

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Motorcoach electronics: Entertainment and much more

First the big screens and surround-sound of the movie theater experience moved into the home. Then the theater experience, generally without the large screens, migrated to private vehicles.

Now theater-quality entertainment is becoming standard equipment on motorcoaches — with the big screens, too.

“Most coaches are getting pretty sophisticated,” said Joe

Camacho, national account manager for commercial vehicles at ASA Electronics in Elkhart, Ind. “Whatever you normally do for entertainment while you are sitting at home you can do on a motorcoach.”

Curtiss Routh, vice president of sales at Radio Engineering Industries (REI) of Omaha, Neb., said today’s passengers wouldn’t have it any other way.

“When our sales people are talking to coach operators they make statements — a bit tongue-in-cheek — that the air conditioning and audio/video equipment are almost more important than having wheels on the bus,” Routh said.

But modern motorcoach electronics involves far more than entertainment.

Little noticed by passengers

but more important are safety features that may include stability control, lane departure warning, anti-lock brakes, tire pressure monitors, fire suppression, electronic driver logs and surveillance cameras.

“The other side of electronics now is what coaches need to promote security and provide a safe environment for passengers,” Routh said. “We are seeing a ris-

ing interest from the motorcoach community in having a robust video surveillance system that will not only protect the driver but also prevent theft. It can deter theft, it can deter violence between passengers and it decreases the operator’s liability and exposure.”

Motorcoaches used for longer trips may be loaded with entertainment treats to help passengers deal

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Uber-style bus service could help commuters

KANSAS CITY — This Missouri city is planning a pilot project for an Uber-style, pop-up bus route system that could end up spreading to other urban areas seeking to fill gaps in their transit systems.

It is called “microtransit,” and it is starting to surface in one form or another in a few urban areas in the country where commuters need a way of getting from transit stops to their ultimate destinations.

In many areas, that need currently is being filled by ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft.

The public-private pilot project being launched by the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority in-

volves introducing a new kind of bus system that would compete with Uber and Lyft, as well as taxis.

“At the end of the day, it’s about options for people who want to get somewhere,” said transit board chairman Robbie Makinen.

The transit authority is negotiating with a Boston-based company called Bridj that arranges bus service on an as-needed basis in its hometown and in Washington, D.C.

Under such systems, routes are developed through transit data, social media activity and requests for service through a smartphone app. Riders in a specified service area are guaranteed a direct ride, with

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 ►



Jim Lehrer, retired anchor of the PBS NewsHour and a longtime bus enthusiast, donated his 1946 Fxible Clipper to the Museum of Bus Transportation. See story on Page 10.

More states looking to boost transportation funding

Congress has finally gotten serious about dealing with the nation’s crumbling infrastructure and highway system, but that hasn’t stopped several states from developing their own plans for funding road and infrastructure projects.

Texas, Arkansas, Michigan and Nebraska are the latest states to allocate money — or at least to seriously pursue new funding — for transportation projects.

Texas voters, who last year approved shifting a portion of oil and gas tax revenue to the state’s highway fund, returned to the polls last month and overwhelmingly passed Proposition 7, a constitutional amendment that dedicates billions more to highway funding.

The proposition, passed with 84 percent yes votes, dedicates certain sales and use tax revenue and motor vehicle sales, use and

rental tax revenue to the state highway fund to provide money for non-tolled roads and the reduction of certain transportation-related debt.

When sales tax revenue exceeds \$28 billion per fiscal year, the next \$2.5 billion will go to road construction and maintenance starting in September 2017.

Then, beginning in September 2019, if tax revenue from vehicle

sales and rentals exceeds \$5 billion per fiscal year, 35 percent of the amount exceeding \$5 billion will go to road funding.

The amendment allows the state Legislature to bolster transportation infrastructure strained by Texas’ booming population without raising taxes.

“Prop 7 will provide an efficient way to dedicate a portion of our sales tax revenue to build the

roads that our children and grandchildren will use,” said Rep. Joe Pickett, an El Paso Democrat who chairs the House Transportation Committee. “All we are doing is taking the success of the Texas economy and dedicating a portion of it to transportation.”

In Michigan, the House of Representatives wants to fix the state’s roads with \$600 million in higher

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Allied Specialty Vehicles 'REVs' up brand with new name

ORLANDO, Fla. — Allied Specialty Vehicles, a major manufacturer of buses and other vehicles under several brand names, has changed its corporate name to the REV Group Inc.

The company said the change more directly aligns it with its continuing commitment to building and delivering many of the world's most popular specialty vehicle brands.

The REV Group serves a diverse group of market segments, manufacturing 23 brands of buses,

mobility vehicles, ambulances, fire trucks, recreation vehicles, terminal trucks and sweepers.

REV Group President and CEO Tim Sullivan said the first priority in the selection of a new name was to ensure it communicated to the marketplace the company's forward-thinking, international leadership in the industries it serves. It also wanted a name representing passion and momentum.

"Like a revving engine letting bystanders know a car is preparing for a quick acceleration, REV com-

municates to the world that we are set for growth," Sullivan said in a news release. "REV shows speed and engagement in action. REV lets the world know we don't simply manufacture specialty vehicles — we REVolutionize them."

