

New NCAA transportation program worries operators

INDIANAPOLIS — Only motorcoach operators with top-rated safety records and safety programs will be allowed to transport college athletic teams to post-season games under a program adopted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

The NCAA said the new ground transportation program — being managed by Chicago-based

GO Ground Options — is aimed at providing the safest travel possible for student athletics who are invited to playoff and championship games the association sponsors.

Adoption of the program came in the wake of an extensive investigation last year by ESPN, the sport cable television network, that showed that numerous colleges have been switching to charter bus

transportation for financial reasons and a number of them — Ohio State, Michigan State, San Jose State, UCLA, Alabama, and Nebraska among them — were hiring carriers with questionable safety records.

While it was not known if the ESPN investigation was behind the new program, the NCAA did say that the safety of the student ath-

letes is its main concern.

“The NCAA is adopting a new and higher standard for safety compliance and certification of charter bus operations,” the organization said in a release posted on its website that provides some details about the program.

“Those operators who wish to transport teams involved in championships must be certified at this

higher level,” the release said.

NCAA spokesman Cameron Schuh said the association had been reviewing transportation issues for quite some time and wanted to develop a ground transportation program similar to one it has for air travel.

“We believe this opportunity will allow us to enhance the safety

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Berg tarnished industry, say Northwest operators

SEATTLE — When Darren Berg jumped into the motorcoach business here in 2003, some operators in the Pacific Northwest figured it could be the start of something good for the industry.

After all, with MTR Western featuring new, top-of-the-line luxury buses, professional drivers with fancy uniforms, and drinks and snacks for its passengers, they were sure it would spruce up the image of all charter bus services.

“A lot of us thought he was on the up and up, and he would elevate the charter industry with his new business,” said Jim Cameron, owner of CWC Charters in Mount Vernon, Wash., and president of the Northwest Motorcoach

Association.

But now, seven years later, with Berg in jail facing federal fraud and money laundering charges and his bus business being managed by a federal court while awaiting its sale to a Seattle investment group, those operators who thought the high-end competition might be a good thing now admit Berg actually tarnished the industry in a big way.

“About the only good thing he did for the industry was get the rest of us to buy newer buses and clean up our coaches with new upholstery and paint,” suggested Noah Wessinger, owner of Get Away Coaches in Woodland, Wash.

Beyond that, he and other op-



MTR Western: ‘The most modern fleet of coaches in North America’

erators contend Berg was actually trying to run them out of business through predatory pricing and other underhanded tactics, while using other people’s money to do it.

They say he regularly low balled their charter prices, recruited some of their key employees with hefty salary offers, and raided their customers. His antics, they maintain, created havoc in the

Pacific Northwest and gave the industry as a whole a black eye that will take time to heal.

“The best word I can think of for what he did is ‘disgusting,’” said Cameron.

Berg was jailed in October after federal prosecutors charged him with defrauding hundreds of investors in several investment

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Olympics dispute resolved, payout details kept secret

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — The nine-month-old squabble over money owed to the U.S. motorcoach operators that provided shuttle services for the 2010 Winter Olympics here last February appears to be over.

The Vancouver Organizing Committee, commonly called VANOC, and Gameday Management of Orlando reached an agreement last month that will allow dozens of operators hired by International Trailways to be paid the estimated \$4 million they are owed for their work. (See Sept. 1, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The settlement was reached during a three-day private mediation session. Details of the agreement, however, were not made public because the parties involved in the meetings signed a confidentiality agreement not to discuss them.

Ron Wall, counsel for Trailways, called the agreement satisfactory and said it cleared the way for Gameday to settle up with Trailways, which hired 58 motorcoach companies to shuttle athletes and spectators during the games.

Gameday, which managed the transportation program for VANOC, but turned over recruit-

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Will outraged flyers try alternatives?

Quote of the Month

“If people don’t want to play that role, if they want to travel by some other means, of course that is their right. This is the United States.”

— *Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, noting there are alternative transportation options for those opposed to airport security measures*

One has to wonder: How many more indignities, invasions of privacy, service lapses, add-

News Analysis

on fees, onerous requirements, and possible threats to health (from body scanners) are airline passengers willing to accept before they begin abandoning air travel, and consider scurrying on board buses in large numbers?

It’s a question of the moment, but no one seems to know for sure what it will take for the current outrage over invasive airport security screenings, including pat-downs and body scans, to turn into genuine revulsion and revolt

by air travelers.

Some of society’s traditional thought leaders think the Transportation Security Administration and its more aggressive measures already have exceeded the balance between reasonable security techniques and the maintenance of a free society.

Others contend the criticism is overblown, that the tougher security measures are both a sign of the times and a necessary evil.

The *Washington Times* editorialized late last month that the TSA “has crossed the line

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Operator gets creative, outperforms transit shuttle

EUGENE, Ore. — Public transit agencies frequently claim they can handle shuttle work for big-time sporting events more efficiently than private motorcoach companies.

Well, it just isn't so, contends Gladys Gillis, co-owner of Starline Luxury Coaches, a Seattle-based operator that has had a number of well-publicized feuds over sports shuttles operated by King County Metro, the major public transit agency in metropolitan Seattle.

And, she insists, she has the

evidence to prove it.

A year ago, the University of Oregon in Eugene called on Starline to handle the parking lot shuttle service for a football game it had scheduled in the middle of the week.

Lane Transit District, the public transit agency that handles the shuttles for the university's regular Saturday games, was unavailable because it was a weekday and its buses were tied up on regular-service runs.

Starline took on the 80-coach

operation and managed to get the thousands of fans to the game. But there were complaints from passengers, saying it took about an hour to get some of them to the stadium and more than two hours to get them back to their cars after the game.

Lane Transit said it usually takes 20 minutes to transport riders to the game from five outlying parking lots — some as far as six miles away — and about an hour and a half to load them up and get them back.

"It was their first time and there were some problems getting people to the game because it was rush hour and there was an accident on one of the routes," noted Van Snyder, a Lane Transit official who helped Starline operate the service.

Despite the challenges, the university again called on Starline to run the shuttles for another mid-week game it had this fall and this time the company was ready.

It rerouted some of the inbound runs to avoid traffic bottle-

necks, added five articulated buses to the fleet of 75 motorcoaches gathered for the job, and made changes to the loading plans and pickup locations alongside the stadium.

The improvements worked and Starline delivered most riders to the



Gladys Gillis

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Canadian operators miffed by possible U.S. poaching

TORONTO — Motorcoach operators in Ontario are going after bordertown U.S. carriers who they say are illegally running charters in their country.

The Canadian operators say the activity is costing them a considerable amount of money, and they want authorities in their country to put an immediate stop to it.

"I don't think it is rampant or widespread by any means, but it is of concern to our operators," said Dave Carroll, director of safety and management at Motor Coach Canada.

He said several operators have complained to his trade association that some Canadian organizations are hiring U.S. carriers to work charters that involve transporting passengers to and from various locations within Ontario.

Under rules and regulations in both countries, charter operators may transport passengers across each other's borders, but they are not allowed to make point-to-point runs within the other's country.

Carroll said MCC has notified Citizenship and Immigration Min-

ister Jason Kenney and Public Safety Minister Vic Toews and urged them to take swift action to halt the practice, which is known as cabotage.

"Our industry supports competition, however, there must be a fair and level playing field," Motor Coach Canada said in a recent statement. "For example, U.S. carriers need not charge (Harmonized Sales Tax), which puts Canadian carriers at a 13 percent competitive disadvantage right off the bat."

The Harmonized Sales Tax, or HST, is the name used in Canada to

describe the combination of the 5 percent federal Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the 8 percent regional Provincial Sales Tax (PST). These taxes are combined into a single value-added sales tax in five of the 10 Canadian provinces: British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia.

The HST is collected by the Canada Revenue Agency, which remits the appropriate amounts to the participating provinces. The HST may differ across the five provinc-

es, as each province will set its own PST rates within the HST.

Carroll said U.S. carriers also pay less for general business, fuel and employee taxes and various regulatory fees.

Because of these factors, "I think it is generally agreed that it is definitely more costly to operate a bus in Canada than it is in the United States," he noted.

