

Associations warn of attack on charter service rule

When the Federal Transit Administration issued its revised rule for charter operations a year and a half ago, motorcoach operators across the country were elated.

Finally, they figured, they would be on an even playing field with public transit agencies, which had been taking away charter business from them for years.

Transit agencies, however, were not so happy.

Although they had agreed during negotiations to about 80 percent of the rule, they viewed it as bringing an end to the oft-times lucrative charter business that had been providing them with additional revenues.

Well, according to a team of experts speaking at the annual convention of the California Bus Association, the transit agencies are still angry and they're hoping to have

the rule reworked so they can start doing charters again.

"It is a good rule and the public-funded transit agencies have been angry ever since," Clyde Hart, vice president of the American Bus Association told the more than 100 CBA members who attended the meeting.

"We believe the stars were aligned in our favor for us to get the rule we got, but that will change if

we have to do it again,"

Although the transit agencies appear to be behind widening efforts to tamper with the charter rule, it is members of Congress who have moved out front on the issue.

U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, a Democrat from Washington state, several weeks ago attached an amendment to the 2010 transportation appropriations bill that would pro-

hibit the FTA from enforcing the charter rule in her state. And, because she chairs the Senate Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Subcommittee, other committee members now are talking about adding their states to the amendment.

Also, two California congressmen, Republican Rep. David Dreier and Democrat Rep. Adam Schiff,

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Diesel fuel will average nearly \$3 a gallon in '10

WASHINGTON — Doing your budget for 2010?

The average price of diesel fuel next year will be 50 cents a gallon higher than this year, the U.S. Department of Energy predicts.

Retail diesel will average \$2.79 during this year's fourth quarter, and rise 50 cents from this year's projected average to nearly \$3 a gallon next year, says the USDOE.

The national average price of the motorcoach industry's main fuel will end up being \$2.48 per gallon this year, and \$2.94 in 2010, the federal agency forecasts.

The fourth-quarter projection, following diesel's \$2.63 average in August and September, is up 19

cents from the department's previous monthly forecast, and the 2010 projection is 16 cents higher than the \$2.78 forecast in October.

Fuel price increases this winter — from a year ago — are being led by a projected \$7 gain in crude oil to \$77 a barrel, DOE said.

Regular gasoline in November will average 15 cents a gallon higher than it did in October, or \$2.70 a gallon, and will average \$2.66 in the fourth quarter.

The projected year-over-year increases in gasoline and diesel "include a small increase in refining margins as a result of the economy-related increases in demand," USDOE said.

Bring patience, paperwork Motorcoach financing is plentiful

CARLSBAD, Calif. — For motorcoach operators planning to purchase a new or pre-owned coach next year financing shouldn't be much of a worry.

Major motorcoach lenders say they have enough money to meet demand.

However, they cautioned operators attending the annual convention of the California Bus Association that they will have to show that they have a strong business plan, are up front about their financial strengths and weaknesses, and have the cash flow to handle new payments.

And, despite the sour national economy, they point out that that's

not too much different than past requirements.

"We're comfortable with the motorcoach industry and we're just looking for the right deals now," said Peter King, of TCF Equipment Finance of Minnetonka, Minn.

Matt Hotchkiss of Wells Fargo Equipment Finance in Minneapolis agreed, noting that as long as profitability stays where it is, there are no reasons for Wells Fargo to change its standard requirements for motorcoach loans.

"We have no restraints on capital and as long as people qualify, we are ready to finance their motorcoaches," he added.

Others on a panel of finance experts who were brought together to discuss bus financing issues shared similar views, although some cautioned that getting loans could take a little longer than they have in the past.

"It takes a little more time now and you will need to be a little more patient, but we are getting out the financing," said Shari Sanders of ABC Companies.

Mike Denny of MCI Financial Services suggested, too, that operators may have to work a little harder putting their financial picture together for the lenders, but the money will be there.

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Diligence can help lower risks in coach operations

Operating a motorcoach company can be as risky as...

Well, it really doesn't matter.

It's risky much of the time and learning how to manage that risk can often make the difference between profit and loss, success and failure.

That's the message Robert Crescenzo, vice president of Lancer Insurance Co., delivered to mo-

torcoach operators attending the annual four-day conference of the California Bus Association last month.

He said learning how to recognize risks of all types — high, low and medium — is the key to managing them and possibly avoiding disastrous and costly problems from occurring.

"We sometimes are not as

good at identifying risks as we are at knowing what to do when it blows up," he emphasized.

Crescenzo, a frequent speaker at motorcoach industry meetings throughout the country, suggested operators develop a simple score sheet to identify the risks involved in each trip they take.

And, after recognizing them, carefully assessing and addressing

each of them.

Such a game plan, he stressed, can result in fewer accidents and claims and, ultimately, lower insurance premiums.

Crescenzo warned that if operators don't take the time to identify the risks, then someone else will and that someone is likely to be a plaintiff lawyer pursuing a claim, or a government regulator

performing an audit.

"You need to have a formal procedure for risk identification, someone has to be assigned to do that at your company," he asserted.

Risks enumerated

He recommended operators create a risk assessment form that

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UMA, NTA to co-locate annual meetings in 2013

The United Motorcoach Association and the National Tour Association announced last month they plan to begin co-locating their annual business meetings — the NTA Annual Convention and the UMA Motorcoach Expo, during the first quarter of 2013.

Last January, near the conclusion of UMA Motorcoach Expo 2009, the two organizations announced they were exploring the possibility of co-locating their annual events.

Following months of due diligence, Lisa Simon, CTP, NTA president, said, “We had many details to resolve but when your bottom line goal is to bring your members convenient and more affordable access to more business, it was easy for both the NTA and UMA leadership to make it happen.”

“This partnership brings together the resources and brand power of two highly successful events to provide an even better experience for our attendees — from UMA operators to NTA travel packagers, not to mention hotels, attractions, destinations, restaurants and all those who service the dynamic group travel market — everyone will benefit,” said UMA President and CEO Victor S. Parra.

NTA and UMA entered into a strategic partnership in late 2007, resulting in collaborative work at each association’s annual event. UMA has managed the motorcoach exhibits at the NTA convention, and NTA has helped develop

the Destinations and Attractions aisle at UMA Motorcoach Expo.

Fully integrating the associations’ two main business events takes the collaboration to a new level, with the goal of bringing more value and expanded opportunities for business to NTA and UMA members.

NTA’s 3,000 members represent 48 countries. The business mix of its 700 tour company members is diverse, and motorcoach travel is an integral part of their business.

“Collaboration with UMA brings NTA’s diversity in touch with the more than 1,100 UMA members located across North America, offering more than 850 charter and tour bus operators who provide transportation services in all 50 U.S. states, Canada and Mexico,” said Simon.

What the collaboration means to UMA members is “more value, more opportunities, and more business contacts,” added UMA Chairman Godfrey LeBron.

In the coming months, NTA and UMA will work to solidify details, including the specific date and location, said Parra.

The World Religious Travel Association, which last month co-located its 2009 World Religious Travel Expo for the first time with NTA’s Convention in Reno, also will continue its cooperative effort with NTA. This will bring three associations together for the inaugural event in 2013.

Adversity, challenges put BANY on a brighter road

ALBANY, N.Y. — The Bus Association of New York, widely known by its acronym, BANY, is rebounding from a near-death experience.

The group held its annual meeting here and for the first time in its 72-year history included a marketplace, bringing operators and suppliers together in a structured setting, as well as a variety of speakers on key industry topics.

Twenty-eight vendors, including nine bus manufacturers and representatives from 16 bus operations were represented, totaling 80 industry people.

In recent years BANY has struggled with defining its role.

For most of its existence, the organization represented large line-haul and subsidized carriers. Some members disappeared, swallowed by the New York Metropoli-

tan Transportation Authority, while others consolidated or drifted away.

Lack of participation forced cancellation of the 2008 annual meeting.

Under the leadership of President John Silvanie, BANY had started taking steps to expand the spectrum of bus operator participation when the New York state budget crisis hit. In its search for new revenue, the state came up with a retroactive sales tax on bus transportation, jolting the industry.