The company declined to comment on specific growth plans.

In connection with the new name and logo, the company has also introduced a new "Vehicles for Life" tagline. With more than 5,000 employees building more than 18,900 specialty vehicles an-

nually, the company helps "connect and protect" lives around the world every day, Sullivan said.

"Whether saving lives by transporting the sick and injured to hospitals, enriching the lives of families as they travel on vacations, or making lives more mobile for those with disabilities, our vehicles are an integral part of everyday life," he said. "We believe the REV banner will serve as a strong corporate identity for the role we play both nationally and internationally."

Sullivan stressed that the com-

pany's new name isn't an acronym.

"It really is a statement," he said in a video posted on REV's website. It's about speed. It's about passion. It's about moving forward at a fast clip. It's about growth. It's the things that we believe in as a company. We really plan to be number one with each and every one of our vehicles as we move forward."



Tim Sullivan

National Interstate earnings down, gross premiums up

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Corporation, saying it continues to experience "slow improvement" in underwriting results, reported a decline in net third-quarter 2015 earnings but a sizeable increase in gross premiums written.

National Interstate, a leading motorcoach industry insurer, reported third-quarter net income of \$5.1 million, or 26 cents a share, compared with \$8.8 million, or 44 cents a share, during the same period in 2014.

The company attributed the

decline for the three-month period that ended Sept. 30 mainly to after-tax realized losses from investments. The net realized losses from investments for the quarter were largely attributable to impairment charges for securities related to the energy sector, "where management is uncertain of the timing and the extent of ultimate recovery," the company said.

On the positive side, National Interstate said its earnings for the first nine months of 2015 were three times higher than during the same period in 2014 — \$18.9 mil-

lion, or 95 cents a share, this year compared with \$6.1 million, or 31 cents, last year.

The company said net income for the first nine months of 2014 was adversely affected by increased loss and loss-adjustment expenses, including strengthening of prior year claims reserves. It lost \$10.7 million in the second quarter of 2014.

The company also reported \$183.2 million in gross premiums written during the third quarter of this year, a 27 percent increase over the 2014 third quarter. Year-

to-date gross premiums written totaled \$523.5 million, up 7 percent from last year.

The 27 percent increase in gross premiums was attributed mainly to the addition of a large alternative risk transfer (captive insurance) customer.

"We continue to experience slow improvement in our underwriting results while maneuvering through the challenging claims environment for commercial auto liability coverages that the entire industry is experiencing," said National Interstate President and

CEO Dave Michelson.

"We are encouraged that we experienced no prior year loss development for the second consecutive quarter and pleased to report an improved combined ratio of 98.6 percent."

Michelson said rate increases on renewed business averaged approximately 5 percent during the third quarter, with alternative risk transfer rates up 6 percent.

Rate increases for the company's transportation component averaged about 5 percent in the third quarter.

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THE DOCKET

New leasing rule could hurt legal operators, UMA says

WASHINGTON — Members of the United Motorcoach Association gave federal regulators an earful recently about how a new lease and interchange rule designed to shut down illegal carriers would actually hurt legal operators who depend on providing contract service.

The members participated in a round-table discussion with Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration officials to discuss their opposition to the *Lease and Interchange of Vehicles; Motor Carriers of Passengers* final rule.

The rule took effect July 27 but will not be enforced until Jan. 1, 2017.

UMA petitioned FMCSA last summer to reconsider the final rule, which covers the leasing, subcontracting and interchange of passenger-carrying commercial motor vehicles.

That led to the meeting with FMCSA officials, which was attended by UMA members Charles Coleman of See & See Friendly Tours, Tom Giddens of Pacific Coachways Trailways, Elizabeth Kamalakis of Coachlight Tours, and Charles “Buddy” Young of Capitol Tours.

UMA Vice President of Indus-

try Relations and COO Ken Presley, who also attended the meeting, said members “shared enough varied perspectives to give FMCSA pause to reconsider.”

“Regulators heard how typical passenger carriers engage each other to serve the needs of their community,” Presley said. “Mandating a lease between two carriers appropriately licensed with FMCSA to simply meet the needs of the chartering public is not only unnecessary, it is counterproductive to FMCSA’s safety objectives.”

The new rule is designed to close a small number of passenger carriers that may have gone out of service yet continue to operate using another passenger carrier’s authority.

‘Chameleon carriers’

FMCSA said the rule was created “to prevent passenger carriers from evading FMCSA oversight and enforcement. It is intended to prevent carriers from entering into questionable lease arrangements to operate under the FMCSA authority of another carrier, without the other carrier exercising actual control over the operations.”

The agency said the rule is designed to shut down so-called

“chameleon carriers” that can evade the FMCSA and other enforcement agencies. It would do so by requiring bus operators, when they enter into a subcontracting or lease agreement, to identify which operator is responsible for compliance with FMCSA regulations and for insurance.

UMA, however, argues that what the rule actually will do is punish operators by making them responsible for potential illegal actions by other operators while doing nothing to punish the actual violators.