Carroll did not know when he would hear from Canadian authorities, although he suggested it could take several months.



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THE DOCKET

House gets dangerous safety bill

Action possible by Democrats

WASHINGTON — A nearly identical version of the draconian motorcoach safety legislation that could see action this month on the floor of the U.S. Senate has been reintroduced in the House of Representatives.

The fact a look-alike bill has been refiled in the House likely increases the chances the doomsday measures could be considered by Congress during the current lame-duck session. (See Nov. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The updated House version of the proposed legislation, H.R. 6441-Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act of 2010, was reintroduced

late last month by Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., who introduced a similar bill in the House two years ago.

Both the United Motorcoach and the American Bus associations have issued warnings about the bills, with the ABA calling the proposed legislation “a bad bill that can’t be made right. It must not be passed by the Senate during the lame duck session.”

The two bills require the USDOT to impose a series of onerous and costly safety mandates on the industry at a highly accelerated pace.

For example, it would require:

- Seatbelts and fire suppression equipment on all motorcoaches within one year.
- New roof standards and advanced glazing within 18 months.

- Installation of electronic stability control systems and tire-pressure monitoring systems on all motorcoaches within two years.

In all, there are 14 overreaching and overarching mandates that would require the industry to spend billions of dollars for compliance.

The requirements would be laughable if they weren’t contained in serious legislation that is poised for consideration by the Senate and now has a clone in the House, making reconciliation simple.

It’s safe to say that passage of Senate Bill 554 and House Resolution 6441 would force hundreds of coach operators to shut down or to drastically curtail service.

The ABA contends the bills also would do little to enhance safety.

Bill would exempt buses from Jersey franchise tax

TRENTON, N.J. — A bill making its way through the New Jersey Legislature could end a decade of motorcoach industry antipathy toward the state because of its confiscatory corporate franchise tax.

Currently, a one-night New Jersey stopover by a motorcoach whose passengers stay in a hotel, dine in a restaurant or two, or visit a local attraction creates a taxable nexus for the company that operates the bus.

That one visit means the coach company will incur the minimum New Jersey corporate franchise tax of \$500. But that’s not the end of it. The company likely will also be compelled to hire an accountant to make the proper tax filing.

Subsequently, the company will be contacted by the New Jersey Secretary of State to register as a foreign corporation, resulting in another \$500 payment to the state.

In total, that one overnight stop in New Jersey can cause an operator to incur \$1,500-\$2,000 in taxes, fees and accounting costs, probably exceeding the gross payment for that portion of the charter and unrecoverable from the group.

That scenario is an example of why the motorcoach industry has long opposed New Jersey’s corporate franchise tax and why many coach companies have shunned the state, including its Atlantic City casinos, during the past decade.

“The number of bus and motorcoach companies willing to bring groups to New Jersey as a destination has diminished considerably,” Ken Presley, vice president of industry relations at the United Motorcoach Association, told the Tourism and Gaming Committee of the New Jersey General Assembly last month.

“Our last survey indicated approximately 40 percent of the passenger carrier (members of UMA) decline to transport passengers to New Jersey destinations.

“As one North Carolina charter bus company stated: ‘In a typical year we would do about four charters a year to Atlantic City, but with the franchise tax and what it cost me to have my CPA file the forms, it is simply unprofitable and not worth the hassle. We usually convince the group to go elsewhere,’” Presley told the state legislators.

Also testifying before the committee were Greater Jersey Motorcoach Association President Thomas

Dugan of Safety Bus Service in Pennsauken, N.J., and Clyde Hart, senior vice president of government affairs and policy at the American Bus Association.

Presley noted in his remarks that while the New Jersey franchise tax is burdensome and a deterrent for the bus and motorcoach industry, it is not bus and motorcoach operators that are likely suffering the most because of the tax. Rather it is New Jersey’s tourist economy.

“It is the large number of charter and tour companies that choose to avoid New Jersey destinations that have the largest negative impact on New Jersey’s tourism,” said Presley.

“In the charter business, preformed groups typically determine the destination or destinations they would like to visit and select a charter company to take them there. The number of bus and motorcoach companies willing to bring groups to New Jersey as a destination has diminished considerably. ... As a result of the franchise tax, New Jersey as an in-route or final destination seems to be slowly disappearing from the tour operators’ catalogs,” Presley asserted.

He pointed out that if 40 percent of the nation’s motorcoach companies, which are heavily concentrated on the eastern seaboard, avoid only one New Jersey destination trip annually the economic loss to the state easily tops \$15 million. “The multiples of that number become very scary,” said Presley, “particularly when considering the loss of jobs, investment and tax revenues.”

Presley also noted that bus and motorcoach companies pay taxes when traveling in New Jersey -- regardless of whether they stop. These direct taxes include fuel taxes, apportioned tag taxes and Uniform Carrier Registration Agreement fees.

“I challenge you today to repeal this burdensome tax that remains an impediment to marketing New Jersey destinations. The vast majority of states do not impose these burdensome taxes on the bus and motorcoach industry but rather have the ‘welcome mat’ out for the tourism dollars they bring,” Presley concluded.

A bill that would exempt coach operators carrying passengers in and out of New Jersey from the corporate franchise tax is expected to pass the state General Assembly.

Health rules for drivers delayed

BALTIMORE — New regulations from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration that are focused specifically on health standards for commercial vehicle drivers will have to wait until next year, says FMCSA Administrator Anne Ferro.

Meanwhile, a U.S. Court of Appeals has ordered the FMCSA to issue a proposed rule by the end of this year on supporting documents for hours-of-service compliance.

The timing of health standard rules, concerning sleep apnea programs and medical examiners, is being pushed back to next year because the agency is finishing work first on its new hours-of-service proposal for truckers and the CSA 2010 safety ratings program.

The hours-of-service rules are due momentarily and the agency was moving toward disclosure of carrier safety data for public review on Dec. 1.

“Those (medical examiner rules) will be issued early next year after the agency completes work on the hours-of-service rule,” Ferro said at the International Conference on Commercial Driver Health and Wellness here.

The rules related to medical examinations also will address vision, respiratory disease and diabetes standards, as well as sleep apnea, the administrator said.

“Down the road, there will be radical changes in the medical requirements to be sure that we are minimizing the risk,” she said, without providing any details on the agency’s plans.

Meanwhile, the FMCSA says it plans to comply with an appeals court order requiring it to issue a proposed rule by the end of this year on supporting documents for hours-of-service compliance.

A rule has been in the works for some time.

Last January, the American Trucking Associations asked the appeals court to issue a “writ of mandamus,” ordering the FMCSA to issue a supporting documents regulation that Congress mandated as part of

Trucker ordered to install EOBRs

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has ordered a Colorado trucker to install electronic onboard recorders on its fleet by March.

The order came after regulators said the company was routinely violating federal hours-of-service rules and commercial driver’s license requirements.

The FMCSA said that JBS Carriers Inc., of Greeley, Colo., must install the devices. The order is believed to be the first of its kind.

If JBS fails to comply, it is subject to \$81,780 in fines.

Earlier this year, FMCSA completed an electronic onboard recorder rule that requires fleets with violations to install the devices.

Since then, the FMCSA has been considering even more far-reaching electronic onboard recorder requirements.

the Hazardous Materials Transportation Authorization Act of 1994.

The regulations were to have been issued by Feb. 26, 1996.

FMCSA and ATA set the lawsuit aside this past spring to settle their differences, but in July ATA said settlement talks had failed and asked the court to rule.

For years, FMCSA has used regulatory guidance and policies rather than formal regulations to govern motor carriers’ supporting documents requirements.

This approach has been frustrating for many truckers and has led to several court cases.

To settle the dispute unilaterally, FMCSA issued a new policy in July that relieved carriers using qualified tracking systems from 15 specific paperwork requirements. ATA responded that the policy was insufficient because carriers needed regulatory certainty.

The appeals court order did not discuss the arguments but simply declared ATA had “demonstrated that the delay in this case warrants issuance of the writ.”

