us," she adds.

According to Lynn Berry, Branson Lakes Area Chamber of

Commerce director of public relations, more than 800,000 Branson visitors, or 10 percent, come as part of a group. Group sales are a focus at the chamber and several employees focus solely on bringing groups to Branson.

"This is a very important

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Tire caused fatal crash; probe reveals sequence of tragic, illegal events

WASHINGTON — Negligence, disregard for safety laws, bureaucratic inertia, and a tragic sequence of events lead to the death of 17 Vietnamese Catholics making a motorcoach pilgrimage from Houston to Missouri last year, a federal investigation has concluded.

A punctured front tire, resulting in a slow leak, was the direct cause of the bus crash near Sherman, Texas, investigators found.

The National Transportation Safety Board, meeting here last month, formally adopted the report of its investigation of the tragedy as survivors of the accident and relatives of the passengers who were killed looked on.

The report contains 24 conclusions and a dozen new recommendations. It also reiterates five previous safety recommendations.

The NTSB said the Aug. 8, 2008, crash and high death toll were caused by three things: a damaged front tire that failed, a guard rail on a low bridge that was neither substantial nor high enough to keep the bus from veering off the road and toppling over, and the lack of safety protection for the occupants.

The bus was owned by a rogue Houston charter operation that had been ordered closed less than two months earlier by a federal safety inspector.

After the board voted to accept

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Coach sales slide slows

Sales of new motorcoaches continue to lag behind year-ago levels but the fall off is not nearly as severe as it was at the end of last year and early this year.

Private and public bus operators purchased a total of 373 new over-the-road buses during the third quarter of this year, down from 439 new coaches bought during the third quarter of 2008, or a 15 percent decline.

New-coach sales during the previous three quarters dropped by margins ranging from 18 to 29 percent.

The months of July, August and September typically have the lowest combined sales of any quarter. This year, however, one more coach was sold during the third quarter than in the first quarter, perhaps another indication of the easing of the sales slide that began

early last year.

Like many in the industry, *National Bus Trader* magazine, which serves as the industry clearing house for new-coach sales figures, had expected to report poor numbers for the third quarter given the current economic conditions and the traditional weakness of the July-September period.

But *National Bus Trader* Editor Larry Plachno was pleasantly surprised by the sales figures, noting that while the numbers were still down from a year ago, the sales skid appears to have slowed.

"I might also mention our numbers are still higher than the 296 coaches recorded in the third quarter of 2004, which was where things bottomed out on the downward slide from 1998," said Plachno.

"Numbers in this third quarter

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Operator teams up to create innovative 49ers shuttle

SAN FRANCISCO — What happens when you huddle-up an enlightened professional sports franchise, a 21st century internet marketing company, and a fast growing charter bus company?

You get an innovative approach to developing and marketing a shuttle service for San Francisco 49ers football games.

The 49ers, Accelar, a Silicon Valley-based internet website design and marketing company, and El Camino Trailways, a South San Francisco-based motorcoach op-

erator, announced a comprehensive joint marketing agreement last month to create, develop and promote alternative transportation for 49ers games.

The resulting “49ers Game Day Packages” have been specifically designed and are being marketed, via the web, to 49ers fans wanting to attend games at Candlestick Park from various locations across Northern California, including Sacramento, Davis, San Jose, Santa Clara, Palo Alto, Milpitas, Walnut Creek, West Oakland, Belmont,

Burlingame and San Carlos.

“This partnership is aimed at getting as many of our fans out of their cars in favor of more convenient and environmentally friendly forms of transportation,” said Jim Mercurio, San Francisco 49ers vice president, stadium operations and security.

“By way of this new partnership, Accelar and El Camino Trailways’ commitment to the 49ers and most importantly, our fans, is impressive. We have every reason to believe they share our views and

commitment to providing exceptional customer service to our fans, making it that much easier for us to partner with them in this endeavor.”

Accelar, which describes itself as a Travel-2.0 start-up company, specializes in delivering internet solutions to the group travel services market. The company has launched a portal, 49ersShuttle.com, to provide 49ers fans with a new, interactive game day transportation alternative with on-line forums, fan-generated content,

fan organized communities and e-commerce solutions for purchase of various 49ers game day transportation and hospitality packages, including what are labeled as “Ultimate, Supreme, Premium and Value Packages.”

“We are delighted to offer 49ers fans a new portal of their own where they can not only personalize and customize their 49ers game day transportation experience, but also share their views, opinions, messages, pictures, video clips and

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Karst buying shuttle service

BOZEMAN, Mont. — Karst Stage is buying Montana Mountain Express, a shuttle service that specializes in transporting vacationers coming to southwestern Montana’s Big Sky region.

“The purchase will enhance Karst’s transportation offerings to a more exclusive clientele, and will enable us to compete better with the rental car companies,” said Dan Martin, general manager of Karst.

Karst, which has been operating for 107 years, has a fleet of nearly 60 vehicles that provide

motorcoach, school bus and airport shuttle services throughout Montana and the region.

“When MME’s owners approached us about buying the business we were excited about the opportunity,” said Martin.

Montana Mountain Express operates a dozen “signature executive” vans and buses that are equipped with Xbox games, music and DVDs. It offers shuttle service from two airports to area resorts, ranches and clubs, and other destinations, including a \$1,200 day trip to Jackson Hole, Wyo.

Bus operator picked for LAX service

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles International Airport has expanded its FlyAway shuttle bus service to Orange County and picked Coach America Los Angeles to operate it.

The FlyAway service is designed to help cut congestion by reducing the number of autos coming into LAX.

The Los Angeles Board of Airport Commissioners approved a three-year, \$6.5 million agreement with Coach America Los Angeles to operate the FlyAway bus service from Irvine Station in Orange

County to the international airport.

“With the expansion of FlyAway to Irvine, we are increasing LAX’s contribution to reducing regional traffic congestion and improving air quality, while better serving our Orange County customers, especially those traveling internationally,” said Los Angeles World Airports Executive Director Gina Marie Lindsey.

“FlyAway removes hundreds of thousands of cars each year from our roads, while providing a convenient, affordable way to use LAX,” Lindsey added.

Service starts Nov. 16 with six daily trips in each direction using 22-seat, compressed-natural gas buses owned by the airport and operated by Coach America.

Irvine Station will have 500 surface parking spaces where FlyAway passengers can park free for up to 30 days.

The Irvine Station is the fourth site in the FlyAway network. LAX plans to develop five more FlyAway service sites by 2015.

Coach America Los Angeles was selected from four bidders to operate the new service.



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Blitz by FMCSA focuses on drivers, drugs, alcohol

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration announced that its first-ever nationwide drug and alcohol strike force had removed 77 truck and bus drivers from the road.

The enforcement action, which took place in mid-September, also resulted in more than 80 truck and bus companies facing penalties.

During the blitz, investigators examined the drug and alcohol safety records of commercial drivers maintained by the companies.

The 77 drivers identified during the strike force can no longer operate a commercial motor vehi-

cle and will probably face fines.

The truck and bus companies will see enforcement actions for violations, such as using a driver who had tested positive for illegal drugs and for not instituting a drug and alcohol testing program.

The drivers and carriers will be able to contest the alleged violations and civil penalties.

The strike force's goal was to identify carriers violating drug and alcohol testing requirements and to remove truck and bus drivers from the road who jump carriers to duck drug and alcohol testing and reporting requirements.

Feds contract for screening system

WASHINGTON — NIC Technologies of Olathe, Kan., has been awarded the contract to oversee the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's pre-employment screening system for bus and truck drivers. (See Nov. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

NIC said the contract was a one-year contract with four, single-year renewals.

Harry Herington, chairman and CEO of NIC, said the company has done similar records work for drivers at the state level, calling the new system "a natural fit."

Announced last month, the pre-employment screening system will allow bus and truck operators to examine federal safety records of drivers.

In a speech late last month, Acting FMCSA Administrator Rose McMurray said the agency would launch the program "by the end of this year."

With the system, fleets will have "more safety information about commercial drivers so that they can use that information when they decide which commercial drivers they are going to hire for their companies," said McMurray.

Panel OKs Ferro to head FMCSA

WASHINGTON — A Senate committee has approved the nomination of Anne Ferro, President Obama's nominee to head the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

Her nomination, approved by the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, moves to the Senate floor for confirmation, though no timetable has

been set.

Ferro, who was questioned by the panel in late September, has been opposed by several interest groups for her ties to the trucking industry.

Ferro currently is president and CEO of the Maryland Motor Truck Association. Previously, she headed the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration.

Highway funds transfer is illegal, says N.C. court

RALEIGH, N.C. — The North Carolina Court of Appeals has ruled that the state's governor had no authority to transfer money from the state highway fund to the state general fund.