“The reality is the rule will require operators who contract with or subcontract for additional buses and/or drivers to execute a formal lease, place their name and USDOT number on the side of the leased coach, and assume all compliance responsibilities, including insurance,” Presley said.

He added the rule would drastically change the way coach operators work with one another and could force some to leave the business.

“It would be particularly harmful to small carriers that often count on the money they earn from subcontracting,” Presley said.

Presley explained that under a

typical subcontractor agreement, a charter bus company with operating authority (company A) will contact another bus company with its own operating authority (company B) and arrange for a bus and driver for supplemental or emergency service.

Not leases

Such arrangements can be as informal as a verbal promise or execution of a charter contract, he said. The company supplying the supplemental service is presumed to assume all responsibility for compliance with Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations and for furnishing the service under its own operating authority.

The new FMCSA rule treats such subcontracting arrangements the same as leases, despite their differences.

“Under the new rule, FMCSA is saying company A is essentially assuming possession of the vehicle and driver and is responsible for the compliance of company B during the term of the lease,” Presley said.

“These arrangements are generally short-term — a few hours to a few days — and there is little, if any, time to confirm compliance

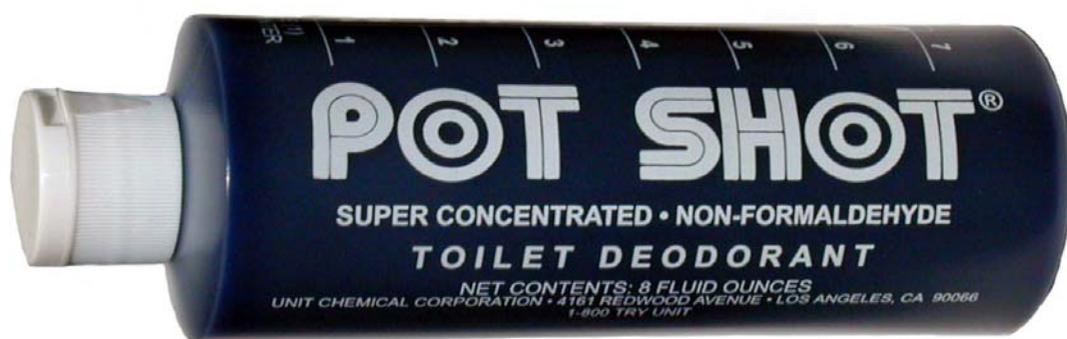
of the vehicle and driver,” he said. “FMCSA is forcing company A to assume the unknown compliance responsibility of company B. If company B’s vehicle or driver has deficiencies that are discovered during an inspection, company A will receive the penalties and negative scores.

“Considering that company B is the actual violator, how does making company A responsible help identify the actual violator and how does this serve the public? UMA fails to appreciate how burdensome formal leases will benefit the public or improve safety. How this makes travel by motorcoach safer remains a mystery.”

UMA President and CEO Vic Parra praised the members who took time away from their businesses to attend the FMCSA meeting.

“Knowing they have families and businesses to operate back home, we are especially appreciative of the UMA members who volunteered to participate in the round-table discussion,” Parra said. “These members continue to build on UMA’s grassroots efforts by coming to Washington, D.C.”

To read the final rule, go to: <https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/regulations/rulemaking/2015-16111>.



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Vehicle miles driven increase across U.S.

WASHINGTON — The Federal Highway Administration said its latest “Traffic Volume Trends” report showed vehicle traffic on U.S. roadways reached 277.3 billion miles in August, a 2.3 percent gain from a year earlier and the most for any August on record.

That continues a trend of vehicles miles traveled growing on a year-over-year basis for 18 consecutive months and puts 2015 vehicle miles traveled on a pace to be the highest ever. The estimates include passenger vehicle, bus and truck travel.

The agency said traffic volume increased in all regions of the U.S.

Until recently, some analysts had predicted that long-term traffic volume trends were on the decline due to population attitudes shifting in favor of other forms of transportation.

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Motorcoaches just a small part of Brake Safety Week

GREENBELT, Md. — Motorcoaches and buses, which amounted to a fraction of the more than 18,000 vehicles inspected during this year's Brake Safety Week, fared pretty well during the annual Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance exercise.

Only 58 motorcoaches were

inspected, and only four of those were placed out of service for safety violations, said Will Schaefer, director of vehicle programs for CVSA.

"There are a few reasons for this small number of buses/motorcoach (inspections)," Schaefer said. "The vast majority of com-

mercial vehicles on the road are trucks, so this is part of the reason.

"Also, of our approximately 15,000 CVSA certified inspectors across North America, only a portion of those are motorcoach certified," he said. "Some parts of the country simply do not have enough bus traffic for officers/inspectors in

those areas to maintain the minimum required number of inspections per year to keep their passenger vehicle inspector certification."

Overall, CVSA-certified commercial motor vehicle safety inspectors conducted 18,817 brake-system inspections on large trucks and buses throughout North Amer-

ica during the Sept. 6-12 Brake Safety Week. Inspectors placed 2,321 of those commercial vehicles out of service for brake violations. Of the vehicles inspected, the OOS rate for all brake-related violations conducted in North America was 12.3 percent, compared with 16.2 percent from last year's Brake Safety Week.

