

## Program for accident victims' families is advocated

By David Safford

ASHBURN, Va. — A top federal safety official is recommending bus and motorcoach operators consider establishing assistance plans to help the families of accident victims in the event of a catastrophic crash.

And, say officials from the Na-

tional Transportation Safety Board, they are ready to help.

Having a family assistance plan in place not only is the right thing to do, it's also a good business practice, said Paul Sledzik, director of the transportation disaster assistance division of the National Transportation Safety Board.

"It's the right thing to do if you feel you're a proactive company and you want to take care of your passengers," Sledzik told attendees at the United Motorcoach Association Safety Management Seminar here late last month.

"If you walk away and don't do anything (after a major accident with fatalities), you're probably

going to be burned in the future.... A consistent message of what you're doing and providing passengers (and their families) will bolster your view in the public eye: 'We're providing x, y, z to the families of this accident, we're flying them from the accident location to wherever' — whatever you're doing shows you're being proac-

tive in helping them out."

Michele Beckjord, NTSB senior accident investigator, put it more bluntly. In the event of a major accident, she noted, images of your wrecked bus along with your company name will be on the news for all to see.

"If you've got 55 passengers

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## Diabetic drivers lawsuit is being closely watched

ELIZABETH, N.J. — A two-year old lawsuit that could impact how motorcoach operators treat diabetic drivers appears headed for a showdown early next year.

Lawyers for Coach USA and three drivers who claim they were wrongly suspended by the company because of possible issues with their diabetes are to wrap up pre-trial discovery activities in March and the case could move to a trial shortly afterwards.

The drivers, who are seeking lost wages, contend the suspensions — which occurred at various times over a six-year period — violated New Jersey's job discrimination regulations, which are simi-



**Wide Swath.** A Missouri Department of Transportation truck pulls a new-fangled snowplow that doubles the effectiveness of snow-removal efforts. More states are adding the tow-behind plows. Story Page 6.

lar to federal rules.

The trio says they lost wages and depleted savings during the combined 25 months they were

suspended.

The case is being watched by motorcoach safety experts because of the impact a decision could

have on individual policies and practices operators across the country have adopted for drivers

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## Rule bans use of cell phones

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation announced a final rule that bans interstate bus and truck drivers from using hand-held cellphones while operating their vehicles.

The rule prohibits commercial drivers from using hand-held phones while driving a bus or truck, sets federal civil penalties of up to \$2,750 for each offense, and disqualifies drivers from operating a commercial motor vehicle after multiple offenses.

Bus and truck companies that allow drivers to use hand-held cell phones while driving will face a penalty of up to \$11,000. The rule affects about four million drivers.

The feds issued a regulation banning bus and truck drivers from texting while driving in September 2010.

## ABC responds to challenging times with new solutions

*Bus & Motorcoach News* has asked North America's leading motorcoach builders and suppliers to participate in a series of Question-and-Answer format articles in advance of UMA Motorcoach Expo 2012.

Here's the first article, with the questions submitted to and answered by Dane Cornell, president and CEO of ABC Companies, distributor and Van Hool and ABC-branded buses and coaches.

**Q. ABC has traditionally been a well-rounded coach supplier, with the ability to handle used coaches, refurbishing, maintenance, trades and finance in a comprehensive way. Has that proven to be an advantage in the current lagging economy?**

A. Yes, it has been an advantage. Economic conditions in the last several years have caused many motorcoach fleet owners to alter their new coach purchase plans,

and to re-evaluate their existing fleet utilization and customer demands for specific coach products. This has resulted in operators selecting different product lines and/or renewing existing equipment and/or refinancing to continue to be profitable in this marketplace.

Based on these changes, ABC Companies has become more of a custom solution provider to operators that can mix and match any of the combinations that operators

need to continue to be profitable and competitive in the challenging market of today.

Since our company is not a coach manufacturer but rather a sales organization providing coaches and services, we can provide solutions for operators that extend well beyond selling a piece of equipment.

**Q. Vertical integration is increasingly showing up in the**

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Dane Cornell

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## Operator Larry Benjamin dies at 58

APPLE VALLEY, Minn. — Larry Benjamin, who became widely known in the motorcoach industry because of his engaging personality, broad smile, infectious laugh and strong good looks, but was in fact a solid operator, died late last month after a seven-month struggle with lung cancer.

He had marked his 58th birthday earlier in November.