Several taxpayers challenged the transfer, which was made seven years ago when the state was under financial stress, along with a similar transfer that had been made at the same time pursuant to an act of the general assembly.

In the appeals court decision, the judges held that the validity of the transfer by the legislature was moot, as the amount had in the interim been repaid to the highway fund.

Regarding the governor's transfer, however, the court found it exceeded his powers under the state constitution, which only authorized him "to effect the necessary economies" when the state budget was in trouble. This did not cover shifting money among funds, the court held, just reducing expenditures.

In late September, the California Supreme Court rejected an appeal by the Schwarzenegger administration of a lower court ruling that annual raids on state transit funding are illegal.

By declining to accept the petition for review filed by state officials, the state high court upheld the ruling of the Third District Court of Appeal that funding diversions violated a series of statutory and constitutional amendments enacted by voters via four statewide initiatives dating back to 1990.

Rockslide shuts I-40 in N.C.

HAYWOOD COUNTY, N.C. — A gigantic rockslide has closed Interstate 40 in western North Carolina near the Tennessee state line, and officials say it will take months to clear the debris.

Vehicles traveling west to Tennessee should take I-40 West to I-240 West in Asheville to I-26 West. Follow I-26 West from Asheville to I-81 South in Tennessee, back to I-40. Eastbound motorists should follow the reverse directions.

One estimate is that it will be February or later before the interstate reopens. The cost of the cleanup has been put at \$10 million. Some boulders are so large they will have to be blown apart before they can be moved.

USDOT council eyes safety

WASHINGTON — Secretary Ray LaHood convened the first meeting of a newly created U.S. Department of Transportation Safety Council last month, saying the council would tackle the critical transportation safety issues facing the department's 10 operating administrations.

"Now is the time to identify and address the top safety issues that cut across our agencies," said LaHood. "The Council will take

our commitment to safety, which is our highest priority, to the next level."

Even before taking office, LaHood saw many important safety initiatives were being pursued in the department's agencies without a formal process for sharing data, best practices and strategies.

LaHood created the council to provide better leadership and to improve the impact of department safety programs.

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USDOT agrees to revisit 'hours rules' for truckers

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation plans to start a new round of rule-making on hours-of-service regulations for truckers.

The USDOT and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration agreed to revisit the rules to settle a lawsuit brought by Public Citizen, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, the Truck Safety Coalition, and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The settlement requires the FMCSA to draft a new proposed rule governing hours of service within nine months and to publish a final rule within 21 months.

There has been no early indication the proposed rulemaking would include hours-of-service rules for motorcoach drivers, which were split from those for truckers six years ago.

Since the hours rules for truckers were modified in 2003, they have been under near constant courtroom attack by citizen safety groups, the Teamsters and others.

In March, the safety groups asked the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington to throw out the hours' rules for the third time. The regulations were modified somewhat following the first challenge in 2004, but the revised rules were challenged again in 2005.

In July 2007, the court remanded the hours rules to the FMCSA, ruling the agency must provide better explanations of its justifications for adopting the 11-hour drive time and 34-hour restart provisions. Many interpreted that decision as "procedural," something the agency could fix fairly easily.

In December 2007, FMCSA announced it was keeping the 11-hour and the 34-hour provisions in an interim final rule. In January 2008, a federal appeals court denied Public Citizen's request to invalidate that interim rule. The final rule was unveiled late last year and

went into effect in the final days of the Bush administration.

The safety groups argue that the current rules "dramatically expanded driving and working hours by allowing truck drivers to drive up to 11 consecutive hours (instead of 10) each shift and by cutting the off-duty rest and recovery time at the end of the week from a full weekend of 50 or more hours to as little as 34 hours. ...As a result, the rule allowed truckers to spend up to 17 more hours driving each week than previously allowed, a more than 25 percent increase over the prior rule, despite strong evidence that the increased hours would lead to more traffic fatalities and serious consequences for driver health."

Earlier this year, the American Trucking Associations refuted those claims. In fact, ATA noted, the new hours of service rules reduced the maximum length of the truck driver's work day by at least one hour and increased the daily required number of hours of rest by two hours. The work day was shortened from a previous maximum of 15 hours (which could be extended by breaks) to no more than 14 consecutive hours.

Drivers are required to rest at least 10 hours between shifts, with at least eight of those hours in the sleeper berth if it is used while on the road. Within the shorter work day, the rules allow 11 hours of driving instead of the previous 10.

"Another myth sowed by these groups is that the 34-hour restart allows significantly longer driving and on-duty times in a week than the pre-2004 rules," ATA said. FMCSA found that "longer hypothetical hours in driving and duty schedules" envisioned by critics "requires an imaginary world with nearly perfect logistics."

In the real world, drivers have found that the 34-hour restart gives them more rest and time off, not less, said the association.

Texas road plan buried

AUSTIN, Texas — The Texas Department of Transportation has deep-sixed the Trans-Texas Corridor, Gov. Rick Perry's high-profile but controversial plan to build a toll-road network across the state.

Earlier this year, the agency said it was scaling down the project but continued work on the mammoth plan. Now, transportation officials say the plan is dead, dead, dead.

The state canceled its final de-

velopment contract with Cintra Concesiones de Infraestructuras de Transporte, the Spanish developer.

Backers of the corridor, which was to parallel Interstate 35, promoted it as a state-of-the-art toll road that would increase international trade and eliminate traffic congestion.

Opponents objected to taking huge amounts of private land and to the proposed tolls, and argued the corridor would increase drug trafficking.

Pa. again asks feds for I-80 tolling

HARRISBURG, Pa. — As anticipated, the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation have resubmitted an application to put tolls on Interstate 80 in Pennsylvania. (See Nov. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The Bush administration rejected the state's toll bid 14 months ago, saying it did not meet legal requirements.

The turnpike commission and state DOT reportedly have includ-

ed new materials in their resubmission in an effort to win approval from the Obama Administration.

They also have adjusted the financial structure of the proposal and an analysis of the plan, suggesting the turnpike commission proposal for running I-80 compares favorably to what a private operator could make from leasing the highway.

Meanwhile, the Alliance to Stop I-80 Tolling has stepped up

its opposition to the tolling plan and called for the Federal Highway Administration to again reject the proposal.

"Now is a critical time to contact your state and federal elected leaders," the alliance said in a statement. "Please let them know you are aware of the recent submission, and urge them to contact Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and Federal Highway Administrator Victor Mendez to deny this heavily flawed proposal."

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Sleep apnea plan pushed for coach, truck drivers

WASHINGTON — The National Transportation Safety Board wants the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to begin a program to identify commercial drivers at high risk for obstructive sleep apnea, and if treatment is required, show that it has been conducted.

The NTSB issued the same recommendations to the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Aviation Administration.

In issuing its recommendation for commercial drivers, the NTSB

noted that the “relative risk of accident involvement for individuals with (obstructive sleep apnea) is clearly elevated and quite clearly associated with the untreated disease.”

FMCSA research has suggested that at least 10 percent of commercial drivers have at least moderate obstructive sleep apnea.

The NTSB wants the agency to identify these drivers and show, when necessary, they are effectively treated through the medical certification process of evaluation, be-

fore being granted unrestricted medical certification.

“Commercial motor vehicle drivers at risk for obstructive sleep apnea is a safety issue we take seriously,” said FMCSA spokesman Duane DeBruyne. “The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is already considering a rule to tighten its standards for medical certification of commercial drivers.”

The FMCSA has a question on its medical certification that asks about sleep disorders.

It also offers this under heading “Is Sleep Apnea Disqualifying?”

“Drivers should be disqualified until the diagnosis of sleep apnea has been ruled out or has been treated successfully,” and “A driver with a diagnosis of (probable) sleep apnea or a driver who has Excessive Daytime Somnolence should be temporarily disqualified.”

Last year, the FMCSA Medical Review Board recommended the

FMCSA require screening for obstructive sleep apnea for drivers with a Body Mass Index over 30. The agency has not acted on the recommendation.

The NTSB also wants the FMCSA to develop and disseminate guidance for commercial drivers, employers and physicians regarding the identification and treatment of individuals at high risk for obstructive sleep apnea.

Fatal crash

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the report, Chairman Deborah Hersman called on federal regulatory agencies to enact the safety measures included in the report, as well as actions cited in previous reports involving interstate motorcoaches.

“We know the standards can be improved,” said Hersman, citing items that have long been on the agency’s “most-wanted” list of highway safety reforms. “I want those recommendations closed in a positive way and taken off the most-wanted list.”

The three members of the NTSB voted unanimously to attribute the crash to the under-inflated tire after reviewing results of an investigation that began when the coach, its driver and 55 passengers crashed through a bridge railing on U.S. 75 en route to Carthage, Mo.