The OOS rate for brake adjustment was lower at 7.7 percent, compared with 10.4 percent in 2014. The OOS rate for brake components was 6.9 percent, down from 9.3 percent in 2014.

During the weeklong brake safety campaign, local, state, provincial, territorial and federal motor carrier safety officials throughout the United States and Canada conducted roadside inspections to identify out-of-adjustment brakes and brake-system violations.

"Brake-related violations comprise the largest percentage of all out-of-service violations cited during roadside inspections," said CVSA President Maj. Jay Thompson of the Arkansas Highway Police. "Improperly installed or poorly maintained brake systems can reduce braking capacity and increase stopping distance of large trucks and buses, which poses serious risks to driver and public safety."

"For everyone's safety, it's vital that every vehicle operating on our highways and roads is mechanically sound and properly maintained," said Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Acting Administrator Scott Darling.

USDOT unit to help infrastructure projects

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation has unveiled a centralized unit to work with states, cities and investors looking for help with navigating the federal transportation bureaucracy.

The Build America Transportation Investment Center, or BATIC, also will help stakeholders apply for credit programs and will identify ways they could tap into private capital in public-private partnerships.

BATIC's executive director is Andrew Curtis Right, who most recently worked in the financial services industry advising parties on transportation infrastructure transactions.

"(Right) and his team will provide project partners and potential investors with the clarity and technical assistance they need to move more projects forward," Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said.



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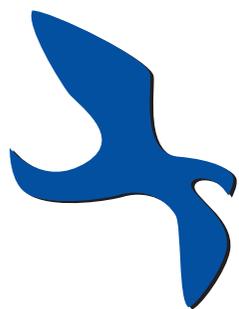
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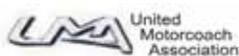
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Test your knowledge of the biggest travel myths

By Loren Christie

There are many myths about the travel industry. Here's a quick test on some of the biggest misconceptions.

1. True or False — Booking your flight and hotel as individual components is cheaper than booking a vacation package.

False — With the number of online travel agencies, wholesalers and consolidators out there, trying to figure out who offers the best value can be overwhelming. And remember it's important to consider the best value versus the best deal because you really do get what you pay for.

Your great deal may end up being the room that hasn't been renovated in 10 years that overlooks a brick wall. Or perhaps your amazingly cheap room might be at a hotel that ends up charging you exorbitant rates for your parking and breakfast or checked bags.

You need to evaluate all of the costs associated with the hotel or airline you are choosing. For the best value consider booking a package. Hotels sell their cheapest rooms to companies willing to bury the rate in the cost of a package, which could include breakfast, parking, attractions passes or other value-ads. For travelers booking both a flight and hotel, vacation packages typically offer the greatest savings.

2. True or False — Your hotel key card can be used to steal your identity.

False — A hotel key card never has your personal information, such as your name, photo or credit card number, attached to it.

Even after you've checked out of the hotel, nobody can use it to pull any personal data. If you lose

your hotel key card during your stay, you're simply locked out of your room. Immediately notify the front desk so the hotel can provide you with a new one. The card you misplaced is de-activated and becomes useless.

3. True or False — Booking at the last minute gets you the best deals.

Little of both — More often than not, travelers will pay a premium if they choose to book an airline ticket at the last minute. The age-old advice to book your airfare at least 21 days in advance still holds true, especially with deep airline capacity cuts over the past years.

For hotels, price increases for last minute travel is not as common, but travelers shouldn't expect to save a ton of money by booking a hotel at the last minute. There are some deals to be had by booking a last minute pre-pack-

aged vacation, but remember, for special occasion trips you risk not getting the trip you really want.

4. True or False — Not all five-star hotels are the same quality.

True — Unlike North American hotels, where stars indicate a level of quality based on the evaluations of a third party, in some places, like the Middle East, the number of stars is often self-proclaimed by marketing folks.

What makes a hotel a seven-star hotel? The star rating systems of Caribbean resorts serve to differentiate the services and amenities offered. Additionally, different tour operators use varied criteria for awarding the stars.

For example, the difference between a four-star and five-star hotel may be that one has a tennis court while the other does not. So if you are a beach bum who has never picked up a racket, why not

save some money and stay at the lower-rated property?

5. True or False — The best way to get through customs quickly is to have a Nexus card.

True — This bi-national pre-approved customs and immigration pass will help speed you through customs lines going into the U.S. and coming home to Canada. Apply online and once you are initially approved you then go for a personal interview.

Set up your application interview appointment at a land border, not the airport. The waiting list at the airport can take a long time whereas land borders can often process you within days.

6. True or False — Tuesdays are the best days to buy airfare.

False — Historically, many airlines released fare sales on Tuesdays, which has led to this best day to buy myth, but the Internet age has jolted this pattern.

Savvy travelers know that when you fly is far more important than when you buy. Try flexible dates shopping to determine when you can get the very best deal and go midday and other off-peak business travel hours.

7. True or False — Repositioning cruises are the best cruise deal out there.

True — When ships relocate from one part of the world to sail in another it is called a repositioning cruise. The deals can be as much as 70 percent off the cost of a regular cruise.