BANY teamed with a number of carriers, plus the United Motorcoach and American Bus associations, to defeat the tax, but the near-death experience emphasized the need for an active statewide organization to keep tabs on state government, and advocate for the

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Daimler names top executive

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Richard Ferguson, a senior sales executive for Freightliner and Western Star trucks, has been named to head Daimler Buses North America effective Jan. 1.

Ferguson will succeed current Daimler Buses N.A. President/CEO Dr. Andreas Strecker, who has held the position for the past seven-plus years.

In an announcement made by Hartmut Schick, head of Daimler Buses worldwide, it was stated that Strecker had decided to step

down to focus on new professional challenges.

In his nearly eight years with Daimler Buses N.A., Strecker worked to build the Orion, Setra and Sprinter brands. During that period, revenue more than tripled, the product line was reoriented, and business processes and organizational structures refined.

Ferguson brings both a sales and finance background to his new position.

After receiving his MBA from the John M. Olin School of Busi-

ness at Washington University in St. Louis, Ferguson held positions with banks and private companies, focusing on treasury and financing, as well as mergers-acquisitions.

He joined Freightliner 10 years ago and with its acquisition of Western Star and Orion Bus



Richard Ferguson

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Public transit initiatives win approval by voters

WASHINGTON — The American Public Transportation Association reports that voters passed pro-transit ballot initiatives in Colorado, Michigan and Maine, while defeating one anti-transit measure in Ohio last month.

Taking into account the successful passage of two additional transit-related initiatives earlier in the year, the success rate for public transportation ballot initiatives this year was 70 percent, said APTA.

“These votes for public transportation speak loud and clear: the public wants more public transportation service and is willing to pay for it,” said APTA President William Millar.

“At a time when unemployment is high and economic uncertainty is foremost in peoples’ minds, you might not expect people to tax themselves for better public transit services. The fact that a majority of transit-related ballot initiatives passed means people recognize the value of public transportation.”

Feds mull preemption issue

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has asked for public comment on the practice by some state and local governments of requiring trucks to display decals or other kinds of identification.

The FMCSA request was promoted by petitions filed by the American Trucking Associations regarding whether federal law prompted vehicle sticker requirements imposed by New York City and Cook County, Ill., and special credentials required by New Jersey.

The FMCSA published its notice in the Federal Register.

CDC: Flu viruses are not long lived

ATLANTA — The U.S. Center for Disease Control has published unambiguous information about the viability of influenza virus on objects.

The information may assist operators in their coach-cleaning operations.

The CDC says that studies have shown that influenza virus can survive on environmental surfaces, ranging from door handles to books, and can infect a person for

Here are transit ballot initiatives that were adopted:

Fountain, Colo., approved a 0.75 percent sales tax increase for transportation improvements, maintenance and service.

Kalamazoo, Mich., approved a property tax millage of 0.6 mills, or 60 cents per \$1,000 of the taxable value of property, to support public transportation.

Flint, Mich. renewed an existing 0.6 mill property tax for five years to support the Mass Transportation Authority.

Maine voters passed a \$71.25 million statewide transportation bond that included public transit investments.

Cincinnati voters defeated an anti-public transit measure that would have placed significant constraints on Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority’s ability to expand public transportation.

For more information on transit ballot initiatives, go to <http://www.cfte.org/>.

The issue is of interest to the private bus industry because of efforts in the past to mandate similar stickers on motorcoaches.

In its petitions, the American Trucking Associations asserted that the sticker requirements were invalidated by a 2005 federal law, 49 U.S. Code section 14506, which broadly preempted state and local credential requirements for interstate motor carriers.

The ATA believes the requirements do not fall into any of the law’s exceptions, that is, for the International Fuel Tax Agreement, the International Registration Plan,

two to eight hours after being deposited on the surface.

An article in the Nov. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News* reported that influenza virus could persist on surfaces for 24 hours or more. That statement was accurate as far as it went, but it did not go far enough.

Quantities of the virus sufficient to infect a human are likely to persist for far shorter periods — that is, for two to eight hours.

Ferro becomes FMCSA chief

WASHINGTON — Anne S. Ferro won U.S. Senate confirmation last month as Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administrator, putting the former trucking association executive in charge of the nation’s bus and truck safety watchdog agency at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Ferro was confirmed in a unanimous vote by 93 senators.

She takes charge at FMCSA as it reopens its rulemaking on truck driver hours of service, one of the most contentious issues facing the agency.

When nominated by President Obama in June, Ferro was president of the Maryland Motor Truck Association. Before joining the MMTA in 2003, she spent 11 years with the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration, first as assistant administrator and then administrator.

Her nomination outraged the Teamsters union and several safety groups that wanted changes in the truckers’ hours-of-service rules that Ferro had supported as head of the MMTA.

During her confirmation hearing she promised to be a “fair and balanced regulator” who would use “data-driven, sound scientific research” to significantly reduce truck and bus crashes.

vehicle registration license plates, state weight-distance taxes, hazmat placards, and safety inspections.

Although the law gives the U.S. Secretary of Transportation authority to exempt other requirements, ATA believes the authority is very narrow and inapplicable to the New York, New Jersey and Cook County requirements. FMCSA issued its notice after the three jurisdictions failed to respond to the agency’s inquiries.

Influenza virus can be destroyed by disinfectants and several chemical germicides, including chlorine, hydrogen peroxide, detergents (soap), iodine-based antiseptics, and alcohols. These chemicals must be used in proper concentration for a sufficient length of time. Reducing the number of influenza virus particles on a surface by using germicides or disinfectants can substantially reduce the chances of hand transfer of the virus.

Road stimulus spending climbs above \$20 billion

WASHINGTON — The Federal Highway Administration reported crossing the \$20 billion mark in approved federal stimulus obligations for highway, road and bridge projects.

Of the \$26.6 billion available for federal highway and bridge projects under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, more than 75 percent has now been obligated.

“Even though winter is right around the corner, highway and bridge projects are still getting underway, creating thousands of jobs and saving thousands more,” said Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood.

“The Recovery Act is helping repair America’s roads and bridges while putting people back to work.”

Here are some of the bigger projects that are underway:

- The \$36 million replacement of the I-25/Alameda bridge in Denver

- Construction has begun on the \$26.2 million I-279/Fort Duquesne Bridge preservation project in Pittsburgh.

- Work is underway in San Bernardino, Calif., on a massive billion-dollar project, using \$128 million in stimulus money for additional lanes on I-215 to reduce

traffic congestion.

- Work has started on the three-mile extension of Minneapolis’ Trunk Highway 610 to I-94. When completed, the project will reduce congestion.

- In Nelsonville, OH, construction started on the 8.5-mile, four-lane highway to divert interstate traffic from local streets.

Nearly 8,500 highway projects have been approved and nearly 5,000 are reported to be underway.

An Alabama motorcoach operator reported that reconstruction of I-59, from mile marker 181 to mile marker 193 has begun, forcing the closing of the northbound lanes.

Northbound traffic has been diverted to a southbound lane, with concrete barriers separating the lanes.

The project, which will take two years to do both sides, cuts through the mountainous area at Stevens Gap.

The operator considers the construction area dangerous and recommends northbound coaches exit the highway at mile marker 181 and take U.S. 11, and southbound buses exit at mile marker 205 to U.S. 11, which parallels the interstate.

Fuel tax increases coming?

As Congress continues to delay long-term action on boosting spending to fix and expand federal roadways, states are reviving talk of increasing fuel taxes to repair and upgrade their highways.

Michigan and Texas are the latest states to consider raising more money for roads.

Fully one-third of Michigan highways were in poor condition in 2008, a percentage that could climb dramatically in coming years if lawmakers don’t pump more money into transportation, say road advocates in that state.

The Michigan Infrastructure and Transportation Association put out a list of cities and counties with the largest amount of bad roads. Detroit led the list, followed by Grand Rapids and Ann Arbor.