Even before ATA filed its lawsuit in January, FMCSA had announced it would deal with HOS supporting documents as part of a rulemaking that would expand the scope of mandatory electronic onboard recorders. According to the agency’s current schedule — published before the court order, the White House would clear a proposed rule by Dec. 30, and FMCSA would publish it a few days later.

Distracted driving: New insight

BLACKSBURG, Va. — Just when you thought you'd seen (or heard) more than enough about distracted driving, along comes more sophisticated research that suggests some of what we've learned is skewed.

For example, it's not terribly risky just to talk on a cell phone while driving.

However, it's very risky to reach for a cell phone or dial a cell phone while driving.

In fact, bus and truck drivers who dialed a cell phone while driving increased their odds of involvement in a safety-critical event by 3.51 times, the new research from Virginia Tech Transportation Institute shows.

For its latest study, the researchers at Virginia Tech decided to examine what specifically there is about cell phone use that is risky. They looked at the various "sub-tasks" involved in using a cell phone and that's when they began quantifying and comparing the actual risk of dialing or reaching for a cell phone versus talking or listening on one.

In other words, although talking on a cell phone did not show a heightened risk, a driver must take

several risk-increasing steps to use a cell phone for conversation and those steps pose a great danger.

Interestingly, the odds for being involved in a safety-critical event actually dropped for drivers talking and listening on a hands-free phone.

Even drivers talking and listening on a hand-held phone increased their risk so slightly it was not regarded as a significant difference by the researchers.

This is an important finding, said the Virginia Tech researchers, suggesting that much of the risk could be addressed through improved design.

Another finding, perhaps not too surprising, is that cell phone policies instituted by bus and truck operators cut cell phone risks more than state cell phone laws.

The new study was commissioned by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Data was collected over a one-year period and included 1,085 crashes, 8,375 near crashes, 30,661 "crash-relevant conflicts," and 211,711 baselines.

The data was collected by DriveCam, the company that markets onboard safety monitoring

systems aimed at reducing risky driving behavior.

As was found in a previous Virginia Tech study, using a cell phone to text, email or access the internet while driving was in a category of risk all by itself, with drivers 163 times more likely to be involved in a safety-critical event.

As has been found in other driving studies, nondriving tasks that take the driver's eyes away from the roadway had the greatest risk — texting, emailing, accessing the internet, dialing a cell phone, and reaching for a headset/earpiece.

It appears that a key difference between the high-risk and low-risk nondriving tasks involves the amount of visual distraction, researchers conclude. Nondriving tasks associated with high visual attention have the highest odds of involvement in a safety-critical event.

Rich Hanowski, director of VTTI's Center for Truck & Bus Safety, notes that "the take-away message is that drivers must keep their eyes on the road and tasks or activities that divert eyes from the road are risky."

Deficit commission heads propose higher fuel taxes

WASHINGTON — The co-chairs of President Obama's National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, which has come to be known simply as the federal "deficit commission," have proposed a 15-cent hike in federal fuel taxes, beginning in three years, to sustain the Highway Trust Fund.

The recommendation would appear to fly in the face of President Obama's stated opposition to higher fuel taxes.

However, that didn't deter the commission's co-chairs, former Clinton White House chief of staff Erskine Bowles and former Republican senator from Wyoming Alan K. Simpson, from proposing higher fuel taxes as a deficit-cutting measure.

Overall, budget-clashing suggestions made by Bowles and Simpson would bring the federal deficit down to 2 percent of GDP by 2014, and lower the national debt to 34 percent of GDP by 2040.

Opposition to increasing fuel taxes — especially with the economy in its weakened state — goes beyond the White House. Many Republicans on the commission, including the

next chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Rep. John Mica, R-Fla., would rather see budgets cut in federal programs to cover transportation needs.

A poll taken in April, just before Senators Kerry, Graham and Lieberman were getting ready to introduce a Senate bill that would impose dramatically higher gas taxes, showed 7 in 10 Americans were opposed the idea.

While Kerry's objective was reducing greenhouse gas production, as opposed to reducing the deficit, 78 percent of those polled said they believed higher fuel taxes would kill jobs.

Currently, the United Motorcoach Association is opposed to any increase in the fuel tax because so much of current federal taxes on gasoline and diesel fuel is diverted to wasteful transit spending, and the Obama Administration continues to favor an increase in transit spending.

At the same time, the American Trucking Associations has in the past expressed support for fuel taxes as a fair and verifiable means of paying for infrastructure.



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(by) subjecting millions of Americans to X-rated X-ray scans and public groping sessions.”

But the *Los Angeles Times* opined that “there’s no bright line to indicate when our quest for security becomes intolerably invasive of our privacy, but we’re still pretty sure the TSA hasn’t yet crossed it.”

The *L.A. Times*, possibly taking its cue from Secretary Napolitano, says “if you can’t stand such a minor inconvenience (as a pat-down or body scanner), perhaps you should stay on the ground.”

Such sentiment harkens back to the enduring but negative slogan from the 1960s: “America: Love it or Leave it.”

So, the federal government has given customers of the nation’s airlines a choice regarding security measures: Like it or lump it.

Still, the customer-unfriendly attitude of Napolitano and Transportation Security Administrator John Pistole isn’t markedly different from what other federal agencies, and even the airlines themselves, have applied to air passengers during the past 18 months or so. Some examples:

- Most of the nation’s airlines, save Southwest, have adopted ticket-change fees that boggle the mind.

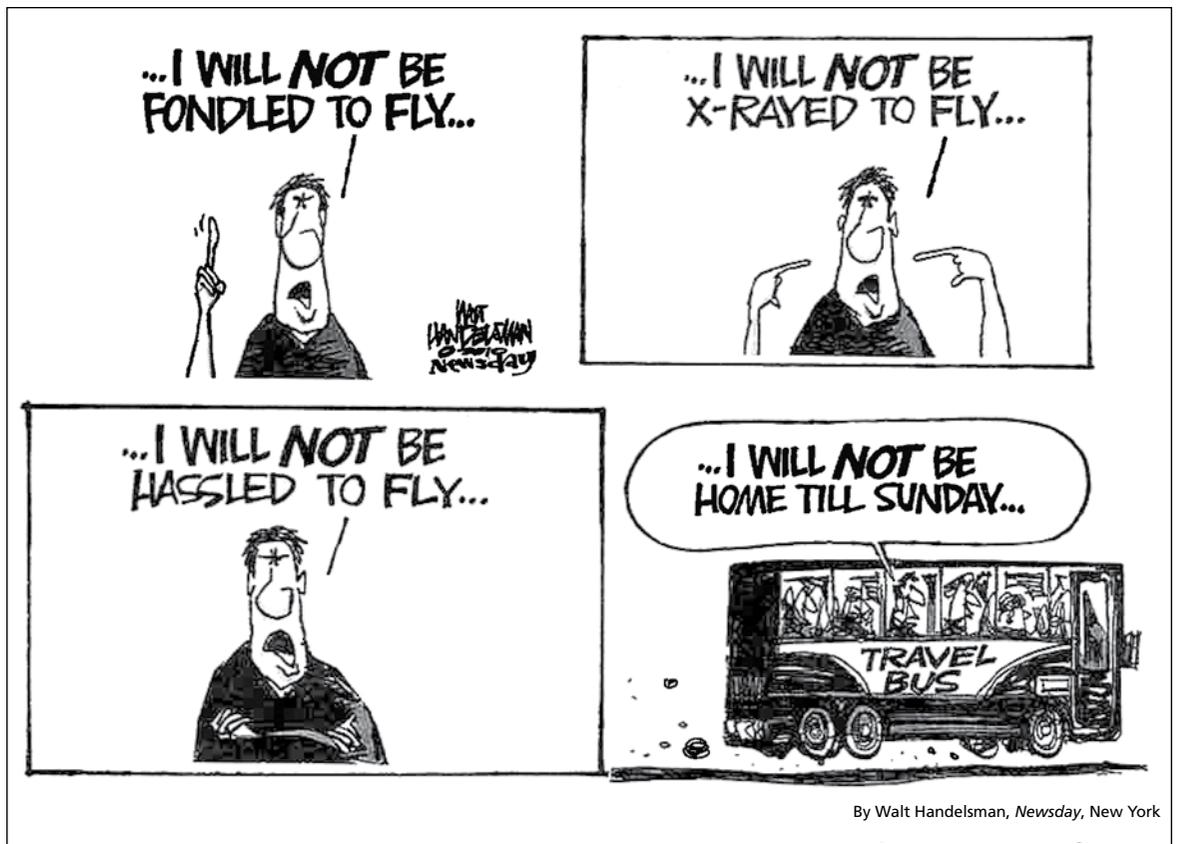
- Most of the nation’s airlines, save Southwest, have adopted checked-bag fees that range from \$15 to \$300 per bag. One airline even charges for carry-on bags.