However, be prepared for more days at sea, potentially costly one-way flights and travel to destinations in the shoulder seasons.

8. True or False — Traveling with a group means you don't get an authentic experience.

False — Certain travelers believe that in order for travel to be "authentic" it must be uncomfortable. It doesn't matter if you arrive in an air-conditioned coach or an overnight chicken bus, you'll still be an outsider in a foreign country no matter how you got there.

The fastest route to an authentic travel experience is to hang out with someone who knows the place. A friend (with a spare bedroom) works well. Failing that, you can't go past a good local guide and that's where group tours excel. They provide local experts that give you a deeper understanding of the culture and destination. Better than any guidebook can provide.

Loren Christie is a fervent traveler who has visited more than 55 countries around the world, appeared on numerous TV and radio programs and as Canada AM's travel expert, shared the joys and pitfalls of travel viewers across Canada.

To the Editor

I attend a lot of bus association meetings, I hear a lot of speakers and I witness a lot of awards being given to operators for various reasons.

Recently I was at the regional meeting of the motorcoach associations of South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia, which was attended by more than 50 operators from those states, as well as some operators from other states.

One Virginia operator was given an award by his state association and when he accepted the award he made a pretty good speech that got the attention of every operator in the room.

He spoke about how important it is to work together when a fellow operator has the dreaded

breakdown. He goes the extra mile for his fellow operators when they are in need. If he is not near to where they are he will recommend someone who might be able to help.

Not a single operator ever wants to hear the dreaded word "no" on the phone when they have a coach down and there are people on board or waiting for the coach. This particular operator goes the extra mile and was recognized by his fellow operators for doing so.

In my travels across the country I hear about operators who will only go out for their own coaches or who just don't want to be bothered with helping someone from four states away.

Let's school our dispatchers

and shop staff on how to react to a call like that. Every operator will go through this and if everyone gets on the same page it could make the bus biz just a little easier.

I have met operators from other states who attend as many meetings as they can and they do this to meet and network and hopefully help each other out somewhere down the road.

Most importantly, if you receive help from another company, no matter what, pay that invoice right away because in the middle of the night the word "no" can really come back and bite you hard.

*Jeff Goldwasser
Sales Executive
La France Industries*

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De facto regulation hurting minority coach operators

By Dave Millhouser

In the mid 1970s, part of my territory was a region that remained seriously racist. During a sales trip I stumbled on a story that renewed my faith in karma.

There were two bus companies in the area, both quite good. The one owned by a black gentleman had applied for additional operating rights at a time when the industry was still regulated.

His white competitor was doing fine, but damned if he was going to let a "black" company have any ICC authority he didn't have. He, too, applied for similar operating rights.

An administrative law judge combined the applications into a single hearing. The minority owned company made its case that the new service was needed, and offered ample proof that it was capable.

When its turn came, the white company presented an impressive list of services it already was providing, implying that it was handling the market's needs. Halfway through the testimony, the judge interrupted, asking if the company fully understood what it was saying.

It didn't. A substantial part of

the "service" the company had been providing was not allowed by its existing operating authority and was, in fact, illegal. The company had testified against itself.

Regulators ended up revoking its interstate authority, and it went out of business.

The black operator, who had struggled to start, and sustain, his business over 50 years in a region and era that was not warm and fuzzy for minorities, grew and thrived.

Evolving social consciousness and a thoughtful judge created a happy ending.

In the early 1980s, when the industry was deregulated, there was a huge influx of new operators and new ideas. Many of the fledgling companies were minority owned, seizing the opportunity that was finally afforded them.

The "old boys" network was forced to adapt, and the industry grew.

Here's an irony for you, and I may be accused of being "anecdotal," but it appears that we're in danger of returning to the (not) so good old days as a result of regulatory excess.

It seems that small (often minority owned) companies have been

disproportionally affected by the current influx of new rules and enforcement.

Large companies have the economies of scale and resources to comply with mandates or to contest them. Small companies, not so much.

Who'd a thunk we'd elect a minority president, then watch government entities, under his watch, squash minority enterprise.

"Regulatory capture" is a process in which businesses being regulated gradually snuggle up to, and eventually influence, those who are supposed to be controlling them.

Don't get me wrong. When life gives you lemons, make lemonade, and that's what some major coach operators seem to be doing. They aren't happy with what's happening, but are smart enough to know it crushes competition.

"De facto" regulation replaces the old "de jure."

It seems heresy to say it, but isn't there a balancing point between safety and practicality? Of course there is, or the speed limit on highways would be 5 mph. Have we crossed a line that does more damage than good to the fabric of society?

Everyone believes they're on the side of the angels, but there's a context, a big picture, and someone in government has to be adult enough to recognize it. When he returned from WWII, my dad brought back a Nazi belt buckle stamped "Gott mit uns" (God with us). They thought the angels were on their side.

In another irony, we occasionally hear of civil rights lawsuits alleging that things like IQ tests and credit scoring have subtle, often accidental, biases built in. Minorities are disadvantaged by accident or inertia.

Look at the current regulatory tsunami in that context. No competent small business should be crippled, but are proportionally more minority owned companies being harmed?