According to the association, 25 percent of federally funded roads were in poor condition in 2007, rising to 32 percent in 2008.

About a third of Michigan’s 287,780 miles of roads are federally funded.

Road quality could hit an even bigger pothole in fiscal 2010-11, when the state is likely to lose up to \$576 million in federal highway funds because it won’t have the \$102 million it needs to nab the matching funds.

If that happens, Michigan will go from spending more than \$1.2 billion annually on highways to around \$500 million next year and in following years, shoving road projects and the jobs that go with them off the drawing board.

Senate Transportation Committee Chairman Jud Gilbert has introduced a bill to raise the state tax on diesel fuel by 4 cents per gallon.

Meanwhile, in Texas, legislators concerned about how to pay for new highways suggested looking at increasing the 20 cents a gallon state fuel tax.

Senate proposes measure to spur anti-texting laws

WASHINGTON — Several U.S. senators have introduced legislation that would offer incentives to states that ban texting while driving.

The Senate bill was introduced by Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee Chairman Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W. Va., and five other members.

“The centerpiece of this legislation is a grant program for states who prohibit texting while driving,” Rockefeller said, noting that the dangerous activity was very pervasive, making it difficult to root out.

Meanwhile, Rhode Island has become the 19th state to outlaw texting while driving.

Drivers caught texting face an \$85 fine for the first offense, followed by a \$100 fine for the second. For the third violation, offenders will have to pay \$125.

Hand-held devices banned by Ontario

TORONTO — Ontario has joined Newfoundland-Labrador, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Quebec and Prince Edward Island by adopting a distracted driving regulation that bans hand-held electronic devices.

More Canadian provinces likely will adopt similar rules. British Columbia’s law is expected to be implemented in January.

While Ontario’s law has gone into effect, enforcement agencies say that “educational enforcement” will be used until Feb. 1.

FMCSA is hosting CSA '10 webinars

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is accepting registration for two “public listening session” webinars this month on the agency’s comprehensive safety analysis 2010 initiative.

The sessions are aimed at reporting on the latest progress of CSA 2010 and answering questions from industry stakeholders.

Each webinar will be a 90-minute live, interactive session. Part one will provide an overview of CSA 2010 and operational model test results. It will be Thursday, Dec. 3. Part two will cover CSA 2010 from a motor carrier and driver perspective, and will take place Thursday, Dec. 10.

To register and submit questions, go to csa2010.fmcsa.dot.gov/listeningSessions.

Chicago toughens ‘diesel’ idling regulation

CHICAGO — Chicago has become the latest city to adopt a three-minute idling rule for vehicles with diesel engines.

The city council passed an ordinance modifying Illinois’ 10-minute idle time limit to three minutes in the city for diesel-

powered vehicles.

Vehicle operators who idle engines more than three minutes at a time will face a \$250 fine.

Cities such as New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., have diesel engine idling limits of three minutes or less.

The new ordinance does contain exemptions, including vehicles in traffic; vehicles standing for the purpose of service, repair or government inspection; vehicles standing to supply cooled air when the outdoor temperature is greater than 80 degrees or heated air when the

temperature is less than 32 degrees; the operation of an auxiliary power unit or generator set as an alternative to running the main engine of a vehicle operating on diesel fuel, and vehicles standing due to the automatic regeneration of diesel particulate filters.

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Coach driver gets 26 years for fatal crash

COLUSA, Calif. — A driver who crashed a motorcoach into a ditch in an accident that killed 11 people and injured dozens was sentenced last month to 26 years and four months in state prison.

Quintin Joey Watts of Stockton was convicted in October on 11 counts of gross vehicular manslaughter and 21 counts of causing great bodily injury. (See Nov. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The verdict came roughly a year after Watts lost control of his bus in October 2008 while driving 41 people to the Colusa Casino Resort.

At the sentencing, the victims' relatives watched as Watts rose, turned and faced them, crying, and pleading for understanding.

Colusa Superior Court Judge Jeffrey A. Thompson rejected a plea from Watts' defense attorney for a nine-year sentence on grounds Watts was a tired, overworked employee who crashed the bus while trying to do his job.

"The defendant has demonstrated little or no appreciation for his role in bringing about this immense tragedy," Thompson said.

Thor Industries' founder Wade Thompson dies

JACKSON CENTER, Ohio — Wade F.B. Thompson, a towering figure in the midsize bus and recreational vehicle industries, died in mid-November after spending more than 14 years battling five cancers. He was 69.

Mr. Thompson was a remarkable business executive and fine gentleman, according to those who knew him.

His singular business achievement was to build Thor Industries into North America's leading midsize bus and recreational vehicle manufacturing company.

Mr. Thompson was co-founder, chairman, president and chief ex-

ecutive of Thor, a company that has never lost money, a record believed to be unique to the two industries.

In the fiscal year ended July 31, Thor posted sales of \$1.52 billion and a net income of \$17.1 million — despite an RV industry that has spent much of the past two years flat on its back.

Mr. Thompson, along with vice chairman Peter Orthwein, founded Thor in 1980 when they purchased Airstream, the iconic — yet financially troubled — travel trailer company.

Mr. Thompson turned Airstream around from a \$12 million annual loss — immediately prior to

its purchase, to a \$1 million profit in the first year.

Thor continued to grow through acquisitions and, today, owns several RV and bus manufacturers. Its portfolio includes bus makers Goshen Coach, EIDorado National, Champion Bus, and General Coach America, plus RV companies Damon and Four Winds, and travel trailer makers Keystone RV, Cross-Roads, Breckenridge, Dutchmen, Komfort and General Coach Canada.

Many attribute Mr. Thompson's business success to hiring smart people and leaving them alone to run his businesses.

"People in place throughout his companies are top notch," said one businessman who sold two companies to Mr. Thompson.

Three days before his death, Mr. Thompson relinquished his duties at Thor, handing control to Orthwein. Mr. Thompson owned 28.4 percent of Thor, according to a recent regulatory filing.

Mr. Thompson also was dedicated to the arts and historic preservation, as well as conservation. During the past decade he focused on helping detect and finding a cure for cancer.

He is survived by his widow and two children.

Tourism promoter Jane Derthick dies in Tennessee

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — Jane Derthick, who spent more than 30 years promoting tourist attractions in the southeastern U.S., becoming widely known to motorcoach operators in the region, died last month after battling cancer for six years. She was 73.

Mrs. Derthick, who lived in Signal Mountain on the outskirts of Chattanooga, began her tourism career largely by accident after she raised three children.

A friend invited her to use some of her newly-acquired free time as a step-on guide for motorcoach groups visiting Chattanooga. From that beginning she moved into tourism promotion, which she pursued for the next three decades.

She became promotions manager for the Southern Highlands Attractions, an organization representing 17 tourist attractions in the Southern Appalachian region, including Ruby Falls, Rock City and

Lookout Mountain Incline, and extending as far as Biltmore Estates in North Carolina and Luray Caverns in Virginia.

She later served as vice president for marketing at Ruby Falls, where she represented the attraction regionally and nationally. She completed her professional career as the marketing director for All Aboard USA.

She served on the boards of the Tennessee Motor Coach Associa-

tion, the North Carolina Motorcoach Association, and the Chattanooga Convention and Visitors Bureau, where she was its chairperson in 1992.

She is survived by her husband, Alan, and children.

Memorials have been established with the First Christian Church, 650 McCallie Ave., Chattanooga, TN 37403, and Hospice of Chattanooga, 4411 Oakwood Drive, Chattanooga, TN 37416.



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Highlights of House healthcare-reform legislation

WASHINGTON — In case you missed 'em, here are many of the main provisions of the healthcare overhaul bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives:

Insurance market

- Creates an insurance market exchange where individuals and small businesses could purchase coverage. Sets minimum benefit packages that may be offered through the exchange.
- Creates a new government health insurance plan that would be sold through the exchange.
- Provides for the creation of nonprofit healthcare cooperatives that would sell coverage through the exchange.
- Bars insurers from excluding people for pre-existing conditions and from charging more based on medical history.
- Creates a temporary national high-risk pool program to provide medical coverage to the uninsured, including those with pre-existing conditions who have been denied cover-

age. The program would operate until the exchange becomes available.