- Most airlines have instituted fees for meals and snacks, headsets, Wi-Fi, pillows and blankets, unaccompanied minor-age children, and pets.

- Many airlines charge fees for priority boarding, preferred seating and booking tickets by phone.

- As of Nov. 1, air passengers must abide by new identification rules that include providing date of birth, gender and full name as it appears on government-issued photo IDs.

- Airlines are now subject to fines of up to \$27,000 if they keep passengers on a plane for more than three hours without taking off. (Any motorcoach operator based within 25 miles of an airline-served airport and who hasn’t called on the station manager of every airline in that airport, offering foul-weather-transportation services, may be missing an opportunity for additional business this winter.)



By Walt Handelsman, *Newsday*, New York

- Passengers may carry items powered by lithium-ion batteries (the kind found in laptops and cell phones) onboard a plane only if intended for personal use. No carrying of several phones that may be given as gifts.
- The airlines’ on-time performance was down in September,

while the number of flight cancellations was up from a year ago.

- The number of first-class seats on planes is shrinking.

- At least three major airlines have asked the TSA for permission to begin letting travelers tag their own checked bags.

Pretty soon the airlines will be

offering no customer service at all.

There are ways around all this, of course — at least for regional trips.

They’re called trains, buses and automobiles.

But, will it happen?

Will America Get Motorcoachified?



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Tough times amplify need for knowledge, relationships

By Dave Millhouser

"Wow, I had expected a much larger man," muttered the insurance adjuster as Mike walked in the door.

At 5 feet 8 inches tall and 150 pounds, Mike was not an imposing figure.

But, he had worked a minor miracle, using a 32-foot boat to pull a powerless drifting tug and barge away from danger in the midst of a howling Nor'easter.

After years of working with Mike's marine salvage operation via telephone and email, the adjuster was meeting him in person for the first time, and was underwhelmed by what he saw.

Once again we've come to that time of the year when I shamelessly try to sell you on the value of attending industry meetings, particularly UMA's upcoming Motorcoach Expo in Tampa.

Times are tough and for some there is the perception that regional and national bus gatherings are little more than a tax-exempt vacation. That can be true, but meetings offer more than that.

You get to meet folks who you've done business with and see what they actually look like, or meet people who you may need in an emergency. Some people can develop and maintain a relationship at a distance but most of us can't.

It is always easier to deal with someone you know, than a disjointed voice. People who know you will help in emergencies, and share information, strangers may not.

Most of you have, by now, figured out that I steal most of the ideas in these columns from you and your colleagues. (That's why you read them and say "I knew that.")

Save a step and go to the real source; mingle with your peers. Often you'll find that operators have similar problems — but different solutions that could work for you. It might even be fun to help someone struggling mightily with an issue you solved years ago.

In recent years there has been a steady increase in educational content offered at regional and national gatherings. The business envi-

'It might even be fun to help someone struggling mightily with an issue you solved years ago.'

ronment has grown both more difficult and complex. You may learn all you need to know without traveling, but well-planned meetings distill information, highlight key areas, and give a more complete picture.

Understanding CSA 2010 could make the difference between survival, and being condemned to bus hell, and it is being discussed at most motorcoach meetings.

You can learn a ton more, in less time, and it's not immoral to have a little fun doing it.

Often, the folks who enforce regulations are presenters at educational sessions, and it is critical to know what THEY think is important.

Clever students study the

teacher more than they study the subject. Educational sessions can offer entree into the minds of regulators... and the opportunity to influence them.

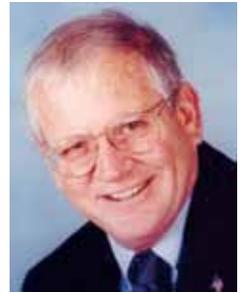
Another, more subtle, advantage of meeting other operators is that they have "skin in the game." Vendors, consultants and writers all have opinions, usually sincere, and sometimes even right.

It's pretty easy for us to suggest you try something because we're risking YOUR money. The sad fact is that, if we get it wrong, there are few consequences. When operators get it wrong, operators pay. That tends to make you folks more thoughtful (which is why your ideas are worth stealing).

One last shameless attempt to sway you.

The economy stinks and money is tight. Your time is more valuable than ever but if you are reading this you're one of the winners. (NOT because you're reading this silly column but because you're still in business.)

Tough times don't diminish the need for knowledge and relationships, they amplify it. We're all in



Dave Millhouser

this together, why not be together?

For the record, just knowing what someone looks like can be deceiving, maybe dangerous. Miniscule Mike is the same guy who, on another salvage job, ordered a 6-foot-5 bruiser (now a federal agent) into the icy water, in his skivvies, to clear a propeller.

Because Jay REALLY knew Mike well enough to fear him, he LEAPED into the water.

When you look at a skinny guy like Mike, ask yourself this question: Have you ever seen a fat stick of dynamite?

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

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Tougher safety standards kick into gear this month

WASHINGTON — Experts who've studied the new federal motor carrier safety assessment system that goes into effect this month say operators need to be proactive, rather than reactionary, in dealing with the new program.

"You're going to have to get in the bus with that driver and make sure he or she understands that everything they do is important," said one safety expert.

"As a company owner, manager or safety director, if you're not ready and prepared to get out and start driving behavior, instead of reacting to behavior, you've got a major lesson coming."

Beginning Dec. 1, the federal government is launching what is generally regarded to be the toughest safety crackdown on the na-

tion's over-the-road bus and truck operators in history.

Called CSA 2010 (shorthand for Comprehensive Safety Analysis), the initiative is designed to get bad operators and drivers off the road. (See Nov. 15, Nov. 1, Sept. 1 and Aug. 1 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administrator Anne Ferro has made clear she's committed to raising the bar to either gain entry or remain in the ground transportation industry. Under the new system, operators must maintain high safety standards.

Ferro recently told a gathering of trucking executives in Phoenix that despite some fleets' desire that her agency go soft on CSA — in regards to publishing fleets' overall

safety scores, such scores will be posted as scheduled.

It's all part of the Obama Administration's crackdown on truck and bus safety. It's why a slew of new rules are being cranked out by the FMCSA, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the USDOT.

CSA 2010 is the centerpiece of the FMCSA effort and it involves three core components:

- A new way to assess carrier safety to address why accidents happen
- A new process with an array of interventions, instead of just the compliance review
- A new approach to safety fitness determination tied to the safety performance of vehicles on the road, and not limited to results from

a compliance review

A revised safety measurement system is at the heart of CSA. It uses all crash records and roadside inspection data, and assigns weights to time and severity of violations.

It then calculates safety performance based on a set of basic standards, which replace the current SafeStat system. It also includes specific driver information. A low score on the standards will trigger an intervention process that will eventually feed into FMCSA's evaluation.

The standards are behaviors linked to crash risk—unsafe driving, fatigued driving (hours of service), driver fitness, controlled substances/alcohol, vehicle maintenance, and crash indicators.

All of this information will be

out there for operators and employers. And even customers will be able to access the information, FMCSA says. Every bus operator will be given a percentile rank, eventually allowing anyone to compare the ratings.

Individual driver records, however, will not be available to the public. But a driver with an unsafe record will impact a company's crash ratio rating.

Currently, SafeStat assesses only bus and truck operators, and not drivers. Under CSA, the system will address carriers and drivers.

Quality data is the key to CSA's operational model, government officials say.

FMCSA began collecting comprehensive data for its new system about five years ago.