There's no racial agenda, but the results may be the same as if there was. If we were making giant strides in safety, it might be worth it. But we're taking baby steps and forcing minority groups out of locally owned coaches into either Great Big Bus Lines or the deadly car.

It's not just minorities who are suffering. Opportunities for small entrepreneurs seem to be dwindling

in the coach business. Large companies handle safety with effective management, while small ones do it with personal relationships. Which is more effective?

One of the first national anti-smoking campaigns, as well as an aggressive war on cancer, were launched by the same folks who started World War II.

Hitler was a health nut and believed that Germany's future depended on a healthy population. By August of 1939 he had the German economy humming.

If those things were all you knew about Hitler, he'd seem like a good guy.

Put him in context, and an entirely different picture emerges. Heretical or not, regulation and safety are part of a big picture.

Use your imagination, because surely your fellow drivers will.

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



Dave Millhouser

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Jim Lehrer donates 1946 Flxible Clipper to bus museum

HERSHEY, Pa. — Jim Lehrer, retired anchor of the PBS NewsHour and a longtime bus enthusiast, donated his 1946 Flxible Clipper to the Museum of Bus Transportation.

“It was the bus our parents would have bought if they could have afforded it,” Lehrer said as he donated the bus during the museum’s annual meeting.

Lehrer and his wife, Kate, acquired the bus, which they named Betsy II, just over 25 years ago. When they purchased it in late July

1989, they sent out birth-like announcements to friends and colleagues. The announcement noted that “no gifts” were to be sent to mark the family addition.

The 23-seat Flxible has been restored and painted to replicate a 1938 Flxible Clipper that Lehrer’s father, a bus station manager, operated when he owned Kansas Central Lines, a short-lived scheduled carrier running between Emporia, Hillsboro, McPherson and Wichita, Kan., in the late 1940s.

Lehrer was born in Wichita and

when he was 12, his father started Kansas Central Lines on a shoestring. The company lasted 13 months, becoming undone by a trio of buses that were barely serviceable (constantly breaking down at the wrong time) because of the heavy usage they endured during the years of World War II.

But his father’s bus industry career and short-lived company left a lifetime imprint on young Jim.

During the museum meeting, Lehrer and his older brother, Fred

Lehrer Jr., reminisced about their family’s struggle to launch the bus company. The brothers developed a lifelong respect and affinity for the motorcoach industry, in part as a result of working with their parents to build Kansas Central Lines.

Jim Lehrer went on to a storied career as a journalist and writer, while Fred became a highly respected clergyman.

The museum has four new board members. They are Dave Millhouser, a *Bus & Motorcoach News* columnist; John Oakman, se-

nior vice president of CoachUSA; and Dave Schmidt, regional sales manager for Prevost Car. Mike Laffan, ABC Companies regional vice president,



Jim Lehrer

was named to fill the spot vacated by the death of Clarence Cornell, one of ABC’s founders and a longtime supporter of the museum.

People

GREENSBORO, N.C. — **Prevost** has appointed *Glen Gendron* as director of pre-owned sales. Gendron takes over for *Dann Wiltgen*, who retired earlier this year.

Gendron has been with Prevost for more than 19 years and has held several management posts, including regional parts sales manager, internal parts sales and bid manager, new coach sales manager, and sales coordinator with the commercial administration team.

He assumed his new duties on November 2.

“I’m very excited about this opportunity and look forward to providing customers with quality Prevost certified pre-owned equipment, Gendron said.

FARIBAULT, Minn. — The training team at **ABC Companies**, led by *Joe Malta*, was awarded the Gold Trailblazer Award in Division II by *Chief Learning Officer* magazine.

The award, presented during the magazine’s Fall 2015 Chief Learning Officer Symposium in Austin, Texas, showcases learning executives who have either launched or completely overhauled existing workforce development



Glen Gendron

Joe Malta

initiatives in the past year.

ABC earned the Gold Award in the division for businesses with fewer than 10,000 employees for demonstrating that “learning is a process not a one-time event” with the launching of ABC University. The ABC team, which also in-

cludes *Mike Peterson*, is working on an updated learning management system that will surpass anything currently used in the motorcoach industry.

The awards, now in their 15th year, were presented in 16 categories.

EAST MEADOW, N.Y. — *Bob Crescenzo*, vice president of **Lancer Insurance Company**, was honored at the **Guardian Brain Foundation’s** annual Butterfly Ball for his volunteer work with the organization.

The foundation is committed to helping out sufferers of and advancing research in Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, brain injuries and

brain tumors.

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — *Marion O. (Okie) Smith Sr.* of James City County, Va., passed away recently at his home surrounded by his family. He was 93.

Smith was the father of *Howard W. Smith Sr.*, president and CEO of **Oleta Coach Lines** in Williamsburg and a member of the **National Association of Motorcoach Operators**.

Marion Smith, a member of The Church of God in Washington, D.C., was sent to Williamsburg in 1943 to work on the church’s farm, where he and his late wife, Rita raised 12 children.

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Microtransit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

only one or two stops, from a bus stop that is within a five-minute walk of where they live or work to somewhere within a five-minute walk of their destination.