The board determined that “the probable cause of this accident was the failure of the right steer-axle tire due to an extended period of low-pressure operation which resulted in sidewall belting and body ply separation within the tire, leading to loss of vehicle control.”

The safety board said the “failure of the bridge rail to redirect the motorcoach to prevent it from departing the bridge” contributed to “the severity” of an accident that injured the driver and 38 other passengers. The bus was traveling at 68 mph at the time.

“The inadequate occupation protection system (onboard the bus) contributed to the severity of the passenger injuries,” the board added, recommending that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration urgently consider safety measures in long-distance buses such as seatbelts and stronger seats.

The board concluded that the driver of the bus, operated by Iguala BusMex, used cocaine and alcohol before the trip and “may have been impaired.” But the board said there was “no evidence that the actions of the driver caused or contributed to the tire

failure” or the series of steps that claimed passengers’ lives after the bus fell about 8 feet off the bridge and slid roughly 24 feet on its right side before coming to rest.

“Even a well-rested, completely alert driver could not have reacted in time to affect the sequence” of events that followed the failure of the tire at highway speed, leading to the accident, the board said.

The tire was a retread. Using retreaded tires on the steer axle of a motorcoach violates federal rules, but the NTSB decided that did not cause the tire’s failure. The bus passed inspection at a state-certified facility in Houston eight days before the accident, when an inspector did not notice the retread.

Iguala was placed “out of service” by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and remains closed.

Owner Angel de la Torre, who has been sued by victims and their relatives, could face charges now that the NTSB report is completed.

Major safety issues identified by the accident investigation include the following:

- The tire failure and the need for tire pressure monitoring systems on vehicles weighing more than 10,000 pounds.
- The lack of oversight of the federal commercial vehicle inspections that are delegated to the states.
- The lack of motorcoach occupant protection systems.
- The deficiencies in federal safety oversight of new entrant motor carriers.

As a result of its investigation, NTSB made several recommendations. One recommendation was directed to the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators regarding tire pressure monitoring procedures, and one recommendation was made to the coach manufacturer, Motor Coach Industries, calling for revised vehicle maintenance manuals.

A synopsis of NTSB report, including the probable cause and recommendations, is available on its website, www.nts.gov, under “Board Meetings.”



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Applause for tour drivers

By Lynda Brown

“Work with the driver... work with the driver... work with the driver” — words I’m continually reminded of with each new tour.

Wise words and so true.

Drivers are the polish that makes the tour director shine.

Our drivers have a huge role in the success of any tour. The tour director and driver succeed as a team or fail as a team. It takes both to make a tour work.

It’s terrific to work with drivers who continually set the bar higher for the next one. I appreciate so much drivers who take pride in their work — who dress the part; who are cheerful and thoughtful towards our guests; who take the time to get to know a few passenger names; who, without being asked or nagged, ensure that those picture coach windows are cleaned several times throughout the day so everyone’s pictures come out perfect; who arrive a few minutes early so I can get myself organized in the morning; who offer to help even me off the coach with my many bags at the end of the night; who still enjoy doing the work they do, and who come prepared every day.

Drivers I’ve worked with have helped me cope with medical emergencies, have offered suggestions for new coffee/lunch stops, have shared a couple of funny stories I now share on the coach, have helped me gain perspective on days where things haven’t

gone according to plan, and have been supportive and encouraging.

When I feel comfortable with my driver, I can relax and be myself and not have to worry about anything.

It’s hugely gratifying for the passengers to see teamwork develop between drivers and tour directors, so much so they firmly believe you and the driver have worked several times together. When, in fact, you’ve only just met.

You need only have one bad experience with a driver to reinforce just how much we depend on the expertise our drivers provide and how vital they are to any tour.

It’s been enriching and rewarding to develop friendships over the years with all the drivers I’ve had the opportunity to work with and each time we meet on the road, it’s like reconnecting with family. Nobody truly understands the daily pressures and stresses of our worlds like another tour director or driver.

Kudos to the motorcoach companies I’ve come to appreciate over the years: Coach Canada in eastern Canada; Traxx Coachlines of Medicine Hat, Alberta; Charter Bus Lines and Golden Arrow Motor Coaches in western Canada, and the countless drivers who have helped me to become the tour director I am today.

Lynda Brown is a Calgary, Alberta-based tour director. Her article was written for the International Tour Management Institute website.

TSAers run amok at bus station

ORLANDO, Fla. — About 700 Greyhound passengers got a taste of what it’s like to fly the unfriendly skies when the Transportation Security Administration conducted a random screening at the Greyhound Bus Station here last month.

An army of agents descended on the Greyhound terminal and proceeded to run 690 passengers through baggage and personal inspections that are seldom seen at bus terminals.

One Orlando news outlet called the screening “a sting” and said it was set up and coordinated by a TSA unit called the Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response Team, which goes by the *Top Gun* name of VIPR.

According to one news account, the operation deployed workers from multiple agencies to check baggage and passengers “in an effort to augment safety for the traveling public.”

Others were less generous in their assessment of the security sting.

Some internet postings suggested it was a thinly disguised effort to round up illegal aliens. More hardcore critics said that because of its randomness it amounted to unreasonable search and seizure and therefore violated the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

A TSA official said the idea of the

inspection was to keep off guard terrorists and others who mean harm, thereby improving safety for passengers and workers.

However, it’s hard to imagine one inspection in three years keeping anyone off balance except, of course, the passengers who had to put up with it. Officials admitted the screening was not in response to any specific threat at the bus station.

Bottom line, it appears the event was unwarranted, unwelcomed and an anathema to an industry that often touts its hassle-free travel environment.

Although the TSA is best known for its agents at airports, the agency’s Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response teams apparently stage periodic operations at bus and train stations, ports and other transportation centers. The program has been around for about three years.

Last month’s daylong event was the first at a Greyhound station in Florida, said John Daly, TSA security director for the Orlando region. Normally, security at the Orlando station consists of two security agents who have hand-held metal detectors to scan people, and who also inspect luggage by hand.

For its sting, TSA brought in 50

folks from agencies including TSA, Orlando police, the Orange County Sheriff’s Office and U.S. Customs and Border Protection who patted down passengers.

Behavior and explosives experts and dogs trained to sniff out bombs and drugs also were used. Everyone who walked into the terminal went through a metal detector like those at airports, and baggage was screened.

Five people were arrested on illegal-immigration charges, and one person was picked up on a local warrant. Glass bottles, knives, a single bullet and a stun gun were found.

Michael Neal, 66, of Nottingham, England, was forced to remove a box cutter from his carry-on bag and place it in his checked luggage. He said he uses it to peel fruit, and he said he didn’t mind the inconvenience.

But Bryce Williams, 49, on his way to Minneapolis with his son, wasn’t happy with the high level of security, particularly after he was forced to shift some tools from a carry-on bag to checked luggage.

Father and son said they skipped the airport because of the security hassles. Now, they’re rethinking their choice.

“I’m driving from now on,” said Williams.

TSA phasing in ‘Secure Flight’ program

WASHINGTON — The air travel security noose gets a little tighter in coming months when airlines and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security begin phasing in what is called the Secure Flight program.

The program is being developed by the Homeland Security Department in response to a key 9/11 Commission recommendation that the department’s Transportation Security Administration come up with a uni-

form watch list matching system.

Each airline will be incorporating the necessary changes into their computer systems to phase in the system, which is supposed to match the name, date of birth and gender information for each passenger against government watch lists.

The watch lists are designed to:

- Identify known and suspected terrorists
- Prevent individuals on the “No

Fly List” from boarding an aircraft

• Identify individuals on the “Selectee List” for enhanced screening

Secure Flight reportedly does not assign a score to individuals, use commercial data, or predict behavior.

By requiring all passengers to provide date of birth and gender, the Department of Homeland Security says it hopes to reduce the number of passengers misidentified as a match to the watch list.

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Greyhound continues Manitoba runs; subsidies pondered

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — With the promise of government subsidies, Greyhound Canada reportedly has backed off its threat to pull its buses out of Manitoba.

The company issued a statement late last month saying it is working on a deal with the provincial government that will allow bus service to continue.

“Officials will continue to meet and expect to secure the precise details of an agreement in the near future,” Greyhound said in its statement.

“Both the government and the company agree that some combination of direct investment and reduction of service will be required.”

Greyhound had threatened to stop service across Manitoba, and had stopped selling tickets for service beyond Nov. 1, saying it was losing money because of reduced ridership. (See Sept. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The company also plans to stop service in northern Ontario, and is reportedly reviewing its operations in other western provinces and territories.

The possibility of leaving rural residents without intercity bus service apparently was too much for the Manitoba government.

“It’s a necessity and an important mode of transportation for many northerners and rural Manitobans, including people using our health-care service,” said provincial Transportation Minister Ron Lemieux.