Hours of service gets top priority

WASHINGTON — In case you hadn't noticed, hours-of-service rules have flown to the top of the agenda of Obama Administration transportation regulators.

New hours rules for over-the-road truckers have been in the making for months and could be made public even as this issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News* is at the printer or in the mail.

Now, airline industry groups and some pilot unions are blasting a plan by the feds to set new limits on pilot workdays.

Opposition to the proposal aimed at reducing pilot fatigue by cutting their work hours is widespread in hundreds of submissions to the Federal Aviation Administration.

The agency must consider the comments before developing a final rule for pilots. Congress or-

dered the FAA to finalize new anti-fatigue standards by Aug. 1.

Under current rules, the maximum workday for pilots is 16 hours and the maximum flying time is 8 hours.

The FAA is proposing the workday be limited to 9-13 hours, depending on time of day and number of flights, and the flying time be between 8 and 10 hours, depending on time of day.

For the first time, the FAA is proposing more restrictions on pilots who work late at night or who make numerous flights, both of which cause more fatigue than flying a small number of flights during the day, say scientists working for the FAA.

Airline groups said the proposed changes would cost airlines billions of dollars by requiring them to hire thousands of addi-

tional pilots and alter schedules, and would not enhance safety.

At the same time, some unions and their supporters say the proposal does not go far enough to limit long workdays.

The Air Transport Association, which represents large carriers, calls the proposal "onerous" and far too costly. The FAA estimated it would cost airlines \$1.25 billion over 10 years, but the airline group said the total was closer to \$20 billion.

Prompted by growing concern from investigators at the National Transportation Safety Board and Congress over the role fatigue has played in recent crashes, the FAA developed its proposal.

There is concern in the motorcoach industry that bus drivers' hours also could end up on the feds' radar screen.

Virtual field trips: New competition?

POUGHKEEPSIE, N.Y. — Is this the competition of the future?

Verizon Foundation has given a \$5,000 grant to help the Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College devise virtual field trips to the great historical estates in the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area.

Because of its educational mission, Hudson River Valley Institute has been developing ways to provide teachers, students and heritage tourists with online virtual experiences as a part of its digital library.

Now, Hudson River Valley Institute will be able to improve these offerings with the inclusion of video, slideshows and other materials that complement existing interpretive programs at heritage sites.

"Thanks to Verizon's generous gift, students at every grade level across the country — who can't visit these mansions — will be able to do the next best thing," said Hudson River Valley Institute Executive Director Colonel James M. Johnson.

"Particularly at a time when school districts face limited funds and budget shortfalls, teachers will be able to use our interpretive material to enrich students' educational experience and generate interest in our region."

The Verizon Foundation's grant will be used to digitize photos, video, audio, and other material for Olana, Clermont and Staatsburgh state historic sites, as well as for the national historic landmarks of Locust Grove and Springside.

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New York MTA to buy 90 Prevost X3 commuter coaches

NEW YORK CITY — The New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority plans to buy a test fleet of 90 Prevost X3-45 commuter coaches.

A contract calling for the purchase of the Prevosts was approved by the New York MTA board late last month. It totals \$49.95 million for an average bus purchase price of just under \$555,000 each.

New York MTA said the price it negotiated was deemed “fair and reasonable” based on comparisons to the most recently negotiated price from Prevost’s major competitor.

Roughly 1 percent of the contract value (\$490,000) will be used to pay the cost of structural integrity testing, tailpipe emissions profile testing, and training.

A pilot coach is to be delivered to New York City Transit in June and it must operate successfully in revenue service for a period before MTA will issue a notice to proceed with assembly of the remaining 89 buses.

Those buses are expected to be delivered between October and December 2011.

The Prevosts will replace the

oldest MCI DL3 commuter coaches in the New York MTA fleet.

The order is considered a “test-and-evaluation” contract by MTA. Should the initial buses perform well, more substantial orders could follow.

“The purchase of 90 buses will permit the test and evaluation in revenue service of a new bus type, (and) ensure the bus meets the standards of New York City Transit’s New Bus Qualification Program,” the MTA said in a contract discussion document provided to board members.

New York MTA will evaluate the Prevosts on a host of performance factors, including miles per gallon and mean distance between failures.

If Prevost wins subsequent orders, it has agreed to build a percentage of the X3-45s in the Nova Bus plant in Plattsburgh, N.Y.

Nova Bus is a subsidiary of Prevost and it opened its plant in upstate New York early last year. The plant currently assembles low-floor 40- and 60-foot Nova Bus LFS models.

As part of the contract, Prevost has agreed to provide a 12-year struc-

tural warranty and a \$90,000 parts credit for aftermarket support.

Prevost maintains a factory parts and service center across the Verrazano Narrows from Long Island in Plainfield, N.J.

New York MTA tested a 45-foot Prevost coach in June and July 2008, to evaluate the bus, as well as gauge customer and operator acceptance. The coach received “favorable results,” leading to the test purchase.

Both Prevost and New York MTA declined to comment on the new contract.

Trailways adds Canadian member

FAIRFAX, Va. — The Trailways Transportation System has added its second Ontario-based member, McCoy Bus Service & Tours of Kingston.

McCoy Trailways (the new company name) joins other Eastern Canadian stockholder companies, Great Canadian Trailways, based in Kitchener, Ontario, and La Chaudière Trailways, which operates out of Saint-Georges, Quebec.

Located between Toronto and Montreal, and 30 minutes from the U.S. border, McCoy Trailways specializes in charter-and-tour services, and operates a fleet of 30 full-

size, midsize and mini-coaches.

The company also provides shuttle services for airport, train and bus terminals in Syracuse, N.Y., as well as packaged tour products that include such destinations as Atlantic City, N.J.; Buffalo, N.Y.; Florida; Branson, Mo., and Nashville, Tenn.

It also offers packages to NASCAR and other sporting events, and its charter clients include sports teams.

“Our clientele is pretty broad,” said Shawn Geary, president of McCoy Trailways. “We serve young sports fans to seniors wishing to

travel to East Coast casinos and other places.”

Separately, it was announced that McCoy Trailways/McCoy Bus Service has won the Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce Tourism Award. Local businesses are nominated by their customers, clients, staff and peers for the chamber’s annual Business Achievement Awards.

Companies are evaluated on such criteria as customer and employee relations, business growth, business standards and ethics, and community involvement.

For more information about the company, go to www.gomccoy.com.

Trailways to meet for ‘75th’

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — The Trailways Transportation System will use its Annual Stockholders Meeting and Conference here Feb. 28-March 2 to commemorate 75 years of providing motorcoach travel.

Not only will Trailways shareholders, affiliated partners, industry suppliers and others mark the organization’s “Platinum Jubilee,” but they also will participate in workshops, network and socialize in one of America’s premier vacation destinations.

Trailways says it has “compact-ed” its 2011 conference so affiliated partners and industry supporters can maximize their time and opportuni-

ties through exhibits, demonstrations and presentations.

For attendees from Trailways stockholder companies there will be a special strategy-building exercise, plus programs, meetings and events.

“The 2011 gathering will be an exciting and momentous occasion, offering many worthy educational sessions, along with a very important business strategy session regarding the future of Trailways,” said Trailways Chair Ron Moore of Burlington Trailways.

For more information, go to www.trailways.com or phone (703) 691-3052.

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Tarnished image

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

funds of upwards of \$100 million. They say he used the money to not only finance a lavish life style with multiple homes, luxury cars, jet planes and yachts, but also to subsidize his motorcoach operation.

His bus holdings, which grew to become the 12th largest bus operation in North America, included MTR Western, which was his principal business and which now is being run by a court-appointed trustee. Others include a sightseeing company in Vancouver, British Columbia, and a no-frills charter business based in Oregon, that operates in Oregon, Washington and California.

Berg's arrest came after he had filed for personal bankruptcy, which led to the court taking over his bus operation.

"He was trying to take over the whole market around here," contended Cameron. "Instead, he did a hell of a lot of damage to our industry and, although it isn't irreparable, it's going to take a long time to fix."

Gladys Gillis, co-owner of Starline Luxury Coaches in Seattle, agrees, saying he hurt numerous operators with his nasty business practices and dirty tricks.