- Permits young people to remain on their parents' health insurance policy up to the age of 27.
- Provides for consumer rebates if premiums far exceed the cost of covering their medical expenses.
- Sets up a state/federal process under which insurers would have to justify premium increases.
- Eliminates lifetime limits on coverage.
- Provides for states to enter compacts to allow for the sale of insurance across state lines.

Coverage mandates/penalties

- Individuals are required to obtain healthcare coverage. Those who do not would face a 2.5 percent tax penalty.
- Most employers are required to provide coverage to their workers and pay for at least 72.5 percent of the premium for individual full-time workers, 65 percent for family

coverage.

- Small firms with up to \$500,000 in annual payroll are exempt.
- Firms with annual payrolls between \$500,000 and \$750,000 that do not provide coverage would pay fees on a sliding scale of 2 percent, 4 percent and 6 percent of wages; firms with payrolls of \$750,000 and above would pay 8 percent in fees.
- Tax credits available to help small firms afford coverage.

Financing

- Imposes a surtax of 5.4 percent on individuals earning more than \$500,000 a year and couples making more than \$1 million.
- Imposes a 2.5 percent excise tax on medical devices.
- Raises \$6.1 billion over 10 years by repealing rules liberalizing the way multinational companies allocate interest expenses.
- Would write into law Internal Revenue Service rules denying tax breaks on business transactions that lack an economic purpose

and are undertaken only to create a tax write-off. Fines of 20 percent to 40 percent would be imposed for violating the rules.

Medicare/Medicaid

- Expands Medicaid eligibility so anyone with an income up to 150 percent of the poverty level would qualify for the government healthcare program for the poor.
- Reduces payments to insurers providing Medicare services through the Medicare Advantage program to bring them more in line with the costs of the traditional Medicare program for the elderly.
- Gradually reduces the gap in Medicare prescription drug coverage. The so-called "doughnut hole" begins to close starting in 2010, with the coverage gap eliminated by 2019.
- Would allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices under its prescription drug program.
- Seek to reduce hospital admissions and to base payments on quality of care.

During downsizing be watchful for 'hostile' employees

As the economic downturn forces more companies to lay off workers, a workplace aggression expert cautions employers about what to do and not do when breaking bad news to employees and to be watchful for employees who exhibit a "hostile attribution style."

Paul Harvey, assistant professor of management at the University of New Hampshire, says although there really is no good way to tell someone they are being laid off, employers should tailor the bad news in a way that minimizes the likelihood of an extremely bad reaction. "Part of it is common sense and being respectful.

"One of my colleagues used to work for a company that decided it needed to downsize. The company took the bizarre step of announcing who would be laid off in stages, with each announcement coming on a Friday the 13th. This creates fear and tension among employees, and also creates an 'us vs. them' mentality.

There weren't any disasters on that occasion, but it's not hard to imagine tensions boiling over," Harvey says.

On Friday, Nov. 6, 2009, a former employee of an Orlando engineering firm opened fire after he was laid off. At least one person was killed and several others were wounded before the suspect, who was reportedly fired because of performance issues, was apprehended.

Harvey says managers should try to get a handle on an employee's personality and be watchful — at all times — for a "hostile attribution style" — people who have a tendency to blame others whenever things go wrong in their lives.

These people usually are easy to identify: they never take responsibility for problems, frequently seek scapegoats, and tend to be angry frequently.

"If you need to lay this type of person off, it's important to be very explicit about why they were chosen and why this was a logical

decision. If it's because of economic reasons, be very clear that it's because of economic reasons. Otherwise the tendency to believe 'they're out to get me' often takes over," Harvey says.

Even if an employer believes an employee is a calm and reasonable person, Harvey cautions that it's best to be as candid as possible and explain all the reasons a person is being laid off, even if it's a bit awkward.

"One of the worst things you can do is create ambiguity. While managers might think they are sparing feelings, they are also giving ex-employees an opportunity to spin conspiracy theories which fuel anger and resentment. Be kind and respectful, but also as candid as possible," he says.

Even if no layoffs are planned, the economic downturn and less job security can lead to more work-related stress, which is compounded by worries about the increasing cost of food and fuel, and the housing and credit crises.

An overall increase in stress raises the potential for more workplace aggression, such as yelling at co-workers and threatening them. Increased stress also can translate into alcohol abuse, depression, withdrawal from work and family, and even suicide.

"A big problem with these reactions is that they don't always go away once the stress is reduced. People become addicted to alcohol or irreparably harm their reputation at work or their relationships with family members. Fortunately the really dramatic stress-related incidents, like workplace shootings, are rare," Harvey says.

Harvey suggests employers understand the difference between "good" stress and "bad" stress. Good stress challenges employees with reasonable goals and rewards for completing tasks. Bad stress, such as very tight deadlines, arcane policies, and uncomfortable working conditions, can lead to reduced productivity and should be kept at a minimum.

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When farming out charters, always look before you leap

By Dave Millhouser

It was snowy and icy as our little convoy approached central Colorado's Hoosier Pass (elevation 11,542 feet).

The lead bus crested the grade and began descending — rapidly — into Breckenridge. I turned to a relief driver sitting near me and observed: "Either that guy is a much better driver than me, or he's going WAY too fast."

As we reached the sharp turn at the bottom of the pass we spotted the coach in the drive-through window of a Denny's. The fact that the Denny's didn't have a drive-through hadn't stopped him.

The front end of his coach had bulled its way nearly to the cash register.

It was peak ski season and we had farmed out part of this charter to a company from Maryland. Their driver had never seen REAL mountains, and the idea of gearing down for the 8 percent grade hadn't occurred to him.

One of the realities of our business is that we always have either too many buses, or too few. Most of us can't resist selling charters, even when we're fully booked, so we "farm" excess work to other companies, and (gratefully) take that kind of business when we need it.

No one has yet invented a better way of smoothing out the peaks and valleys of a seasonal market.

The benefits of working with other com-

panies outweigh the risks, but there are some things worth considering that can reduce the likelihood or consequences of driving through a Denny's.

Your customer chartered you. Hopefully it's because you've served them well, or they've heard good things about you. If things go awry, you're the one they'll be looking to for remedies, even if you farmed the work to another operator.

It's critical that whoever you use have the appropriate USDOT authority and be properly licensed and insured. You can't assume anything. Be sure.

"Proper" insurance may be something of a moving target because the legal minimum won't begin to cover a catastrophe. In the event of an accident, the victims are going to sue everybody, particularly the operator they contracted with. If you farm the "Young Millionaires Club" charter, and they flop into the Grand Canyon, everyone involved is going to need a ton of insurance.

Depending on your circumstances, it may be worthwhile to carry more than the minimum, and to require higher coverage from companies you hire. At the very least, know what they have. It would be tragic to lose your company because they were under-insured.

It's important to know who you're dealing with. Local, friendly competitors are a relatively simple proposition. Hiring someone

you don't know well can lead to a whole range of excitement, ranging from irritation to disaster.

Drivers have been known to sell their own company, at the expense of the operator who originated and sold the charter. Buses sometimes show up late for pickup, or even disappear into the ether (if a better paying job turns up for an unscrupulous carrier). Sometimes seating capacity is wrong, or the hired coach is dirty. The only way to control quality is to work with companies you know.

There also are geographical considerations. It's like the search for the Holy Grail. Bus companies scour the country looking for markets that mirror their own — those mythical places where THEY are busy while WE are slow.

It rarely works because spring and fall are busy almost everywhere, but it's worth a shot.

When you use coaches from afar, keep a few things in mind. A southern operator might not be adept at dealing with cold and winter. Northern carriers could be a bit weak at tweaking the A/C. The drivers that come with the buses don't know the geography, and, unless they're based at your place, may need help with logistics.

If they get lost, run out of fuel or don't dump the lav, it'll be on you.