“We haven’t nailed down a specific figure (for subsidies) because we have to continue those conversations with Greyhound going forward. They’re coming forward with more information for us.”

Jobs to be cut at Greyhound

ABERDEEN, Scotland — Greyhound Lines may be eliminating additional jobs as its British owner seeks to reduce costs.

Greyhound, which is owned by FirstGroup plc, has already cut about 1,800 positions this year.

FirstGroup reportedly is seeking to reduce costs by about \$121 million in its North American division, which besides Greyhound includes a large school bus operation and transit management unit.

“There might be a little bit more out of Greyhound,” FirstGroup spokeswoman Rachel Borthwick told a wire service in London. “We should get to a position where the business is the right size for the current economy.”

Greyhound revenue declined 20 percent during the first half of FirstGroup’s fiscal year.

The government subsidy will be less than the \$4 million a year that Greyhound has said it is losing in Manitoba, Lemieux said. That means some routes may be served less frequently and others might be closed altogether, he added.

Both Greyhound and Lemieux are hoping Canada’s federal government will put up money as well,

but federal Transport Minister John Baird dismissed the idea in September, accusing Greyhound of trying to “bully” the provinces.

Greyhound, the only public travel option in many remote areas, has said it is being hurt by rural depopulation and a weak economy. It has been seeking subsidies, as well as a loosening of federal regula-

tions that require it to operate money-losing routes.

Other provinces do not appear to be as eager as Manitoba to help the company. Federal and provincial transportation ministers set up a working group last month to look at the issue. Following the meeting, Lemieux said some of his counterparts “felt very strongly” bus ser-

vice should not be subsidized.

Motor Coach Canada, reacting to the transportation minister’s reluctance to assist Greyhound, said it would be questioning “whether this same sentiment will be applied to the large subsidies provided to rail passengers and to the residents in urban areas through the subsidies to (public) transit.”

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Amtrak service costs taxpayers

WASHINGTON — U.S. taxpayers spent about \$32 subsidizing the travel cost of the typical Amtrak passenger last year, about four times the rail operator's estimate, according to a private study.

Forty-one of Amtrak's 44 routes lost money in 2008, said the study by Subsidyscope, an arm of the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Subsidyscope says its review counted certain capital expenses that Amtrak doesn't consider when calculating the financial performance of its routes, namely wear and tear on equipment/depreciation.

Leading the Amtrak loss list was the train between New Orleans and Los Angeles - the Sunset Limited - which lost \$462 per passenger. The taxpayer subsidies keep the passenger trains running.

The Northeast corridor has the highest passenger volume of any Amtrak route. The corridor's high-speed Acela Express made a profit of about \$41 per passenger.

At the same time, the Northeast Regional line lost about \$5 per passenger.

Passenger rail systems throughout the world lose money and require government subsidies to cover operating expenses.

Marcus Peacock, project director for Subsidyscope, said his group's analysis should lead to more scrutiny of Amtrak routes that are losing the most money.

People

FAIRFAX, Va. — *Joseph E. Kobussen*, president of **Kobussen Trailways** in Kaukauna, Wis., has been appointed to a one-year term on the board of directors of the **Trailways Transportation System**.

Kobussen is a third-generation family manager of the company his grandfather founded in 1938. Kobussen Trailways has grown to operate a fleet of 350 school buses, 13 motorcoaches, and assorted paratransit vehicles. It operates out of six terminals in southern Wisconsin.

Kobussen also serves as president of the Heart of the Valley Chamber of Commerce in Fox Valley, Wis., and is past president of the Wisconsin Family Business Forum and the **Wisconsin Motorcoach Association**.

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. — **Peter Pan Bus Lines** has promoted four top managers to senior positions within the company.

Frank Dougherty was named vice president-transportation and an officer of the company.

In his new role, Dougherty will be responsible for the development of strategic fleet planning and optimization of driver manpower companywide, as well as assure that all Peter Pan divisions are coordinating and functioning efficiently. In addition, Dougherty will be responsible for maximizing efficiencies of Peter Pan's pool service with **Greyhound Lines** throughout the northeast.

Dougherty previously was general manager of Peter Pan's Providence, R.I.-based division (formerly Peter Pan-Bonanza). He began his career as a driver for Greyhound before joining **Bonanza Bus Lines** in 2000.

Peter Pan promoted *Ken Mulcahy* to senior director of line-run operations.

Mulcahy joined Peter Pan 21 years ago as a driver and for the past 11 years has been director of operations.

Bruce Westcott has been named senior director of sales and marketing. Westcott joined Peter Pan last year to handle business development for the company. He previously was executive vice president of The Stanley Works and has more than 20 years of experience in sales and marketing.

Joanne Berwald has been appointed senior director of human resources. Berwald joined Peter Pan last year, having previously been director of human resources and vice president of operations for Buxton Company.

Peter Pan achieved an extraordinary level of visibility in late August when the company provided 40 motorcoaches to transport family, staff and members of Congress during the three days of funeral services for the late *U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy*, D-Mass. The coaches were seen frequently in the extensive television coverage.

WASHINGTON — The **Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance** announced that *Stephen Keppler* has been named interim executive



Kobussen



Bittner



Cornell



Sullivan

director. Keppler most recently served as CVSA director of policy and programs. He succeeds, at least temporarily, *Stephen F. Campbell*, the long-time executive director of CVSA who did not have his contract renewed by the organization's executive committee.

CVSA promotes commercial motor vehicle safety and security by providing leadership to enforcement, industry and policy makers. Its membership is comprised of local, state, provincial, territorial and federal motor carrier safety officials and motor carrier industry representatives from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

WINTER GARDEN, Fla. — The board of directors of **ABC Companies** has appointed *Ashley Cornell* the vice president/general manager of the organization's CustomerCare Group.

At the same time, ABC announced the appointment of *Tom Sullivan* to the position of account executive for its southeastern region.

In his new position, Sullivan will team with ABC sales veteran *Claude Payne* to cover new and pre-owned coach sales in Virginia, Kentucky, West Virginia, and

North and South Carolina.

In her new role, Ashley Cornell will manage all aspects and responsibilities within the CustomerCare area, overseeing day-to-day activities for a support staff consisting of technical, engineering, service representatives and warranty personnel. CustomerCare is the unit of ABC that handles all new coach equipment-related issues, including warranty and vendor alliances, engineering, technical and product development services and field services.

As the former director of CustomerCare, Cornell has managed customer relationships, serving as the key liaison between ABC after-sales support programs and ABC customers.

Cornell joined ABC Companies a dozen years ago. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Tampa.

Sullivan has extensive sales experience, including employment with **Volvo Trucks North America**, and most recently as regional sales manager for **Motor Coach Industries**.

He is a graduate of James Madison University with a degree in finance and holds a master's degree from The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va.

GREENSBORO, N.C. — *Tim Bittner* has been appointed a regional sales manager for pre-owned motorcoaches by **Daimler Buses North America**.

Bittner joins Daimler from **Prevost Car**, where he sold motorcoaches in the Mid-Atlantic region. Prior to that he spent seven years as president/owner of a commercial bus dealership in Southern California.

Bittner's territory at Daimler includes parts or all of six mid-east states, including Ohio, Maryland, Kentucky, West Virginia, New York and Pennsylvania.

COLUMBUS, Ind. — **Cummins Inc.** has promoted *Lori Thompson* to vice president of the truck and bus OEM business.

Thompson, who was executive director of the truck and bus OEM business, joined Cummins in 1979. She has led the company's logistics and ReCon remanufacturing operations in Memphis, Tenn., and held management roles at company operations in Mexico and Belgium.

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Electronics rebuilt by Big Rig

CALGARY, Alberta — Motorcoach operators and their maintenance personnel know the drill: a signal-light switch, public-address microphone, electronic destination sign or other electrical device goes on the fritz, and there's nothing to do but toss it away and buy a new one.

Until now.

Big Rig Collision of Calgary announced it has set up an Electronics Rebuild Division with the goal of putting an end to needlessly costly component throw-aways and replacements, and a whole lot less needless waste in landfills.

"In the past, motorcoach operators and transit authorities have had to literally throw out failed electronic components and purchase

new ones," said Big Rig President Brad Field.

"There was no viable option to repair them. With our new Electronics Rebuild Division we are able, in most cases, to rebuild those components and supply them back to the owner for about 30 to 40 percent of the cost of new components.

"It's a lower cost option for our customers — and a much greener one. Why fill up landfill sites with potentially hazardous, perfectly repairable electronic components when Big Rig can repair them for a fraction of the cost?" Field asks.

Heading up the Big Rig Electronics Rebuild Division is George W. Wilson. With 20-plus years of electrical and electronic experience

in the motorcoach industry, Wilson understands that most of the modern electronic components used on coaches and buses are repairable, says Field.