A particularly damaging one, she said, involved Berg having his drivers follow charter buses of other companies and then mingle with the passengers after they were dropped off at a location and try to sell them on using MTR Western for their next trip.

"They would tell the passengers that whatever they paid for the charter, MTR would charge them less, no matter what," she said.

Gillis said MTR also had its information technology manager register a web address using the name of Gillis' company, Starline, so she could not use it for her own business.

Darren Berg indicted by federal grand jury

SEATTLE — A federal grand jury has indicted former motorcoach company owner Darren Berg on 12 criminal charges related to a Ponzi scheme he's accused of operating for a group of investment funds he managed.

Berg faces nine counts of wire fraud, two counts of money laundering and one count of bankruptcy fraud, according to the indictment issued late last month by the grand jury.

He is being held in the Federal Detention Center in SeaTac, south of Seattle. Law enforcement officials consider him a flight risk. (See Nov. 1, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Wessinger said Berg also aggressively pursued veteran drivers and skilled office employees of other carriers and wouldn't give up until he had them working for him.

"If he wanted you, he got you," he stressed.

He said he has been particularly upset and puzzled by how much the industry catered to him, giving him prestigious awards and featuring his company at trade shows and conventions. Even maintenance shops gave him special treatment, moving MTR buses ahead of the buses of other companies so they could get back on the road quickly, he said.

"There were so many people who bent over backwards for him, it got ridiculous," he added.

David Beagle, an industry consultant and former executive with Gray Line of Seattle, said Berg's collapse was bound to happen and it was not a surprise to those who had been following his operation closely.

"We knew what he was doing and that it wasn't sustainable in the

Berg, 48, is under investigation by the FBI, the Washington State Department of Financial Institutions and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation unit.

Federal prosecutors say in the indictment Berg ran a scheme to defraud investors going back to 2003, misappropriating tens of millions of dollars in investor funds he used to pay off early investors to keep his Ponzi scheme going.

In setting up his Meridian funds, Berg raised about \$280 million from about 500 investors, who stand to lose more than \$100 million, according to court records.

traditional business sense," he said. "He put a black mark on our industry."

Beagle said it still is possible to save some of the operation and potential buyers, including one that has hired him, are looking into buying parts or all of the business.

One possible deal to buy a substantial chunk of Berg's former bus operation has been reached. A Seattle investment group, called GTO, said it has signed a letter of intent to acquire the assets of MTR Western's Washington, California and British Columbia operation.

GTO, which also agreed to loan money to MTR to help it operate until the sale becomes final, is headed by H.S. Wright III, whose group has substantial investments in hotels and lodges.

"This is a natural for our corporate hospitality operations in California, Oregon, and Washington, where we own or operate hotels, the Space Needle, convention and event planning services, and other tourism and corporate hospitality interests," Wright said.

Berg also is accused of using investor money to buy cars, yachts, private jets, and purchase and remodel a waterfront Mercer Island mansion.

Additionally, he's accused of siphoning off millions from his funds to finance his bus companies, operated under the MTR Western and other brand names. Those companies are being sold in a bankruptcy proceeding. (See related article on Page 1.)

Starting in January 2001, Berg created a series of investment funds purportedly for investors to invest in seller-financed real estate contracts, hard money loans and real estate and mortgage backed

securities.

The funds were designed to be open to only "accredited" investors — not the general public, a distinction that put them in a class of investments that receive little if any regulation by the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Washington State Department of Financial Institutions.

To keep the scheme going, Berg is accused of faking documents, including bank loans, appraisal reports and title reports.



Darren Berg

He said the purchase will preserve the jobs of 150 MTR employees.

"We're doing this to support the people of MTR and for the potential to own a profitable Northwest enterprise," he added.

Seattle bankruptcy attorney Diane Carey, the court-appointed trustee who is overseeing MTR Western and the other Berg bus operations, told a Seattle newspaper she had fielded several inquiries from companies seeking to buy Berg's bus assets, mostly other bus companies looking to buy part of his fleet or the entire bus companies.

She said Wright's group saw a strategic fit with its tour, event planning and hotel interests. She also noted that MTR Western was placed in bankruptcy as a means to facilitate the sale of the company to GTO.

Another Berg bus company, based in Eugene, Ore., is still for sale.

Carey told the Seattle Times it has been hard to know MTR's fi-

nancial status precisely because "Darren Berg used the different companies that he was in charge of like his own personal checkbook; he borrowed money back and forth.

"We believe that ultimately it can be profitable but the way it was operated in the past didn't lend itself to that," Carey said.

For instance, she said Berg didn't allow the vehicles to operate in rough conditions, which limited the company's revenues. "It was the Berg philosophy not to have them run on snow and gravel. It's not a really businesslike model to pamper your motorcoaches," she said.

"The new owner is going to have to run it like a business."

Meanwhile, as the sale of MTR Western moves forward, the operation remains under the eye of Carey. "The buses are still rolling," she says of the business.

How long, though, is a different question. The MTR buses certainly won't roll as they did in the past when Berg was allegedly funneling millions to keep them on the road but out of the dirt.

NCAA policy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

aspect of ground travel and realize some cost savings, all while providing excellent service," he added.

Under the program, charter companies selected to transport teams must hold a certification from Consolidated Safety Services, a private company that conducts extensive bus compliance and safety inspections and certifies carriers for the U.S. Department of Defense military transportation program.

The certification for the NCAA program, however, will include higher standards than those now used to certify carriers for the DoD program, which currently includes more than 400 approved operators

from throughout the country. What those new standards actually are has not been released.

Some operators that have been transporting college teams for years have complained privately about the new program, saying they could lose the business because of the certification requirement or because someone involved in the selection process favors another carrier over them.

However, the NCAA has indicated it is interested in working with carriers currently transporting sports teams, including those that have contracts that include travel for post-season play.

"The ground transportation program is not intended to change any contracts an institution may al-

ready have in place with a ground service provider," Schuh said. "Where contracts may already exist, we are working with the institution to either bring the provider into the program if they qualify, or provide other relief as appropriate."

Still, numerous carriers reportedly have been eliminated from the program, according to information obtained from the NCAA. The organization asked a large number of colleges to provide the names of carriers they would recommend handle their charters and while several hundred were named, the majority were eliminated due to the safety threshold.

The program is being managed by GO Ground Options, which is affiliated with Gray Line and City

Sites of New York and GO Airport Express and Continental Air Transport of Chicago. It is headed by Bill Maulsby, the founder and former head of Bus Bank, a bus broker that matches potential customers with motorcoach operators.

Maulsby, who handled transportation for a number of colleges while at Bus Bank, declined to talk about the program, including details on how the carriers will be selected. He called the information "private matters" that only the NCAA could discuss publicly.

Schuh said the NCAA and GO Ground have developed a list of qualifications centered on safety, service and savings that bus operators must meet to be selected for program.

GO Ground is responsible for hiring the bus operators and having them available for college teams with sports records that indicate they might qualify for playoff or championship games, according to the NCAA release.

It said Go Ground already is engaging carriers for the Division I, II and III football and Division I women's volleyball championships, and plans to assign a motorcoach operator to each college involved.

It will handle all booking and coordinating arrangements for the school and the carriers will be paid directly by the NCAA rather than each individual college, which had been paying in the past and then getting reimbursed by the NCAA.

People

TORONTO — Ten members have been elected to the board of Motor Coach Canada. Elected were:

- **Sheldon Eggen** of **Charter Bus Lines of BC** and **John Wilson** of **Wilson's Transportation**, representing British Columbia and the Yukon.

- **Michael Colborne** of **Pacific Western Transportation** and **Dale Janzen** of **Fehr Way Tours**, representing Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

- **Jim Diebel** of **Hanover Holiday Tours** and **Marc Laplante** of **417 Bus Lines**, representing Ontario.

- **Real Boissonnault** of **Autocar Excellence** and **David Okovita** of **Gray Line**, representing Quebec.

- **Brian Gillis** of **Ambassatours**, representing Atlantic Canada.

- **Matthew Giardetti** of **Sound Insurance** as the products and services representative.