Hiring other companies is a necessary component of business for most charter companies. It's so common we may have be-

come complacent, and it is critical to understand that getting it wrong, combined with a bit of bad luck, can damage or destroy a well-run company.

The risk can be reduced, though, by consulting with your insurance agent about proper coverage and general guidance regarding farming out work.

A friend was short a bus one busy weekend and hired a local company he didn't know. Kumquat Bus showed up late, with an aging, filthy bus. The driver got lost, and the bus broke down. You know: "The Revenge of the Bus Fairy" scenario.

A couple of days later my buddy got a nasty letter from the group listing the atrocities, questioning his ancestry, and demanding their money back. The letter ended on a high note, praising Mr. Kumquat to the sky and complimenting how hard he had struggled to make things work out.

It was backwards and unfair, but that's a risk we take every time we hire another company to do our work. We need to choose wisely.

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



Dave Millhouser

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Consultant offers ideas for finding more business

CARLSBAD, Calif. — It's time for motorcoach operators across the country to step up their efforts to find new business sources and revenue streams.

And Ryan Kelly, chief executive of Community Spec Inc., a transportation consulting and marketing company in Atlanta, has a few tricks up his sleeve to help.

Speaking to members of the California Bus Association at the group's annual convention here, Kelly urged operators to look into the new opportunities that are showing up across the country.

High on his list is the formation of partnerships with cities and public transit agencies, which he said would help motorcoach companies diversify their operations and bring in a regular flow of new income.

Kelly said numerous local governments don't have the ability or the financial resources to meet all of their transit needs and they are looking to outsource some or all of them to private businesses. The

work covers a variety of scenarios, including providing paratransit, commuter or non-emergency medical services, leasing buses, handling staffing and managing entire urban bus systems.

"This is a rare opportunity in American history to get some of those contracts," he said.

Being prepared

Kelly suggested operators interested in responding to a request for proposal can get a jump on the process by preparing a template that would include all of the information about their company so when an opportunity comes up, they need only add the specifics of the contract and it is ready to go.

Additionally, he urged operators to learn as much about the request as possible before bidding for it, and have the RFP reviewed by an attorney so all of the details involved in the work are clearly understood.

"It's important you know what you're getting into," he emphasized.

Kelly said a key website to learn about RFPs nationally is <https://www.fbo.gov>, while <http://www.pd.dgs.ca.gov/default.htm> and <http://www.bart.gov/about/business/procurement/index.aspx> offer RFPs in California.

In addition, state and national trade associations often are aware of new RFPs and some cities and transit agencies advertise them in local newspapers and national trade journals as well as on the internet.

"You just have to keep looking," he stressed.

Look locally

He said operators also can learn about upcoming contracts by regularly attending city council and transit board meetings where they usually are discussed early on.

"The best advice is to politic a little bit because they want to see your face and know who you are," he said. "And, once you're in, you're in."

Kelly also reminded operators they should be on the watch for grants that state and federal governments offer transportation companies, including coach businesses.

Many are available from the federal Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, Department of Homeland Security, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Defense and the Small Business Administration. They include funds to provide bus service in rural communities, obtain cleaner diesel engines and secure funds for capital expenses.

Information about possible federal grants can be found at <http://www.grants.gov>, as well as each agency's individual Web sites such as <http://www.dhs.gov>, <http://www.epa.gov> and <http://www.fta.gov>.

Kelly noted that while some grants are restricted to public transit agencies, private motorcoach companies that work with cities or bus operations may be eligible for some of those funds as well.

Expand marketing

Motorcoach operators also can bolster their revenue by widening their marketing efforts and looking for opportunities to get their names and pictures in the paper.

Kelly said congressional representatives often get mention when federal dollars are awarded to a community and he suggested that motorcoach companies issue news releases and pictures when they receive a grant.

"This is a good time to market your company."

He also suggested that operators try advertising on cable television networks, which can reach a more targeted audience and are far less expensive than local newspaper advertising. In addition, he told operators to take advantage of social networking by developing a presence on Facebook, My Space, Twitter and other popular social networking sites.

"It's amazing how much you can do and not have to pay for it," he said.

Charter rule

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

are circulating a "Dear Colleague" letter among House members that proposes to allow public transit agencies to operate charters for all "public events."

"That would shoot a hole in the charter rule and undo everything we have with the rule now," stressed Victor Parra, president and chief executive of the United Motorcoach Association. "Public events are just about everything we do."

He said the proposal by the two congressmen is attracting some interest because it was started by members of both political parties and is being viewed as a nonpartisan effort.

It appears to be causing confusion, too, which could slow any effort to stop it.

Parra said that when he met with members of the staff of Texan

Republican Rep. Joe Barton, they told him they had assumed the motorcoach industry supported the proposal and were surprised to hear that they actually opposed it.

"There still are a lot of members of Congress who don't know what the rule is all about," he said.

However, there has been at least one development that could help, according to Parra. He said UMA appears to have achieved an agreement with Dreier's office in which the congressman will consider removing his name from the letter, which would weaken it because it then would lose its nonpartisan appeal.

Dreier initially agreed to be linked to the letter because he was concerned that shuttle service for the annual Jan. 1 Rose Bowl college football game could be negatively impacted if public transit buses were not allowed to take part. However, an agreement assures that full shuttle service

would be available for the parade and football game.

Parra said he also met with Sen. Murray's staff, but it was not a very productive session.

He said the staff hinted that the senator would drop her charter rule exemption measure if the national associations could get all of the motorcoach operators in the Seattle area to agree not to pursue any charter contracts with the Seattle Mariners baseball and Seattle Seahawks football teams.

Murray is a strong supporter of King County Metro, which had been serving the sports teams before the new rule took effect and which would pick them up again if the private companies stepped aside.

"We just couldn't do that because that would be coercion," he said. "And besides, Clyde and I don't look good in orange jumpsuits."

Parra and Hart were joined by

panel members Jim Seal, an industry consultant, and Mike Waters of Coach America Franciscan Lines urging operators from across the country to immediately get involved in the fight to save the rule.

"This is one of our industry's most serious threats because transits have made overturning the rule their No. 1 priority," emphasized Parra.

The panel called on operators to begin meeting regularly with their members of Congress, letting them know who they are, how important they are to the community and how they value the charter rule.

"We need friends, your congressional members. They can be helpful and they want to be helpful. But if they don't hear from you, they won't hold off making their decision until you show up," Hart said.

Parra agreed, noting that members of Congress hear from transit

agencies all of the time and they now need to hear from motorcoach operators as well.

He suggested, too, that operators need to become more involved in their own communities, which would strengthen the industry's position on how critical the charter rule is.

Panelists also urged operators to bid for charter jobs when they become available in order to show the FTA they are interested and capable of doing charters.

"If you have an opportunity to do a job that comes under charter, it is very important you do it effectively," said Parra.

Hart suggested, too, that operators carefully watch transit agencies that may be suspected of doing illegal charters and file complaints with federal regulators when they believe the rule is being violated.

"If you want to keep the rule, you are going to have to fight for it," he added.

Rating services put National Indemnity Co. under watch

OLDWICK, N.J. — Bus and limousine insurer National Indemnity Co. of Omaha, Neb., has been put on credit watch, along with other insurance subsidiaries of Berkshire Hathaway Inc., by several credit and insurance rating services.

The rating moves came after Berkshire Hathaway announced it was acquiring Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp. for \$100 per

share in cash and common stock, making it the 100 percent owner of the railroad.

The transaction is valued at \$44 billion and includes the assumption of \$10 billion of BNSF debt.

Insurance rating service A.M. Best said it initiated its review because it has concerns "regarding the utilization of (Berkshire Hathaway's) insurance and reinsurance operations as a funding source for

this transaction."

Best said it also is "concerned with the liquidity and concentration risk pertaining to a single large investment as a substantial portion of (Berkshire Hathaway's) portfolio, since the majority of (Berkshire Hathaway's) equity investments are held at the insurance and reinsurance entities."