"I don't think most companies will replace expensive electronic components when repairing them is an option," says Wilson. "And at Big Rig, we're always eager to spare our customers from unnecessary expenditures."

Currently, Big Rig's Electronics Rebuild program can rebuild more than 50 electronic components, including most types of multiplex modules, HVAC controllers, voltage regulators, battery equalizers, signal light switches, monitors, video control modules, PA microphones, radio/CD players, audio amps and electronic destination signs.

For a free estimate on rebuild costs, owners can send their failed electronic components to Big Rig Collision.

Providing the components are repairable, Big Rig says it will quickly complete the rebuild or, in an emergency, immediately send a replacement from its inventory.

For more information, go to www.bigrigcollision.com, or e-mail rpek@bigrigcollision.com.

Blue Bird, Girardin announce joint-venture production plans

FORT VALLEY, Ga. — Leading school bus manufacturers Blue Bird and Girardin Minibus have announced a joint venture that will shift production of some Blue Bird buses to Canada.

Under the arrangement, production of Blue Bird Micro Bird small school and commercial buses will be consolidated with Girardin bus products and distribution merged into a single entity.

"Girardin's complete Type A bus line is a perfect complement to Blue Bird's complete Type C and D bus product lines and ensures our dealers can offer our mutual customers the best in a complete family of Blue Bird school and activity bus products," said Greg Bennett, president and CEO of Blue Bird Corp.

The new entity, located in Drummondville, Quebec, will be named Micro Bird Inc., and will be responsible for the design and fabrication of all Blue Bird Type A school buses, activity buses and commercial buses," said Steve Girardin, president of Micro Bird.

All Type A products, branded Blue Bird Micro Bird by Girardin, will be exclusively distributed and supported by the Blue Bird dealer network.

Just over two years ago, Blue Bird closed its Micro Bird plant in Brantford, Ont., and moved production of the small bus lines to Fort Valley.

The move of the small models back to Canada will free up space for the production of larger school buses at the Fort Valley facility.

CIT files reorganization plan

NEW YORK — CIT Group Inc., once one of the motorcoach industry's leading lenders, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection early this month.

The filing came after months of struggling to avoid financial collapse.

The company provides credit to thousands of small and midsized businesses. In the 1990s, CIT

Group/Industrial Finance marketed financing and leasing programs to the motorcoach industry.

CIT stressed that its lending operations will continue as it pursues its prepackaged reorganization plan through bankruptcy court. CIT's filing is one of the biggest in U.S. corporate history; the filing shows \$71 billion in assets against debt of \$64.9 billion.

Fleetsource buys Dover Diesel Svc.

CLIFTWOOD, N.J. — Fleetsource, which provides products and services to commercial fleet operators, announced it has acquired Dover Diesel Service of Carlstadt, N.J., one of the largest independent Caterpillar and Cum-

mins service dealers and parts providers in New Jersey.

This acquisition was the sixth by Fleetsource since 2005.

The transaction gives Fleetsource additional engine diagnostic and on-vehicle service capabilities.

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Coach sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

were also considerably higher than the disaster year of 1991."

To a large degree, the third quarter mirrored this year's second quarter. (See Sept. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.) Among the similarities:

- Conversion shells are still down considerably from previous years and "can be said to represent much of the reduced numbers from last year."

- Public-sector sales were only slightly less than a year ago.

- Sales of particular models, notably the Prevost X3-45, the Van Hool TD925 double-decker, and the MCI J4500 and D4505, "continued strong" in the quarter.

- Canadian sales were healthy as Coach Canada and Greyhound Canada added new coaches to their fleets.

The three best selling models during this year's third quarter represented 55.5 percent of the market, which was up marginally from 54.4 in the second quarter and 55 percent in the first quarter.

The best selling coach in the

third quarter was the MCI J4500, followed by the D4500, and a tie between the Prevost X3-45 and the MCI D4505.

The other top selling coaches (in order) during the third quarter were the Prevost H3-45; Van Hool TD925; Van Hool C2045, and Setra S 417.

Sales of new coaches into Canada totaled 75 buses, or 20 percent of the total, during this year's third quarter. That compares to third-quarter 2008 Canadian new coach sales of 76 buses, or 17.3 percent of the total, and third-quarter 2007

Canadian sales of 25 units, or 5.5 percent of the market.

A total of 77 imported coaches — Setra, Temsa and Van Hool — were sold in this year's third quarter, or just over 20 percent of the total. That compares to 112 imported coaches, or 25.5 percent of the market, a year ago, and to 103 imported coaches, or 22.5 percent of the market, in the third quarter of 2007.

The conversion shell market remained very depressed. Sixteen conversion shells were sold during the third quarter this year, down

from 32 shells sold during the year-ago third period, and 64 shells sold during the third quarter of 2007.

Conversion shells represented 4.3 percent of the market in this year's third quarter. Previous years saw the market share of conversion shells as high as 15 percent.

Auto-stick transmissions were installed in 75 of the coaches sold in the third quarter, representing 20 percent of the market. That is up from a year ago and may reflect the addition of the Volvo I-Shift in the auto-stick category, along with the ZF AS-tronic transmission.

Fall foliage

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

sell themselves," said Desautels.

Premier doesn't operate its own tours but provides coaches and drivers for major tour operators. It had about 160 departures this season, which was comparable to past years, he said.

"Tour companies market themselves pretty aggressively," he said. "Some asked for rate reductions to be more competitive in response to a terribly soft summer season. They probably didn't need the discounts to the degree they anticipated."

Most fall tours run seven days but some go 11 or 12 days. The first

two weeks in October usually are the best for colors, so tour operators often offer discounts for the two weeks before and after that peak period.

DATTCO in New Britain, Conn., which also provides buses

Branson tours

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

market to Branson, Mo.," said Lenni Neimeyer, director of leisure group sales.

Berry said visitors who come to Branson as part of a group see more shows than those who come on their own. She said the average group sees 4.9 shows, while indi-

viduals see 4.2 shows.

"We committed a few more buses than we could handle, and as

and drivers for tour companies, overbooked by about 35 percent, anticipating a slow fall season, said Dennis Lyons, vice president of the company's coach tour group.

"The thing about our groups, they do a lot more shows and attractions than our individuals," Neimeyer agreed.

Motorcoach groups also are good for the environment and Branson traffic, officials note.

"When you put 40 people or more on a bus, that keeps 20 cars off our highways," Neimeyer said.

a result we wound up in pretty good shape," Lyons said. "We probably had 18 to 20 buses per day on the road, mostly for fall foliage tours."

There were some cancellations, Lyons noted, but the European market remained strong, in

"It's eco-friendly."

And who comes to Branson on all those coaches? "It is all age groups," Neimeyer said.

"Many people love to have everything prepackaged and planned for them," said Berry.

Officials say spring is the second busiest time for motorcoach travel, which brings a lot of student groups to the area.

part because of the exchange rate between the dollar and euro.

Colors this year were considerably better than last year, he said, due to an abundance of rain well into summer.

"The rain helped us with some really bright colors," Lyons said.

Instead of cutting rates, some tour companies improved on-board amenities, including more leg room, individual head sets and a lounge in the rear of the bus.

"On these tours, people spend a lot of time on the bus, so they want to make the ride more comfortable," Lyons said. "Fall foliage has always been a good seller. It's something we can count on."

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Dealing with a bus fire or crash damage is no easy chore

By Dave Millhouser

"Do you have a drill press?" asked the bus salesman.

The sales rep was standing next to George, the owner of a badly burned bus, and had just pried a piece of melted aluminum off the coach's side.

The new Eagle had been cruising on Connecticut's Interstate 95 when some kids transporting a mattress on the roof of a car suddenly let it go.

It slid under the bus, jammed and burst into flames.

The blaze was spectacular and photogenic. Fortunately there were no injuries.

Within nanoseconds of the TV report, George got a call from his bus salesman, asking if he needed any help "identifying parts" for the repair. This is code for "Can I sell you another bus?"

George nodded towards the drill press, and watched the salesman drill a hole in the aluminum nugget. "Whatcha doing?" asked George.

"Making a key chain out of your bus" replied the (heartless) salesman.

Every time there's a bus fire, huge headlines erupt, and news anchors gush that everyone on the bus barely escaped with their lives (and every appendectomy is JUST before that sucker was about to burst!).

A bit of research indicates that, prior to

the truly horrific Hurricane Rita bus in 2005, we hadn't had a fatal fire since sometime in the 1950s, and that one involved a head-on collision.

Thermal Incidents (more salesman code words) are serious and highly visible, but thankfully injuries and death are rare. In real life, the major significance of most fires are public relations and economic.