Unlike Uber and Lyft, which also use smartphone apps to arrange rides, Bridj contracts with established transit services to provide drivers and vehicles that hold 14 people on average, said Matt George, the company's CEO.

The idea is to fill gaps where normal bus service is nonexistent or irregular. Rides in Boston and

Washington cost more than regular bus fare on average. But not much more, George said — about \$3.50 on average compared with an average fare of \$2.50 for public transit (trains and buses) in those cities.

If the Kansas City authority eventually makes a deal with Bridj, it will be the first public-private partnership of its kind, Makinen said, and a model for other cities.

"If it works in Kansas City, it works anywhere," George said.

The fact the need for such a system exists in other urban areas can be seen in the popularity of Uber and Lyft to provide similar services.

In New Jersey, for example, more commuters are turning to the ride-sharing services to cover that difficult "last mile," the distance between train stations or bus stops and their homes or jobs.

According to NJ.com, 300,000 of the 1.3 million rides provided by Uber in New Jersey in a recent month were to transit stations or bus stops.

"We've seen increased demand to and from transit stations during commuting hours," said Ana Mahony, Uber general manager for New Jersey. "We're seeing Uber become an extension of public transit. People are using Uber to

get to and from the station."

Numbers for Lyft in New Jersey were unavailable, but nationally, 25 percent of the rides provided by Lyft were to and from transit.

"There are a large number of commuters who are using Lyft to connect to public transportation. Many are individuals who would have driven alone," said Emily Castor, Lyft's director of transportation policy.

Typically, those commuters don't live close enough to a train station to walk or the closest station has a parking shortage, which prompts them to drive to work, Castor said.

Transportation experts said such rideshare services — including microtransit pop-up bus services such as Bridj — could help fill that gap. And that could open up another area for diversification by bus and motorcoach operators through partnerships with public

transit agencies.

"The last mile has been a challenge for transit," said David Behrend, a North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority spokesman. "Historically, it's been a struggle all across transit systems. (Rideshare services) will have to be considered in transportation planning going forward."

Jon A. Carnegie, executive director of the Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University, said past efforts at providing shuttles or connecting bus service with rail has fallen short for a variety of reasons, including commuter confidence that the bus will arrive in time for them to catch the train.

On-demand rideshare services could encourage new commuters to use transit if they can guarantee transportation, Carnegie said.

"It could make sense, as long as it is reliable and people are confident they'll get a ride when they need it," he said.

Uber targets party buses

SAN FRANCISCO — After disrupting the taxi industry and dabbling in logistics such as food and package delivery, Uber is now eyeing another lucrative business to co-opt: party buses.

Last month, the San Francisco-based ride-hailing company launched UberEvents, which allows party hosts to buy Uber rides

for their guests in bulk.

So, rather than leaving a wedding or Christmas party in a garishly decorated shuttle bus, guests can take a pre-paid Uber ride at the expense of their host.

Hosts create their event online at www.uber.com/events to receive guest passes via email that they can then distribute to their invitees.

State funding

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

gas taxes and vehicle registration fees, plus another \$600 million from the state's general fund.

The plan, which still needs approval by the Senate and Republican Gov. Rick Snyder, would include a diesel tax increase of 7.3 cents a gallon. It also would include a 40 percent increase in truck registration fees, which the trucking industry considers "excessive."

A group formed by Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson to study highway funding has offered several options for raising \$160 million in additional money for roads, including various tax increases and revenue transfer proposals.

One of the plans would increase the state's motor fuel tax by 10 cents a gallon, which would eventually be phased out as the sales tax revenue on new and used vehicles is gradually transferred to highways.

Arkansas highway officials say they have \$20.4 billion in needs over the next decade but only \$3.6 billion in expected revenue from state and federal sources.

Nebraska also has created a task force to focus on transportation infrastructure issues. The task force is looking at ways the public and private sectors can work together on transportation funding and at opportunities to use new technologies.

The effort follows the Nebraska Legislature's passage in 2011 of the Build Nebraska Act, which set aside one-quarter cent of the state sales tax to raise more than \$80 million a year for transportation.

As part of that act, a fuel-tax increase of 1.5 cents a gallon will be levied in each of the next four years.

"Building a 21st-century infrastructure is an important part of growing Nebraska," Gov. Pete Ricketts said.

One state that is bucking the trend toward increasing transportation funding is Wisconsin, but not because it opposes such an increase — it just doesn't have enough money.

State transportation officials said they are delaying several major road construction and rehabilitation projects for two years because of a \$325 million budget shortfall.

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Electronics

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

with the boredom of long hours on the road when the trip runs through repetitious scenery or the darkness of night.

"We are seeing a lot of technology making it into the market whereas before it was basically a radio and speakers and maybe a VHS tape player," Camacho said. "Operators want to make the trip as comfortable for the passengers as they can."

ASA has long specialized in entertainment electronics. In a typical baseline installation, Camacho said, "We will do radio and speakers. Depending on the length of trips and the size of the bus, a video package is a close second now because it has become more affordable. They will want monitors for video playback of movies. If it is a tour bus, they are going to play videos of the area and sights."

High-end sound systems can truly recreate the modern theater experience, Routh said.