In taking action, Best joined Standard & Poor's and Fitch Rat-

ings in placing the "financial strength ratings" and "issuer credit ratings" of the domestic and international insurance subsidiaries of Berkshire Hathaway under review with negative implications.

Best placed the financial strength ratings of 'A++' (Superior) and issuer credit ratings of "aaa" of National Indemnity Group and Government Employers Group (GEICO) and their members under

review with negative implications.

In addition, it placed the financial strength ratings of 'A++' (Superior) and issuer credit ratings of "aa+" of General Re Group and its members under review with negative implications.

Best will reassess the under-review status as more details regarding the insurance and reinsurance operations is presented by Berkshire Hathaway management.

Buy a part, support 'Motorcoachified' promotional effort

The first-of-its-kind campaign promoting public awareness of motorcoach travel in North America continues to gain support within the industry.

Already attracting dozens of motorcoach operators who are installing promotional wraps on their buses and trade groups that are signing up with cash contributions, the fledgling Motorcoach Council now has received a big boost from two major coach manufacturers and distributors.

Motor Coach Industries and ABC Companies have set up vol-

untary programs where their customers who purchase parts from them may have one-half percent added to their net bill that will go toward supporting the council and its campaign.

MCI said it would match the first \$50,000 contributed by its customers, while ABC said it will match its customers' total contributions up to \$25,000 annually.

Operators interested in joining the "op-in parts programs" with MCI can sign up at <http://www.mcicoach.com/AboutUs/getMotorcoachified.htm> or by speaking to a

MCI service parts representative.

ABC customers who want to join can visit the company's website, at www.abc-companies.com, to access and download a form and return it to Kimberli Martin by fax at (407) 905-7051.

Both companies are founding members of the nonprofit Motorcoach Council, which this past summer launched a major promotional effort called *Get Motorcoachified*.

It involves motorcoach operators wrapping their buses with messages that spread the campaign

theme and the benefits of motorcoach travel.

ABC said it is proud to offer its support to the council and give operators an opportunity to help promote motorcoach travel to consumers.

"We encourage our customers to opt in and support the Motorcoach Council's efforts," added Patricia Ziska, MCI vice president and chief customer officer. "A program like this has never been done before, and participation will drive its success."

Meantime, the council and the

Get Motorcoachified campaign are drawing support from state trade groups and their members.

According to council spokeswoman Heather Horton, 10 state motorcoach associations have joined the group and more than 40 operators have ordered campaign wraps for their buses.

For more information about the bus wrap program, go to www.motorcoachcouncil.org/campaign.

Questions should be directed to Heather Horton at pr@motorcoachcouncil.org, or phone (720) 449-9000.

Europeans adopt promotional campaign

GENEVA, Switzerland — Bus and motorcoach operators in Europe and elsewhere around the world have adopted a campaign designed to increase awareness of the inherent social, environmental and economic benefits of bus and coach travel.

The promotional effort, called Smart Move, is similar to the nascent *Get Motorcoachified* program that has been launched in North America. (See article above, and Oct. 1 and Nov. 1 issues of

Bus & Motorcoach News.)

Smart Move was developed jointly by the International Road Transport Union, which has bus and coach members in 70 countries, and Busworld, the global organization that develops meetings for bus and coach builders and operators worldwide.

Smart Move is focusing much of its effort on decision makers, hoping to raise their awareness of just how safe, environmentally friendly, affordable, user-friendly

and efficient buses and coaches are.

With industry and policymakers working together, Smart Move organizers say society can create a "safe, green, affordable, user-friendly and efficient mobility system by simply doubling the use of buses and coaches."

The Smart Move program has been endorsed by the United Motorcoach Association.

For more information about Smart Move, go to www.busandcoach.travel.

Amtrak adds Wi-Fi to trains

Following the lead of BoltBus, megabus.com, and other intercity motorcoach carriers, Amtrak has announced it plans to launch free wireless internet service on Acela Express trains in the second quarter of next year.

The government-owned rail provider said Wi-Fi installation already is underway on the Acela Express trains that serve Boston, New York and Washington, D.C.

"This service will initially be offered at no cost to our customers," Amtrak said, "though pricing

may change depending on customer response, system performance and costs."

Wi-Fi service is free on the intercity bus lines.

Amtrak expects Wi-Fi to help increase ridership, adding \$4.3 million in incremental revenue through the end of fiscal year 2014, according to its estimates.

In addition to Acela, Amtrak said it is preparing to extend Wi-Fi to other services, "depending on market response," with Northeast Regional trains likely the first.

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Bus financing

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Business plan (check)

All of the lenders stressed that a well-written and accurate business plan is critical when an operator applies for a loan to purchase a motorcoach.

Details, they said, must include a carefully completed credit application, the need or justification for adding another coach to the fleet, tax returns, debt obligations, fleet list and a personal financial statement.

Denny suggested that companies use a top accountant to keep the financial figures in order and to prepare many of the statements needed by finance companies.

"Hire a good accountant just like you hire a good mechanic," he emphasized.

Hotchkiss noted the fleet list is important because it shows equity and if the operator has the financial ability to handle a "hiccup" in the economy, while King said that most finance companies also are interested in not only a current financial statement, but one from the previous year as well.

Denny also stressed the importance of being completely honest when filling out the paper work, noting that finance companies are outstanding when it comes to turning up something that an operator may have missed, either by mistake or deliberately.

"If it is out there, they'll find it," he asserted.

Pay on time (check)

Also, operators will have a healthier financial picture if they can show they have kept up with previous or existing loan payments and can handily manage new ones, according to the panel members.

"It is very important to pay your bills on time," emphasized Dave Johnson of Key Equipment Finance.

If an operator were about to miss a monthly payment, it should be covered through a bank line of credit and not a loan restructuring or loan extension, two solutions that would be very expensive, according to Michael Gagne of People's Capital & Leasing Corp. and others on the panel.

Some lenders charge fees as high as 10 percent of the monthly

payment for a missed payment, while restructuring the loan can add thousands of dollars of new interest to an existing loan, they warned.

"Getting a line of credit is the best way to go," stressed Sanders.

Guarantees (check)

The panel also noted that operators who are planning to buy buses, but who are either approaching retirement or planning soon to turn over their businesses to their children may not be able to escape the standard requirement that company owners be personally responsible for bus loans.

Panel members said if the company is going to be sold to an outsider, the seller should make sure the buyer can qualify for coach financing or if the business is going to be turned over to a family member soon, the finance company might require personal guarantees from them as well as the current owner.

"The owner is the strength of the business and we want to partner with the strength of the company," said Johnson. "The owner can't get away from the personal guarantee."

and high-risk trips would require a review by the general manager or the owner of the company.

The reviews would help determine if the right driver, coach and route have been set for the trip and if every possible precaution has been taken to minimize problems.

"Sometimes the simplest trip could be the most high-risk trip," Crescenzo stressed.

He noted, too, that the company's risk evaluator needs to watch for last-minute issues that could increase the risk of a trip. Included among them are additions to a trip requested by passengers, a change in the weather forecast, road detours that require route changes, illness to the assigned driver, and mechanical problems with the bus selected to handle the trip.

"They could be easily missed," he said.

Red flags

He said red flags should go up, too, when there is a rush to complete a maintenance schedule or make repairs to a bus to have it ready for a scheduled trip, when a larger bus is substituted for a smaller one, and when the routes are changed on repeat trips.

In other areas, Crescenzo emphasized that operators who promise to deliver something to their passengers, need to see that it is done.

"If you say you are going to do something, then do it," he said. "If you say you will be helping a woman off the bus and she falls, a lawyer will be pointing that out."

He also suggested that operators look for positives during the current difficult economic times, including the idea they are likely

Setra sales territories get revised alignment

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Daimler Buses North America has realigned its new and pre-owned sales territories for Setra coaches, according to Tom Chezem, vice president of sales.

For new coach sales, the updated sales alignment looks like this:

Darril King, Northeast territory (consisting of 11 northeastern and New England states, plus Washington, D.C.). Contact: Darril.King@dcbusna.com.