What do you do when your coach is seriously damaged? Your insurance company (which will be footing the bill) is going to have major input.

If the coach is reduced to a pile of smoldering bussy protoplasm, or is 20 years old, the decision becomes a no-brainer. It's totaled.

The age and value of the coach weigh heavily; you're not going to put \$100,000 into a bus worth \$80,000.

If you (and your insurer) are teetering on the edge, here are some considerations. Hopefully they make sense, not just for fires, but for any major body repair.

Think about your season. If it's a close call, and the decision is made to repair the bus, can you afford to be without it? In the current climate, buying a replacement can be quick (refer back to "heartless salesman").

Some repair facilities, particularly those affiliated with manufacturers, may lend or lease you a bus if you give them the repair job. Will your insurer go for that? The loaner

or leased coach is a great motivator for the repair facility to get the job done quickly.

Restoring burned buses is difficult. Getting the smoky smell out is never easy. Modern buses have lots of fabric inside and odors cling to it. Insist on a thorough cleaning (or fabric replacement), and don't accept a repair that doesn't pass the "sniff test."

Depending on the bus's age, repairing the electrical system can be tricky. Patching electrical stuff is never a good idea, but it can be a disaster with the new, multiplexed systems. You're going to want a new wiring harness in the damaged area. Many manufacturers don't have those puppies lying around, so you may need to push.

You'll also want to be sure the frame and components haven't been compromised by heat. Damage is not always visible. Years ago we salvaged wheels off a burned Scenicruiser. They looked fine but every one cracked within a month. That could have been nasty.

Modern body shops have sophisticated equipment that can restore any bus to like-new condition — if it makes sense economically.

If it's decided to repair the coach, make sure the chosen facility is equipped to do the job right.

Insurers are sensitive about fires, and the cost of repair, so the manufacturer has a major stake in helping you get things right.

Involve their tech reps and parts people as soon as possible. It will help with the quality of repair, and keep your body shop honest.

Some bus builders have parts folk dedicated to identifying and expediting major body parts. Find them and love them. They're the ones who can tell you if the body shop REALLY is waiting for parts.

The decision as to whether to repair or replace can be a contentious one. Your insurance broker can be helpful. If you've built a healthy relationship, this is when it pays off.

Find out what caused the fire... and don't do that anymore.

If it's something beyond your direct control (turbochargers leap to mind), stay in touch with the manufacturer and do updates quickly.

Whether this one's your fault or not, driver training and maintenance can control the frequency and severity of fires, and reduce the chance of injury.

By the way, I still have that key chain.

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



Dave Millhouser



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Prevost opens B.C. service center

DELTA, British Columbia — In plenty of time for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Prevost, a division of Volvo Group Canada Inc., has opened a service center here.

The 6,600-square-foot facility, Prevost's first in the Pacific Northwest, provides full service for all makes of motorcoaches, as well as all other buses equipped with a Volvo engine.

The center is near several major highways that serve Canada's third-largest metropolitan area, and is easily accessible from Vancouver International Airport, ferry terminals and the Canada-U.S. border.

The maintenance facility has four bays and one wash pad. In addition to normal daytime business

hours — Monday through Friday, after-hours or holiday appointments may be arranged through Service Manager Dennis Garvey.

"Prevost is known for its ongoing commitment to provide all our vehicle owners with exceptional after-market service, including parts, maintenance and emergency repairs," said Randy Castillo, Prevost service network manager.

"Selecting Vancouver for our newest facility was a natural. The region is growing rapidly and reliance on transit service is already strong.

"In anticipation of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games, public transit systems in Vancouver, Whistler, Squamish and Pemberton are enhancing their service and expanding their fleets, many with

transit buses built by Nova Bus, Prevost's sister company. We look forward to working closely with them to provide support for their vehicles."

Thousands of motorcoaches and buses will travel the roads between Vancouver and Whistler during the 2010 Olympic Winter Games, the largest event in the region's history. The games in February and Paralympic Winter Games in March will attract an estimated 5,500 athletes and officials, 55,000 workers, 10,000 media representatives, and as many as 200,000 spectators per day.

"We're delighted to be up and running in time to accommodate the substantial increase in traffic that will accompany the Winter



Prevost repair center features four bays, after-hours service.

Games," said Christian Gagnon, Prevost construction project manager. "Yet, we know that with its exceptional beauty, outstanding recreational opportunities and other attractions, the Vancouver area is a draw for numerous four-season

motorcoach users, and we'll be here to serve them, as well as all buses equipped with Volvo engines."

The service center also can handle the mandatory new bus or motorcoach inspections required by British Columbia.

Olympics-related road closures begin in British Columbia

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — The 2010 Winter Olympics don't start until mid-February but road closures in preparation for the games began this month.

First Avenue, from Quebec Street to the Cambie Bridge, and the seawall outside the Vancouver Olympic Village were put behind fences.

The rest of the phased road and closures run Jan. 1 to March 1, with bans on parking and stopping in curb lanes on the city's busiest streets from Feb. 4 to March 1.

Those lanes will be restricted to security vehicles, buses and cars with Vancouver Organizing Committee-issued vehicle access and parking permits.

Major street closures include Abbott from Expo to Keefer (Jan. 4), Quebec Street (Jan. 15), Renfrew from Hastings to McGill (Jan. 24), Canada Place and Waterfront Road (Jan. 27), Expo and Pacific (Jan. 29) and Midlothian near the Vancouver Olympic Center (Feb. 1).

During the games, Granville

from Smithe to Cordova, Robson from Bute to Beatty, Hamilton and Mainland between David Lam Park and Georgia and Beatty between Smithe and Dunsmuir will become pedestrian-only corridors.

The east end of False Creek will be fenced. The northern half includes B.C. Place Stadium and GM Place. The southern half includes

the Vancouver Olympic Village.

Commercial vehicles will be steered to temporary routes Feb. 1 to March 21.

For ticketholders to snow events, first-come, first-served online bus reservations begin Nov. 24 for the mandatory \$25 round-trip to Whistler and \$12 round-trip to Cypress. The price doubles Jan. 4.



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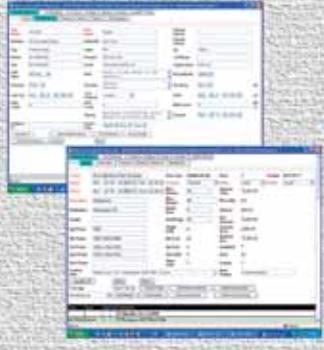


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Building a WiFi system for your buses — on a budget

By Sondra Sneed

So, you'd like to upgrade your fleet by offering passengers WiFi on your buses, but the cost doesn't make sense in the current business environment.

There may be a reasonable alternative to spending thousands per coach on an expensive satellite system. In fact, offering WiFi doesn't have to cost \$5,000 to \$10,000 — per bus.

For a do-it-yourselfer, a small WiFi system, based on a cellular carrier's 3G network, can be put together for around \$800 (or less). The following method provides a reasonable bandwidth for passengers to check and send e-mails, check airline flight status online, or surf the internet.

Three things are needed to create a 3G cellular WiFi system:

- A 3G cellular modem
- A cellular router
- A cellular amplifier

The 3G cellular modem, which is also called an aircard or data card, will have either USB or PC-MCIA port connections. Cellular modems can be purchased from a carrier dealer (wireless store), Best Buy or other retail outlet where

mobile phones can be purchased and activated.

Buying a 3G modem

First, choose a carrier. *PC Magazine* reports Verizon has the widest 3G coverage of the national carriers, but Sprint is the first to offer 4G (aka WiMax).

Buy an unlimited data plan with the modem.

Cellular modems average \$60 each (one-time cost), and unlimited data plans average \$60 a month

Buying a router

Next is the cellular router, which takes the 3G cellular signal and routes it to multiple users on the bus. Cellular routers work just like home or office routers that are connected to DSL or cable modems. Instead of a cable or phone

line, however, cellular routers redistribute the signal coming from a cell tower.

Purchase a 3G cellular modem before buying the cellular router. The reason is that there are different router models for different network providers. The carrier store may have routers in stock to fit your new modem.

D-Link and Cradlepoint are well-rated 3G cellular router manufacturers. Their prices range between \$200 and \$300, depending on the reseller.

You can conduct an internet search for "cellular routers" to find a dealer or look on their websites for details and customer service contacts.

Finally, a cellular amplifier is the key to this lower-cost method of producing WiFi for your passen-

gers. While being mobile, you'll no doubt travel through areas that have spotty or weak cellular service.

And, just as you experience dropped cell phone calls in these areas, data will have an even harder time because a strong signal is essential to a solid data connection. Data "dead zones" cause disruption in service and a cellular amplifier bridges the gap between cell towers.