Four directors retired from the

board: **Mark Hannah** of **PWT** and **Roger Gervais** of **RCG Tours**, who were instrumental in forming Motor Coach Canada 15 years ago, and have been active and supportive board members ever since.

Gervais was the first chair of Motor Coach Canada and held that position for five years.

Also leaving the board were **Terry Fischer**, first of **TRAXX** and later of **Sightline Tours**, who has been an active member since 2004, and **Adam Doiran** of **PEI Tours**, a member since 2008.

MONROVIA, Md. — **John Adams** has joined **Colonial Equipment Co.**, a regional bus dealer, as regional sales manager.

Adams has more than 13 years experience focusing on the requirements of the church bus market. His territory encompasses the extended Mid-Atlantic region, including West Virginia.

Colonial Equipment, which has been in business for nearly 30 years, represents Alexander-Dennis, ARBOC Mobility, Azure Dy-

namics, BraunAbility, CAIO-North America, Federal Coach, Foton America, National Van, Starcraft and StartTrans.

For more information, go to www.thebusplace.com. Colonial also has new website specifically devoted to the church bus market, www.thechurchbusplace.com.

RICHFIELD, Ohio — **National Interstate Corp.** announced that **James C. Kennedy** retired from its board and was replaced by **Vito Peraino**.

In addition to being a director of National Interstate, Kennedy was vice president, deputy general counsel and secretary of **American Financial Group Inc.** of Cincinnati, Ohio.

American Financial is the parent company of **Great American Insurance Co.**, which is the majority stockholder of National Interstate, and Kennedy represented American Financial on the National Interstate board. Kennedy also has retired from American Financial.

Peraino, who is a senior vice president of Great American Insurance Co., also replaces Kennedy on the National Interstate board nominating/corporate governance committee.

Gary J. Gruber, a member of the committee since it was formed in 2005, has been appointed committee chairman.

OMCA picks new leaders

NIAGARA FALLS, Ontario — Directors of the Ontario Motor Coach Association have elected officers and executive committee members for 2011.

The new officers, who also are executive committee members, are: Chair, John Crowley of Coach Canada; vice chair, Ghislain Leduc of Leduc Bus, and secretary-treasurer, Ray DeNure of DeNure Tours.

Other newly elected executive committee members are Susan LeClair of Shoreline Tours and Ray Cherrey of Pacific Western Transportation. Also on the executive committee are Immediate Past Chair Jamie Murray of Parkinson Coach Lines, and Brian Crow, OMCA president.

At OMCA's 2010 Conference and Marketplace here, the following individuals were elected to two-year terms on the OMCA board:

- Coach operators: Ron Mallette of Tisdale Bus, plus Crowley, Leduc and DeNure

- Directors at large: Greg Hammond of Hammond Transportation; Dave Willis of Ayr Coach, and Cherrey

- Supplier: Connie Markle of

Tourism Kingston

- Tour operator: Diane Diebel of Hanover Holiday Tours; Ted Goldenberg of Get Away Tours and Sue LeClair

- 2011 conference chair: Jennifer Petrous of Metro Detroit Convention and Visitors Bureau

The board members join eight other directors elected last year to two-year terms.

A number of individuals were recognized at the OMCA conference for their contributions to the industry and OMCA. Honors went to:

- Bob Heath of Foley Bus Lines in Modoc, Ontario, for Driver Excellence. Heath was recognized for his ongoing customer relations and heroic efforts during a bus fire.

- Allan Badder of Badder Bus Lines in Thamesville, Ontario, for Lifetime Achievement. Badder has more than 60 years in business.

- Guy Tessier of MCI as Products & Services Member of Distinction. Honored for his efforts in supporting coach operators and OMCA.

- David Steele of Tartan Tours, elected to the OMCA Hall of Fame.

Calendar

DECEMBER 2010

1-2 UMA Safety Management Seminar, NTSB Training Center, Ashburn, Va. Info: Call (800) 424-8262 or www.uma.org.

7 Illinois Motorcoach Association/ Midwest Motorcoach Association

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Stuffing the Bus: Members of the Maryland Motorcoach Association are conducting their annual food drive early this month to benefit the Maryland Food Bank. Last year, the drive collected more than 4,600 pounds of food; 10 bags, 5 boxes and a 55-gallon drum of toys; 45 winter coats, and more than \$560 in cash. There will be a Stuff-a-Bus Program on Dec. 10 at the Rose Inn in Linthicum, Md. For more information, call Mary Presley at (571) 312-7117 or go to www.marylandmotorcoach.org.

Diesel hits two-year high

WASHINGTON — Diesel fuel prices rose to their highest level in more than two years late last month, reaching more \$3.18 a gallon, while gasoline climbed to \$2.89 a gallon, the U.S. Department of Energy reported.

The U.S. average price of diesel is now at its highest level since it averaged \$3.29 on Oct. 27, 2008, when it was coming off its historic

highs.

The price for the motorcoach industry's main fuel also is roughly 40 cents a gallon higher than a year ago.

Gasoline's average is nearly on par with the year's high of \$2.90 a gallon set in early May, which had been the highest since October 2008.

Crude oil prices in late November also hit a two-year high in some markets of more than \$87 a barrel.

Olympics dipute

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ment of the coaches to Trailways, had maintained throughout the dispute that it was unable to pay Trailways because it had not been paid by VANOC.

VANOC, though, insisted all along that it had paid Gameday all of the approved transportation bills, and it was Gameday that was holding up payment to Trailways and the operators.

Wall said the agreement means the operators, some of which had to borrow money to remain in operation while the dispute continued, will be paid as soon as possible.

"We are finalizing a settlement agreement that will include when

the operators will be paid," he said. "I don't anticipate it will be a long process."

Wall said earlier that Gameday owed Trailways about \$6 million, including \$4 million for the operators and \$2 million for other vendors, administrative costs and other expenses.

The dispute angered many operators, some of who blamed Gameday and others who blamed VANOC. There was talk of operators taking legal action against all three participants, Gameday, VANOC and Trailways, but no lawsuits apparently were ever filed.

Gameday President Tony Vitano did not return several telephone messages and VANOC officials could not be reached.

Oregon shuttle

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

stadium within 20 minutes — the same time it usually takes Lane Transit on Saturdays when there is far less traffic — and they all were returned to their cars within one hour and two minutes, nearly 30 minutes better than the transit run times.

"We got a little creative," said Gillis.

Rather than loading one or two buses at a time after the game, as the transit agency usually does, she lined the buses two deep from the

curb at most pickup locations and was able to load between five and 10 buses at a time.

And how did the university like the service.

"It worked out very well and it went very smoothly," observed Vicki Strand, who is in charge of transportation for the university.

Lane Transit was high on the results, too, according to Snyder.

"They learned from the first time they did it and I think it went really well," said Snyder. "I hardly heard any complaints and I even heard some people say the service was pretty good."

Get Motorcoachified at Expo auction

TAMPA, Fla. — A new event at UMA Motorcoach Expo 2011 will be the first Get Motorcoachified Silent Auction.

The initial auction will take place on the Expo exhibit floor during the vendor-and-supplier tradeshow, Jan. 20-22.

The Motorcoach Council, which created and promotes the Get Motorcoachified campaign, reports that donations for the auction have started to accumulate. They include: electronics, travel packages, art and collectables, plus tickets to sporting events.

But, says the council's Pamela

Wolff, more help is needed to make the event a success.

"Please donate an item, package or certificate today. If you have already donated, (pass the word along) to a friend who might want to put their product, service or attraction in front of a well-qualified audience of motorcoach operators," said Wolff.

"Help the Motorcoach Council help the industry by supporting this fundraiser, which will in turn support our nationwide campaign to drive public awareness of the many benefits of coach travel and cultivate the next generation of

riders," she added.

All donations will be listed in an online preview, as well as a show catalog delivered to UMA Expo attendees in their welcome bag. Sponsorships and 'featured partner' positions also are available.

Go to www.BiddingforGood.com/GetMotorcoachified to make an online donation or contact Wolff by email at Pamela@Motorcoach-Council.org, or call (412) 770-7164, for more information.