Brian Pinckney, Southeast territory (9 southern and southeastern states). Contact: Brian.Pinckney@dcbusna.com.

Mark Stenz, Midwest territory (11 midwestern and plains states, plus Wyoming). Contact: Mark.Stenz@dcbusna.com.

Larry Williams, Southwest territory (9 southern, southwestern and western states). Contact: Larry.Williams@dcbusna.com.

Juan Lepe, West territory (7 western and Pacific states, plus Alaska and Hawaii). Contact:

Juan.Lepe@dcbusna.com.

Terry Barnett, Canada. Contact: Terry.Barnett@dcbusna.com. Barnett also is responsible for used coach sales in Canada.

The realigned pre-owned sales territories are:

John Manzi, Northeast (10 northeastern and New England states). Contact: John.Manzi@dcbusna.com.

Tim Bittner, Mid-East (6 Midwest, mid-Atlantic and southern states). Contact: Tim.Bittner@dcbusna.com.

Rob Lambert, Southeast (13 southern, mid-Atlantic and southwestern states, plus Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C.). Contact: Rob.Lambert@dcbusna.com.

John Hagel, Midwest (12 midwestern and plains states, plus Colorado and Wyoming.) Contact: John.Hagel@dcbusna.com.

Randy Kolesar, West (7 western and Pacific states, plus Alaska and Hawaii). Contact: Randy.Kolesar@dcbusna.com.

Daimler executive

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Industries he served as chief financial officer and vice president finance for Orion from 2000 to 2003.

He subsequently returned to Freightliner where he served as president of Daimler's North American used truck operations,

and most recently as vice president of sales for both the Freightliner and Western Star brands.

and most recently as vice president of sales for both the Freightliner and Western Star brands.

"Dr. Strecker's accomplishments and successful market positioning of Daimler Buses North America allow me an easy transition into this role," said Ferguson. "I look forward to my return to the North American bus market and to the successes that are ahead."

to find better and more qualified drivers in the job market now who are looking to stay with a company much longer than in the past.

"If you haven't found anything positive in the economy, you might be missing a good opportunity," he added.

Additionally, he reminded operators they are responsible for their lab data for drivers even if a third party conducts the drug and

alcohol testing; state and federal regulators now are asking companies to produce their ADA reports during compliance reviews; the person who answers the company telephone can be as important in delivering customer service as a driver, and now appears to be a good time to evaluate older coaches to determine if they can be refurbished and remain in the fleet for another year or two.

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Study makes strong case for value of business travel

WASHINGTON — Motorcoach operators and industry suppliers who remain undecided whether to attend or exhibit at UMA Motorcoach Expo in late February may want to consider new research that claims to establish the first clear link between business travel and business growth.

According to the study by the global research firm Oxford Economics, for every dollar invested in business travel, businesses experience an average \$12.50 in increased revenue and \$3.80 in new profits.

“This study shows that not all

spending cuts are smart cuts,” said Adam Sacks, managing director of Oxford Economics. “When companies reduce their travel budgets, there are negative consequences that we can now quantify, in terms of lost revenue and (reduced) profit growth, and in terms of giving competitors a distinct advantage.”

The Oxford Economics study marks the first time the return on investment of business travel has been successfully measured, say the researchers.

The study found that curbing business travel can have a strong negative impact on company prof-

its. The average business in the U.S. would forfeit 17 percent of its profits in the first year of eliminating business travel, and it would take more than three years for earnings to recover.

“In order to grow, businesses have to invest,” said Roger Dow, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association. “This research shows that face-to-face meetings and incentive awards to top performers are among the smartest investments companies can make.”

Dr. Martin A. Asher, adjunct professor of finance at the Wharton School at the University of

Pennsylvania, said that in tough economic times many business executives have an understandable short-run focus on managing costs.

“The (Oxford Economics) report points out the less visible — but significant — long-term benefits resulting from business travel, such as partnership building and new business opportunities,” said Asher. “Increased business travel in this economy can actually increase sales and reduce the financial decline companies might otherwise suffer.”

The research found that roughly 40 percent of prospective custom-

ers are converted to new customers with an in-person meeting, compared to 16 percent without such a meeting. The study also found that returns from participating in conferences and trade shows ranged from \$4-\$5.99 per dollar invested.

The travel study was sponsored in part by the Destination & Travel Foundation, a combined effort of the U.S. Travel Association and Destination Marketing Association International.

Oxford Economics’ analysis was comprehensive, covering 14 economic sectors over a span of 13 years.

Glaval switches to Ford chassis

Elkhart, Ind. — Midsize bus manufacturer Glaval Bus has announced a replacement model for the cutaway bus it was building on the discontinued Chevrolet Kodiak/GMC Topkick chassis. (See July 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The “new” Glaval Entourage “will fill the gap left by the GMC/Chevy C4500/5500 discontinuation,” said Ken Becker, product manager at Glaval.

The revamped Entourage is now being built on a Ford F-550 Super Duty, 19,500 pound (G.V.W.R.)

chassis, with a 6.8-liter Triton V-10 gas or 6.4-liter V-8 diesel engine, and TorqShift® transmission.

The Entourage features seating for up to 33 passengers, a wide front axle and full front suspension system, and aerodynamic styling.

Glaval has been manufacturing transportation vehicles for more than 30 years.

It produces nine bus models, with the largest seating up to 45 passengers.

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

State associations get Facebook pages

Three state and one regional motorcoach associations have created pages on the social networking website Facebook.

The Motorcoach Association of South Carolina, along with the South Central Motorcoach, Georgia Motorcoach Operators and Alabama Motorcoach associations, announced they now have a presence on Facebook.

Facebook is the world’s most popular social networking website. A Facebook page provides organizations, like the associations, with

a variety of tools and mechanisms for communicating with their “fans,” individuals who are interested in the associations and interested in other people who have an interest in the organizations.

A Facebook page also allows users to share photographs and videos, as well as exchange messages. Business organizations on Facebook often can benefit from referrals from their fans.

The United Motorcoach Association established a Facebook page in October.

Here are the links to the new state motorcoach association pages:

South Central: www.facebook.com/pages/South-Central-Motorcoach-Association/165855549170.

Georgia: www.facebook.com/pages/Georgia-Motorcoach-Operators-Association/202662041208.

South Carolina: www.facebook.com/pages/Motorcoach-Association-of-South-Carolina/171017970917.

Alabama: www.facebook.com/pages/Alabama-Motorcoach-Association/172227656786.

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Prevost adds 100 locations to service network

SAINTE CLAIRE, Quebec — Prevost Car has announced that the Prevost service network now includes more than 100 Prevost service providers across North America.

The expanded network can accommodate all Prevost vehicles, including Prevost and Volvo brand coaches, according to the announcement.

Coach operators and motor

home owners will benefit from the expanded network, which complements the Prevost Service Center locations, said Thomas Munds, Prevost service provider development manager.

Munds said that Prevost carefully chose and qualified each of its service providers. He said they must comply with strict guidelines

to become Prevost certified. The new service providers are separated into two groups.

“Level One Certified Service Providers” are specialists in power train repairs, offering maintenance and repair services for Volvo engines and transmissions.

Level Two Certified Service Providers have received more extensive training, qualifying them to offer maintenance and repair services for the entire vehicle.

Certified mechanics receive initial training from Prevost’s own service experts, and then are required to receive on-going training.

Prevost training managers

Robert Buchwalter and Robert Hitt have developed sessions that focus on more than mechanics. Prevost history is reviewed, a coach is literally taken apart, and all systems such as the multiplex, the electronic stability program, and the diesel particulate filter vertical installation are analyzed.

Mechanics must successfully complete several tests before a Prevost service provider certification is awarded.

The expanded service network can handle all warranty issues, meaning no further claim work is required between the customer and Prevost.

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IC consolidates school buses

CONWAY, Ark. — For more than 75 years, buses, notably school buses, have been produced in Conway.

That will end next year when IC Corp. ceases production at its Conway school bus plant.