Besides dead zones, mountains and tall buildings, or rural areas that are not well covered by cell towers also cause disruptions in service. To avoid these issues, cellular amplifiers work great.

Buying an amplifier

Consult with a cellular amplifier supplier for technical support regarding the range or area of cov-

erage you need. This is determined by the size of the vehicle.

Technical support should also be able to tell you what type of an external antenna will work for your situation.

Look for a dual-band model amplifier, which works with all carrier networks (except Nextel iDEN). The amplifier should be powerful enough to boost a signal for a data card, as well as cell phones.

There are a number of companies that make amplifiers. Wilson Electronics has the only FCC-approved technology for controlling oscillation. Wilson also has knowledgeable, available staff; many of its competitors depend on dealers to support customers. Go to www.wilsonelectronics.com to find help in locating the right model.

All of these products are relatively easy to install. Once you've installed the first system and tested it on your customers, worked out any kinks, and evaluated the monthly cost you may find it to be the right solution for your fleet.

Sondra Sneed is the editor and senior writer for a wireless trade publication. Contact her at sondra@sondrasneed.com.

Oregon modifies rules for tire chain use

SALEM, Ore. — The Oregon Department of Transportation has modified its winter tire chain regulation in an effort to keep traffic moving with fewer snow- and ice-related tie-ups.

Under the modified chain regu-

lation, tandem drive axle trucks are not required to use chains, but single drive axle vehicles with a gross weight of more than 10,000 pounds are required to install chains when snow signs are posted.

"We expect (the new rule) will

help keep traffic moving with fewer tie-ups," said an ODOT spokesman.

Oregon law requires vehicles to carry chains in snow zones, regardless of the weather conditions. For more information, go to www.tripcheck.com.



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49ers shuttles

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

experiences with other 49ers fans with customized Facebook and Twitter pages”, said Kumar Shah, Accelar’s chairman and CEO.

“With special game day prizes, express shuttle service to Candlestick Park, and a variety of 49ers game day packages we have brought to the 49ers fan base all across Northern California new and exciting ways to purchase their tickets for the express shuttle service provided by our partner, El Camino Trailways, through Accelar-powered portal, www.49ersShuttle.com.

“The 49ersShuttle.com is the first game day portal we have launched under a broader initiative — www.GameDayShuttle.com, a portal for sports fans all across the nation — to deliver to the sports fans for each sports team their own self-organizing portal, and personalized and customized game day experience”, said Shah.

“We are delighted to partner with the 49ers and with Accelar to deliver to 49ers fans the experience of arriving at Candlestick Park in a hassle-free and quick way with our 49ersShuttle Tail-Gate Express Service and 49ersShuttle Express Service, and a fully staffed game



El Camino Trailways is a key player in the 49ers shuttle partnership.

day customer service, operation, and tech support center,” said Bob Aube, El Camino Trailways’ director of sales.

“We have partnered with Accelar, our internet solutions provider, to deliver a self-organizing, 49ers fans-driven express service portal — www.49ersShuttle.com — where the 49ers fans determine the time and location for the 49ers express shuttle service.

“Based on the input received from the 49ers fans we have created our 49ersShuttle Tail-Gate Express service for those fans who want to get to the park early for their tail-gate parties and the 49ersShuttle Express Service that will considerably shorten the time

to get to the Candlestick Park compared to other transit-bus like services with numerous stops along the way,” said Aube.

El Camino Trailways also has transportation and ticket packages available, including game day tickets, tail-gate party tickets and express shuttle service tickets.

David E. Pickeral, executive adviser to Accelar, calls the collaboration between Accelar, the 49ers and El Camino Trailways “historic.”

“For anyone who lives in, has visited, or has otherwise ever tried to drive in the Bay Area during football season the benefits of this scenario are manifest. I only hope it catches on in other cities and their sports franchises,” said Pickeral.

Pa. cuts tourism marketing

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Pennsylvania, one of the nation’s most-visited states, has cut its tourism promotional spending virtually in half for fiscal 2010.

Gov. Edward G. Rendell announced the commonwealth would be investing \$8 million during the current fiscal year to help local and regional organizations market tourism attractions and promote the state.

Pennsylvania invested \$15.6 million in tourism promotion during fiscal 2009.

The money for 2010 was late in

being committed this year because of a budget impasse.

“Even in a challenging economy, Pennsylvania recognizes the need to invest in our tourism industry because it generates more than \$28 billion in economic impact — an amount greater than the recently enacted state budget,” Rendell said.

Included in the money for this year is \$100,000 for the Pennsylvania Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus to promote group and motorcoach tours.

NTA plans Shanghai marketing

LEXINGTON, Ky. — The National Tour Association is receiving financial assistance from the federal government to create a Visit USA center, co-located with the United States Commercial Service, in Shanghai, China.

The center will promote group leisure travel to the U.S.

“In addition to financial assistance, the (U.S. Commerce) Department will help coordinate and support project activity, including the establishment of a new Visit USA Center with the Department’s Commercial Service in China,” said Acting Assistant Secretary of

Commerce for Manufacturing and Services Mary Saunders.

“This partnership between NTA and the Department of Commerce will enable American companies and destinations to promote themselves to Chinese travel agents and tour operators,” said NTA President Lisa Simon, CTP.

“The creation of the Visit USA Center will help NTA facilitate increased group leisure travel to the U.S. as part of its China Inbound Program.”

Proposed programs and services include distribution of information on U.S. destinations.

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Cisco Systems' tool aims to stop employee porn surfing

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Cisco Systems has introduced new technology it says can help employers be much more effective at stopping employees from internet surfing to

pornography websites — a practice that can trigger sexual harassment lawsuits — or to other sites deemed nonproductive.

A new survey asserts that as

many as 54 percent of U.S. companies ban workers from using social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and MySpace on company time.

The survey of 1,400 chief information officers by Robert Half Technology, an IT staffing firm, also found that 19 percent of companies allow social networking use only for business purposes, while 16 percent allow limited personal use.

These developments suggest companies want to make it harder

for employees to access their favorite web haunts while using company computers.

According to a Cisco spokesman, internet content filtering tools now used by companies have an Achilles heel: Only 20 percent of active web links are accounted for on the blacklists used by those filtering tools.

And many workers, says the Cisco spokesman, have figured out how to use anonymous proxies — links that obfuscate the true web ad-

dress — to circumvent web filtering.

Cisco's new tool, called Cisco IronPort Web Usage Controls, analyzes each web link an employee clicks to in real time, and can spot — and block — anonymous proxies that exist in what Cisco calls "the dark web," the 80 percent of URLs that are unaccounted for by any black lists.

It also reads web pages and can decide if it's an anonymous proxy, even if the URL was just created and is not on any blacklist.

Ontario assn. retools website

TORONTO — The Ontario Motor Coach Association has launched a revamped website designed to more fully meet the needs of its members and to provide information to consumers.

The association said it undertook the retooling to make its website easier to use by creating a more intuitive menu bar.

"We are really excited about the increased functionality of our website. Our mission is to assist members in their day-to-day business and having an easy-to-use website will help us achieve that mission,"

said Ann Fairley, OMCA vice president.

The site's new look also is aimed at reinforcing the association's theme of members growing their business.

OMCA members can download a membership database, update their own profile, pay invoices, and use a member search function to seek out business partners or emergency help.

To see the site, go to www.omca.com. For more information, contact Fairley at (416) 229-6622 Ext. 223.

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Navistar unveils its 2010 engines with 'American' EGR

CHICAGO — Navistar Inc. rolled out its 2010 engines and trucks here last month, adopting a decidedly jingoistic approach, with one company executive telling reporters it planned to offer customers “a distinctive technology for North America.”

“We’re not German, we’re not

Swedes, we’re Americans,” said Dee Kapur, president of Navistar’s Truck Group, referring to Daimler Trucks North America and Volvo Trucks North America, owned respectively by German truck maker Daimler AG and Swedish manufacturer AB Volvo.

Kapur spoke during a press

event at which Navistar demonstrated several models of its 2010 engines and trucks and said they would perform the “same or better” than its competitors without needing any new components or additive liquids.

Daimler (Detroit Diesel) and Volvo will use selective catalytic

reduction technology to meet the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s strict nitrogen-oxide emission standards for 2010. SCR requires urea-based diesel exhaust fluid.

All current North American engine producers use exhaust gas recirculation technology. Europe-

an engine makers have used SCR since 2006.

Navistar contends that 2010 SCR systems will add 300 pounds to 500 pounds of weight in components and DEF, which bus and truck operators and their drivers and maintenance staffs will be responsible for maintaining to keep the engine running properly.

Ramin Younessi, group vice president of product development and strategy for Navistar’s Truck Group, said the company has tested its 2010 EGR system for 10 million miles.