Companies that have made recent donations include KVH, Sawmill Creek Resort, Grand Canyon Railway and Lancer Insurance.

ACC changes name to Awash Systems

MISSISSAUGA, Ontario — ACC International Inc., the leading North America producer of large-vehicle, single-brush wash systems, has adopted a new name, Awash Systems Corp.

The name was changed to better reflect the company's comprehensive line of wash bay products, as well as its leading position in the motorcoach and school bus markets, said Awash Systems President Jack Jackson.

"Today's unveiling of Awash marks a significant milestone for our company. The ACC name, which originally stood for Automotive Cleaning equipment Company, no longer adequately represented our business, our products

and solutions, our expertise, and our position as North America's recognized leader in fleet washing and wastewater treatment solutions," said Jackson.

"The Awash name embodies our ability and our commitment to continue helping our customers and the many organizations in North America maintain their large vehicle fleets, improve operational resource consumption, and drive their business forward through our revolutionary systems and expertise."

The company's product line includes single-brush wash systems, wastewater treatment and reclamation systems, shampoo systems, and parts and service.

Awash Systems' products pro-

vide cleaning solutions for all types of businesses, assuring safety and business continuity by reducing operational costs, and improving efficiencies in fleet maintenance, according to Jackson.

The name change comes just over a year after Jackson purchased ACC International from Martin van Tol, who founded the company 20 years ago.

"Growth necessitates change," said Jackson.

The company also has launched a new website, www.awashsystems.com.

Awash Systems' latest product offerings will be on display next month at UMA Motorcoach Expo in Tampa, Fla., Jan. 19-23.

Seon offers updated surveillance unit

COQUITLAM, British Columbia — Mobile surveillance solutions provider, Seon Design Inc., is bringing a new version of its powerful video data management software solution, vMax® Commander, to UMA Motorcoach Expo next month in Tampa, Fla.

Seon says vMax Commander is the only video and telematics management tool a fleet manager needs to administer operations of any size, adding that it works effectively regardless of the number of buses or properties involved, or their locations.

vMax Commander also helps users reduce the administrative requirements of managing the on-board video and telematics data from their fleet.

And, it increases operational efficiency by giving fleet managers the ability to acquire critical data quickly and easily.

"There is no need to search for a vehicle, and no more running back and forth to manually pull a hard drive," says Jordan Shishmanov, Senior Product Manager. "Wireless technology eliminates all of that. If there is an issue, you can access the

information you need right from your central office."

Another important vMax Commander feature is automated system-wide health monitoring, a preventative maintenance tool that alerts the system administrator if any part of the system isn't functioning.

Other features include centralized mobile surveillance data management, and live video viewing over a web-based or GPRS network.

See at Motorcoach Expo Jan. 19-23 or go to www.seon.com.

La France to introduce new fabrics at Expo

LA FRANCE, S.C. — La France Industries, a leading supplier of motorcoach industry upholstery fabrics, has announced it will unveil a new color theme and patterns, as well as an expanded line of "Eco Friendly" fabrics, at UMA Motorcoach Expo in January.

The Blue Grotto theme and newly styled patterns will be shown for the first time at UMA Expo, which will be Jan. 19-23 in Tampa, Fla.

"The pattern choices range from classic to chic," said La France's Joe Brinkmeyer.

In addition, La France will introduce an expanded line of Eco Friendly fabrics in both plush and flat woven construction. Two color patterns, purple mist/burgundy mist and slate blue mist will be on display.

La France Industries is based in La France, S.C., and all its fabrics are made in the U.S.



La France blue grotto arcade pattern



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'Greyhound Express' to take on megabus in Midwest

CHICAGO — Greyhound Lines has adopted a new approach to compete with curbside operator megabus.com in the Midwest.

Beginning this month, Greyhound is starting express service between its Chicago hub and Milwaukee, Madison, Wis., Minneapolis, Indianapolis and Lafayette, Ind. In some of the cities only curbside pick-ups will be available.

And, like megabus.com, fares on the new Greyhound service start at \$1, with demand pricing in effect, and tickets are available for purchase on a new website, www.mygreyhoundexpress.com.

Greyhound Express, as the service is called, features new coaches with reserved seating and on-board amenities, including free Wi-Fi access, extra legroom and power outlets.

"Greyhound recognized the demand for a higher level of service between popular Midwest cities at an unbeatable price," said Dave Leach, president and CEO of Greyhound.

"Just in time for the (Christmas/New Year's) holiday season, Greyhound Express customers will ex-

perience time-and-cost savings, a reserved comfortable seat and premium amenities, all while gaining convenient easy access to downtown centers and local attractions."

Greyhound Express customers must purchase tickets online to take advantage of the discount pricing. Tickets can be printed at home or at work, and customers can go straight to the gate knowing a guaranteed seat is waiting for them, Greyhound said.

A private waiting area near dedicated departure gates will be provided at terminal locations, and a "guest services specialist" will present an extra level of service for Greyhound Express customers, the company noted.

Greyhound Express will serve a mixture of terminal and curbside locations. For example, in Chicago, Greyhound Express will be inside the terminal at 630 W. Harrison St.; in Milwaukee, Greyhound Express buses can be caught in the Milwaukee Intermodal Station on West Washington Avenue, but in Indianapolis the service will use a curbside location at the IndyGo Stop, north of East Market Street, and in



Greyhound's new MCI D4505s seat 50 and feature Wi-Fi, power outlets, seatbelts, wheelchair lifts and leather seating.

Lafayette, a curbside stop will be made outside the Amtrak station.

Asked about the new competition, Dale Moser, president of Coach USA, corporate parent of megabus, lobbed a verbal hand grenade at Greyhound in an interview with an Indianapolis newspaper.

"Am I surprised? No. Am I surprised that it took this long? Yes," Moser said. "We've been servicing those cities for over four years, and they (Greyhound) finally realized what they needed to do."

Megabus was launched in April 2006. (See April 1, 2006, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

"What I see is a company in business for 75 years finally coming to realize that there is a different and a better way to provide the motorcoach experience," Moser

told the paper. "We're flattered they copied the megabus business model."

Moser reiterated his contention that megabus has "gotten people out of their automobiles and created a new image for bus travel and developed a new clientele."

Initially, Greyhound Express has scheduled four departures daily for the three-hour trip from Indianapolis to Chicago. megabus.com has six buses leaving Indianapolis for Chicago.

The Greyhound Express service is a slightly modified version of service Greyhound and Peter Pan Bus Lines co-launched in the northeastern U.S. two months ago.

The joint "Express Service" is available on roundtrip routes between New York City and Balti-

more, Boston, Philadelphia, Silver Spring, Md., and Washington, D.C. Customers can select from among 274 schedules a week.

"By partnering with Peter Pan Bus Lines, we can streamline service on our most popular routes to provide only one stop or less and provide passengers with more efficient, cost-effective travel options," said Leach.

Tickets for Express Service can be booked on either the Greyhound or Peter Pan company websites. A new, separate website, www.UncommonTransport.com, serves as an information source about Express Service, including special fares and schedules.

Greyhound and Peter Pan also operate BoltBus, a curbside operation, in the Northeast.

megabus to make D.C. its fifth hub

WASHINGTON — megabus.com has designated Washington, D.C., as its fifth hub, and is launching 10 new routes leaving from its parking lot base at H and 10th streets Northwest starting later this month.

Travelers will be able to ride megabus from Washington to such cities as Richmond, Va., Knoxville, Tenn., Raleigh, N.C., and Toronto.

To kick off the service, megabus is offering 10,000 free seats online for travel to and from the new cities from Dec 15. through Jan 15.

megabus has operated in the District of Columbia since 2008. It plans to add 32 buses to its fleet operating out of the district.

megabus' other hubs are in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia

and Toronto.

In the Washington area, megabus and competitor BoltBus, vie with eight other operators to provide service to major cities in the region.

According to the Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development at DePaul University, intercity bus service has expanded 5.1 percent in the past year.

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For more information and discounted UMA member rates, contact Michael Brown at Amerisearch at mikeb@amerisearchbga.com or 800.569.6133.