A spokesman for IC’s parent company, Navistar, said “We have to consolidate our bus assembly operations into one facility. It’s driven by market factors.”

Roy Wiley said the economy has made for a “terrible time” for the industry, with school districts not being able to purchase many buses.

IC is consolidating production at a plant in Tulsa, Okla., which is a newer facility and costs less to operate.

U.K. operator expanding to U.S.

OAK FOREST, Ill. — Yet another bus operator from the United Kingdom is expanding into the U.S. market.

U.K. transport firm Go-Ahead Group plc has formed a joint venture with Cook-Illinois Corp., the largest private school bus operator in Illinois and the fifth-largest private school bus contractor in the U.S.

The as-yet-unnamed joint school bus contracting company is

IC plans to continue fabricating parts at the Conway site but it will be a much-reduced operation. Up to 477 jobs will be lost. Layoffs will not start, however, until after the first of the year.

Conway traces its bus-building roots to the early 1930s and the Ward Body Company, which produced Ward school buses.

In 1979, Ward filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Then-Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton helped put together a group that bought the assets of Ward. In 1980, the American Transportation Corp. was formed and began doing business as AmTran Corp. a year later.

In 1991, Navistar began investing in American Transportation Corp., acquiring control in 1995.

expected to be up and running by the 2010-11 school year.

Go-Ahead joins three other U.K. transport companies doing school bus business in North America — FirstGroup, which operates First Student; National Express, which owns Durham School Services in the U.S. and Stock Transportation in Canada, and Stagecoach Group, which has some school bus contracts in Wisconsin.

FirstGroup also owns Grey-

BANY revives

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

industry.

Other dangers loomed, including the fear that a crippling sales tax on motorcoach purchases might be reinstated.

Recognized and respected in Albany, BANY has had a long-term relationship with a highly effective lobbyist. A group of operators decided that revitalizing BANY was the quickest and most efficient way of serving New York’s bus industry. Their efforts produced the large

turnout this fall.

UMA’s Ken Presley and ABA’s Clyde Hart both participated in the meeting.

Presley explained that New York was one of the nation’s premier motorcoach destinations, and a large percentage of calls he fields on a daily basis are from carriers with questions or problems related to operating in New York City. A strong state association would provide a needed resource, he said.

A majority of the motorcoaches in the U.S. are registered within 350 miles of New York, so laws en-

SmarTire unit now available in aftermarket

ELYRIA, Ohio — Bendix Commercial Vehicle Systems has announced the availability of its SmarTire tire pressure monitoring system through its network of Bendix independent aftermarket partners and original equipment suppliers in North America.

SmarTire has been available on some new motorcoaches for the past three years.

The system monitors the pressure and temperature of each tire to provide tire status information in real time. The system warns the driver of tire-related problems, as it reads information from inside of the tire.

The information is communicated wirelessly to an onboard receiver, which forwards the information to a multifunction, two-inch display installed on the vehicle dash. The driver is alerted to loss of air pressure or high tire temperature.

The system also can communicate pressure information to maintenance personnel.

“Tires and fuel are major cost factors for fleets, and the first step to reducing tire-related costs and improving fuel economy is to make sure tires are at their optimum inflation level,” said Fred Andersky, Bendix director of marketing for controls.

According to Andersky, the system is sold as a kit, and can be retrofitted on almost any commercial vehicle.

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

hound Lines and BoltBus, while Stagecoach owns Coach USA, Coach Canada and megabus.com.

Go-Ahead is not only one of the larger bus and rail operators in and around London but also offers smaller, community-based transport services throughout the U.K., as well as being one of that nation’s largest aviation cargo services.

acted in the state are observed, and often mirrored, throughout the region. Presley said that a successful BANY has regional, and perhaps national, implications.

Silvanie asserted that “BANY is alive and well, moving into the 21st century. We want to build on what just happened.

“Considering the large turnout of both operators and suppliers we feel that the marketplace was a huge success. Based on that, and the efforts of our membership committee, we expect to double our membership in 2010,” he said.

Nat'l Interstate earnings jump, Michelson named director

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Corp. has reported a sharp turn around in net income for the third quarter and substantially higher net income for the first nine months of this year.

The insurance holding company earned \$8.2 million, or 42 cents per diluted share, during this year's third quarter, compared to a loss of \$4.23 million, or 22 cents a share, during the third quarter of 2008.

For the first nine months of this

year, National Interstate earned \$32.9 million, or \$1.70 per diluted share, versus net income of \$9.7 million, or 50 cents per share, for the same period in 2008.

Net earnings from operations improved for both the third quarter and first nine months, compared to the same periods in 2008, reflecting fewer large claims.

In addition, a reduction of the

deferred income tax valuation allowance and net realized gains from investments contributed to the higher 2009 net income. In other words, National Interstate did not experience the large investment losses it incurred a year ago.

About the only negative National Interstate experienced during the third quarter and first nine months of this year was a drop in

gross premiums written, reflecting the weak economy and lots of competition among companies writing insurance.

Gross premiums at National Interstate totaled \$69.6 million during the third quarter and \$279.7 million for the first nine months of 2009. That was roughly 10 percent below the same periods in 2008.

National Interstate also an-

nounced its board had increased the number of directors from eight to nine, and elected company President and CEO Dave Michelson to fill the newly created board seat.

Michelson has served as president and CEO since January 2008.

The board also approved a seven cents per share quarterly dividend, payable Dec. 11, to shareholders of record Nov. 27.

Officials probe Georgia crash

ATLANTA — Another apparently illegal bus company has crashed a coach, this time injuring more than 40 members of the famous Morehouse College band.

The company owning the coach reportedly was told by state and federal officials to stop operations but continued in business.

The crash occurred at the end of October, but the company, known variously as Superior Transportation or Superior Coach, supposedly had been ordered to shut down in February.

The Georgia Public Service Commission announced it had started an investigation of Superior, as did the Georgia State Patrol.

Bill Edge, a spokesman for the commission said Superior was not licensed by the state. Edge also confirmed the state sent Superior a cease-and-desist order in February.

Superior's owner Steve McClardy claims he never got the letter. "The state got it wrong," McClardy told an Atlanta television station.

McClardy said the state got his name wrong on the cease-and-desist letter. McClardy also says he was licensed by the state under the name Superior Coach.

Edge was asked about the possible mix up. He responded by saying neither Superior Transportation nor Superior Coach was authorized to operate in Georgia.

"We have no permit certificate issued to a Superior Coaches of Atlanta Inc. Bottom line, there was an application filed in 2008 under that name. We never got the documentation needed to process the application. It was dismissed in March of 2009," Edge said.

A spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Transportation confirmed Superior was not authorized to operate interstate.

Morehouse College officials say the company whose name was on the bus was not the company they hired to transport the band.



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.
- ★ **New pre-owned coach section of the exhibit hall floor** – To meet the growing demands of customers, operators now are learning they must adapt and make equipment buying a marketing, as well as financial decision. The exhibit floor is not just a buyer's haven, but having sat through intensive education sessions, you will be able to decide what equipment and services you'll need that fit your new business model. Come and see the diversified exhibit hall floor.
- ★ **New motorcoach manufacturers** – Come and see what the industry's leading manufacturers have in store for you. Anything and everything you need to succeed in this new economy will be waiting for you when you step foot onto the industry largest trade show venue.
- ★ **Expanded Destinations & Attractions Isle** – Deciding where you take your customers is as important as the equipment you buy and the services you purchase to operate your business profitably. Thanks to our partnership with the National Tour Association (NTA), we've added new and exciting Destinations & Attractions to the EXPO exhibit floor.
- ★ **Invaluable networking opportunities** – UMA Motorcoach Expo is the only place where you'll be able to forge **powerful business partnerships** with operators around the Nation and Canada. EXPO's networking opportunities are a great way for you to learn first-hand how other operators are dealing with this *new economy*. Since all EXPO functions are open to all attendees you can build and strengthen your relationships with vendors and suppliers as well. Plus catch up with old friends, learn how they are staying the course, and have fun...*all in just 4 days!*



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."

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