"Our Elite System comes with 16 mid-range and tweeter speakers and two powered subwoofers," he said. "To go along with that, they will certainly have a number of monitors. Primarily there will be 23-to-24-inch monitors staggered throughout the coach."

Individual seatback monitors

are available but rarely seen, Routh said. "At least in North America that isn't seen as the most cost-effective solution. It is a lot easier to maintain eight monitors than 55 with all the wiring and everything else that is involved."

Certain passenger groups may demand customized video capability, he added. "People may want to plug in a laptop and view a PowerPoint presentation. It could be a high school or university team that wants to look at the game footage they just recorded."

Personalization

Individualized technology is the next wave of coach entertainment development.

"Adding Wi-Fi or individual seat audio is another option," Camacho said. "Another popular option is having individual seat or a bank of USB or standard electrical outlets so people can charge their individual phones and tablets. That is becoming very common because so many individuals have those devices and need to keep them powered."

As a result, Wi-Fi may become a standard part of the motorcoach package, he said.

"Bringing the Internet into the coach allows people to continue their daily activities — social networking, viewing Web pages, Googling. It is not so much for

streaming video content but for helping pass the time," Camacho said.

The presence of Internet content on passenger tablets will create another issue for operators: maintaining onboard decorum.

"The concern everybody has is about safety and security," Routh said. "What nobody wants is for somebody to have a bad experience on a tour because out of the corner of their eye they see somebody looking at something they don't approve of or agree with."

"I think the coach companies understand this and try to block certain sites but there are some pretty savvy customers who will find a way to hack around that."

Another growing need is HDMI cabling and connections to go along with high-definition video monitors, Routh said. "Passengers want the same level of quality they see at home. Everything we are putting out is the latest and greatest."

Passenger choice

The cutting edge of motorcoach entertainment is passenger choice in programming.

"We have recently gotten a digital media center that streams via Wi-Fi signal to everybody's personal devices," Routh said. "The passenger downloads an app on their device and can instantly pick from a number of titles of approved, copyrighted content. People can put on their headphones and watch their movie of choice, similar to what they do in airplanes or their personal automobile."

The era of affordable digital media is bringing the ability to record as well as play in transit.

"Camera systems are becoming a standard as well," Camacho said. "These can be backup cameras or a camera mounted on the side of the bus or internally. Every new bus receives some sort of backup guidance, whether it is a backup sensor or backup camera."

The digital video recorder (DVR) linked to security cameras can hold tons of imaging, he said.

"The range goes from a few

days to a whole month," Camacho said. "The storage time frame is based on what the customer wants to achieve."

In addition to providing evidence of incidents the video can be used for driver training, he said. "Some operators will pull out a day at random and view it as a driver performance review to make sure safety procedures are followed properly."

"If you put exterior cameras on each side of a coach, looking back and forward, when there is an accident you can quickly go to the video to see, for example, if the coach went over the center line or if it was the other driver," Routh said. "We also have GPS (ground positioning satellite) so the company can see where the coach was and when and how fast it was going."

The ASA recording system has a "panic button" to aid in retrieval of specific video segment, he said. "It is an event marker that makes sure that video sticks on the hard drive and isn't rewritten when the recorder reaches its capacity."

The onboard, pre-trip safety announcement could be the most important show on the video system. The ASA player logs evidence of the safety message's broadcast, Routh said.

"Unfortunately, there have been some bad accidents and it was proven that one of the reasons people were not able to get out of the bus in a timely manner was the lack of playing the safety video ahead of time," he said. "Ours records the date, time and duration of the safety message. The coach operator has every right to protect their business and this is a great tool for them to do it."

A dual mentality

The proliferation of mobile electronics has required the manufacturers of coaches and equipment to work together on equipment placement and electrical power.

"It takes a dual mentality," Camacho said. "We have ideas and the manufacturers have ideas. Col-

lectively we have to come up with solutions. We ask if something is workable in their vehicle configuration. Is this monitor too big? How big is too big? How small is too small?"

"From a power standpoint, everything we provide is a 12-volt or 24-volt option so we are not having to use too many inverters. Power consumption is an area where we are very cognizant of how much a product eats up so we know there is not going to be an issue of draining the battery."

A costly necessity

"All of our products are designed and engineered with the tolerances of the coach in mind," Routh said. "Due to the tenure of our people, they understand what these buses can handle. We have become more and more efficient over the years in pulling as little power as we need to."

The costs of electronic gadgets are falling but can, nonetheless, add up. How much?

"That is a tough question to answer because there are so many options and components," Routh said. "For a coach operator, providing the level of audio and video that customers want could cost thousands of dollars per coach."

The range is all over the place, Camacho said.

"For a basic audio and entry-level video package you are probably talking a few thousand dollars, or at least entering the thousand-dollar range. To offer all the creature comforts and add the Wi-Fi, individual seat chargers and DVR, you can be upwards of \$5,000 or \$6,000."

Maintenance and service should be included in operator planning. And if something malfunctions during a trip, it could be necessary to ship replacement parts overnight.

"If a coach is three days into a seven-day trip and a monitor goes down, I guarantee you that people sitting in those seats are going to ask for some sort of refund if they can't view that monitor," Routh said.

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