“We have put the engines through two summers and two winters of testing so far,” Younessi said. “This includes over-the-road, buses and severe service, and we will do another winter of testing, still.”

Navistar’s 11-liter and 13-liter “big-bore engines will be EPA compliant in the box,” he said, “with one set of engine hardware with many different ratings, with horsepower from 370 to 475 and multiple torques.”

“There is a myth that the engines will run hot with EGR,” Younessi said. “The truth is that our advanced EGR will have a cooling system and lower combustion temperatures. The laws of physics do not change.”

Younessi apparently was aiming his comments at a competitor’s criticisms of Navistar’s technology, saying its EGR system would mean much higher engine temperatures.

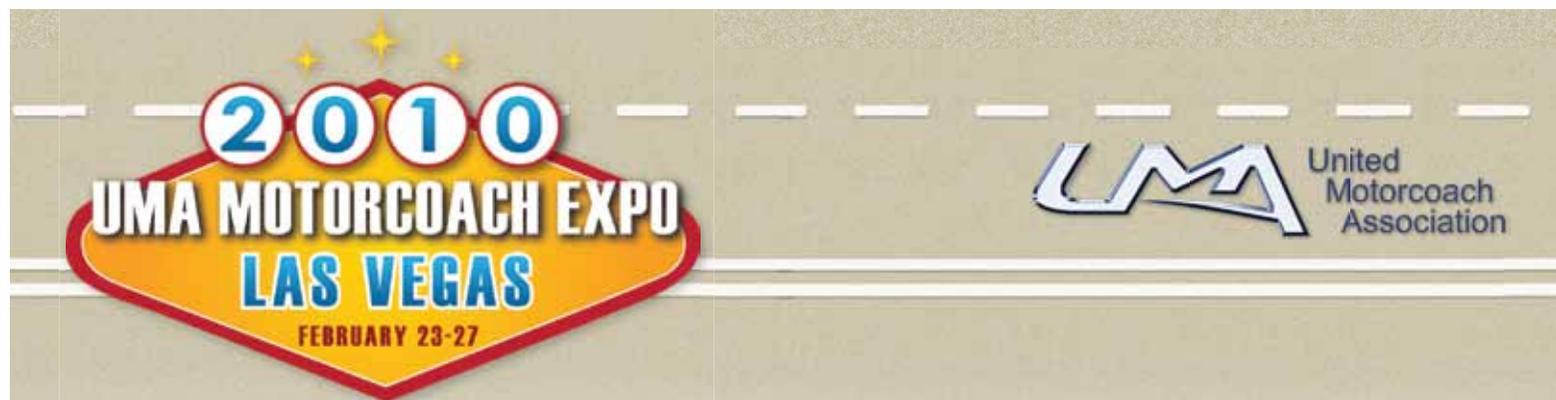
Navistar says in its literature its 2010 system will use “improved” combustion through a “unique combustion bowl design, as well as increased injection pressure, sophisticated controls and calibration and state-of-the-art air-path management” to prevent the formation of NOx in the engine, rather than treat it in the exhaust system, as SCR does.

“We will have the least amount of changes for 2010 in our big-bore engines, since they were introduced just two years ago...with an engine block designed for 2010,” Younessi said.

He said Navistar’s technology has reduced engine noise in the cab by 65 to 70 percent over similar-sized engines.

“We get complaints from some people that they can’t hear the engine,” Younessi said. “All of those buzzes, rattles and squeaks, all of those ugly noises by those little pads between parts, they’re all disappearing.”

Younessi said the truck models Navistar brought to Chicago for reporters to drive and examine would be just as efficient overall in fuel use as SCR models.



Why you CAN'T afford to miss UMA Motorcoach Expo...

- ★ **New timely education sessions** – UMA’s education sessions are recognized as the industry’s best and this year’s program is no exception. Moreover, with today’s challenging economy staring everyone in the face, learning how to navigate through these uncertain times *is a must!* Each EXPO solution session is customized to meet the demands of the *new economy*. You’ll learn new ways to market and manage your business that will help you not just succeed, but *thrive* with the knowledge and new insights you’ll gain through this information-packed program. EXPO Solution Sessions are run by some of our industry’s best operators who know and understand what you are going through. They’re not shy about sharing their successes...or their failures. What you can learn from them will be priceless. You’ll leave Las Vegas with proven, “shovel-ready” ideas that you can readily implement in your business.
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WHAT OPERATORS ARE SAYING ABOUT UMA MOTORCOACH EXPO



David Brown, HOLIDAY TOURS

“During these uncertain times attending UMA Motorcoach Expo is critical. It may prove to be the most important business decision you make all year.”



Mike Waters, COACH AMERICA/FRANCISCAN LINES

“Expo has always provided operators, large and small, the opportunity to see up close new vehicle equipment, supplies, and literally every item a bus operator will need to survive. It also gives us old timers the chance to see each other again and to meet new friends and colleagues through networking facilitated by UMA.”



Larry Hundt, GREAT CANADIAN TRAILWAYS

“UMA Motorcoach Expo is the most important show I attend. EXPO helps me keep up with our ever-changing industry. I find the show and the solution sessions vital to our growth and success.”



Ronald Bast, PRESIDENT, RITEWAY BUS SERVICE, INC.

“The UMA Motorcoach Expo is the ideal venue to expand our network contacts as well as nurture existing relationships. The importance of maintaining association memberships is essential.”



Tom Giddens, PACIFIC COACHWAYS TRAILWAYS

UMA Motorcoach Expo is the one place where everyone who attends can benefit. Whether you are a small or large operator there is something to learn and apply to your business. The education sessions, networking opportunities, and showfloor allow me to meet with everyone in the industry in just 3 days. It is the one industry event I would not miss!



Loren Jones, HAWKEYE STAGES

“We have come to every UMA Motorcoach Expo since 1994. The one-on-one networking times are always great. This is the one central show where we always know we will be able to see various manufacturers and suppliers face-to-face. There have been several products we would not have bought had we not seen them at UMA Motorcoach Expo.”

Allison 'optimizes' its transmission line for 2010

INDIANAPOLIS — With re-vamped diesel engines just a couple of months away from widespread introduction by truckers and somewhat later by motorcoach operators, Allison Transmission has announced a series of product improvements for the new model years.

Allison, the world leader in medium- and heavy-duty commercial transmissions and the No. 1 transmission supplier to the motorcoach industry for decades, says its transmissions have been "optimized" for 2010, meaning efficiency and fuel economy features have been enhanced.

"We've always been committed to understanding and satisfying the needs of our customers. That's why we constantly analyze, refine and improve our products and features," said Jim Wanaselja, vice president, Allison Transmission North America marketing, sales and service.

For 2010, Allison's "load-based shift scheduling" feature includes a "super economy shift schedule." The upgrade allows Allison transmissions to up-shift under cruising conditions to improve fuel economy.

The load-based shift scheduling feature automatically selects between economy and performance shift schedules based on the vehicle's payload and the grade on which it is operating.

The shift feature is available on all bus, highway and pupil transport/shuttle series transmissions.

The super economy feature also is available with "shift energy management/low-range torque protection" (SEM/LRTP) capable engines.

The 2010 Allison 1000/2000 series transmissions feature increased horsepower and torque ratings, allowing a broader range of applications at a lower initial cost.

The 1000/2000 trannies, with shift energy management, are now rated up to 340 horsepower and 660 pound-feet of torque. Without shift energy management they are rated up to 300 horsepower and 575 pound-feet of torque. Ratings may

Buyer sentiment drops in October

U.S. consumer confidence declined in October, according to the Reuters/University of Michigan monthly consumer sentiment index.

The monthly index fell to a 70.6 reading from 73.5 in September. The level was about in line with economists' forecasts of a 70.

An improvement in confidence frequently manifests itself in expanded consumer spending, including increased discretionary travel, which accounts for 70 percent of the economy.

vary by model and application.

Hardware enhancements to all 2010 1000/2000 Series models have reduced the power required to charge the oil lube-distribution and main-pressure system. The introduction of this "variable modulated main" feature reduces main pressure when the clutch apply system

does not require full main pressure. New wave friction plates reduce internal drag, resulting in more efficient operation that helps improve fuel economy, says Allison.

A new "vehicle acceleration control" feature helps control aggressive driving practices and improve overall fuel economy. The

VAC feature limits acceleration by controlling the amount of engine torque based on vehicle load.

Allison says that tests using a simulated bus duty cycle show VAC helps improve fuel economy by as much as 3 percent. VAC is available on bus and pupil transport/shuttle series models.

Also new for 2010, Allison B 300 and B 400 models are available with "increased lockup availability." This feature enables the transmission to shift into lockup in first range, and lockup stays on through first to second shift. The transmission's controls determine when to activate lockup.

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