A native of Northfield, Minn., where he and his brother owned and managed Northfield Lines, Mr. Benjamin was a member of the boards of the United Motorcoach Association and the International Motor Coach Group.

At UMA, he was chair of the association's important meetings committee, making him the chairman of UMA Motorcoach Expo.

"Larry Benjamin represented all that is good and right about our industry," said UMA President Victor Parra. "He was smart and compassionate.

"He ran a high-quality, competitive company, but understood the importance of associations like UMA that encourage and support initiatives designed to raise the bar in our industry.

"To say he will be missed is severely understating the void his passing creates," added Parra.

Mr. Benjamin, and brother John, co-owned Northfield Lines for the past 22 years. Larry Benjamin operated a restaurant in Northfield, the Quarterback Club, before becoming the principal owner of Northfield Lines, which has a fleet of more than 20 motorcoaches, 10 small and midsize buses, and 74 school buses.

The Benjamin brothers were honored in January as Business People of the Year by the Northfield Chamber of Commerce.

Friends, colleagues and employees remembered Mr.



Larry Benjamin at a UMA Expo with wife Mary Jane.

Benjamin as an "extraordinary man," a "blessing to all of us," an "incomparable individual" and a man with a "kind heart."

The family said he prided himself not so much in his success in business as in the friends he made throughout his career. His warmth, charm, fun-loving nature and sense of humor brought him many friends.

In addition to his brother, he is survived by his wife, Mary Jane; a son, Kyle; daughters Ali Coyne and Heather Stuart, and seven sisters.

Memorials in Mr. Benjamin's name have been established with The Breath of Hope Lung Foundation, P.O. Box 1081, Chanhassen, MN 55317, and Fairview Hospice, 2450 26th Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55406.

## Tax relief sought after schools supply shopping-mall charters

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — A Virginia motorcoach company that lost a charter job to a public school district is looking into a new tactic to recover some of the revenue it missed out on.

Oleta Coach Lines of Williamsburg is seriously considering asking its county taxing agency for a one-time discount on this year's taxes, says Sales Director David N. Smith.

"We can't just ignore what happened and look past it," he said.

Smith said the company deserves a tax break because the school district that it supports with its taxes beat it out of a contract from a large retail mall to provide a shuttle service for shoppers on Black Friday in late November.

Oleta bid \$12,500 for the contract, but was told by Premium Outlets that it had a lower offer from Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools and the mall was required to take the lowest bid. The school district charged \$7,700 for the service.

"This is very upsetting," Smith

said. "There is no need for a school system to be doing private charter work,"

While the school district insists it did nothing wrong, it did say that following a review of the situation it has decided to no longer provide such service in the future.

"We don't want to compete with the private sector," stressed Scott A. Burckbuchler, assistant school superintendent for finance and operations.

He said James City County officials asked the school district to provide the shuttles for the mall and the district agreed to do it as a service to the public and county.

"Our purpose was only to provide a service that was of community interest as tax revenues are generated as a result of (shopping mall) sales," he said.

Buckbuchler maintained that the school district was not aware when it accepted the work that a private motorcoach operator was interested in operating the service.

Smith said he learned the school district was going to pro-

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# THE DOCKET

## TSA warns of terrorist interest in buses

WASHINGTON — The Transportation Security Administration issued a bulletin last month to state and local authorities saying they should be wary of potential terrorist plots against mass transit — and buses in particular.

TSA Administrator John Pistole said the TSA released the bulletin to remind agencies of the general threat against mass transit, not due to a specific threat.

The TSA has long held that buses are an attractive terrorist target due to their open architecture

and accessibility for use by millions of travelers.

Pistole described the bulletin, Terrorist Concerns Regarding Mass Transit Bus Systems, as something TSA reissued out of recognition that millions more people travel by mass transit rather than by air, particularly during the holiday season between Thanksgiving and New Year's.

The bulletin noted that attacks against buses are more prevalent worldwide than attacks against aviation systems. Terrorists launched

more than 725 attacks against buses between 2004 and 2009, the bulletin estimated. Virtually all of those attacks, of course, were far from U.S. shores.

Pistole referenced the magazine *Inspire*, published by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and its previous call for terrorists to hijack buses to ram them into crowded areas, buildings and other infrastructure.

Speaking at a forum last month at George Washington University here, Pistole said the TSA contin-

ues to work with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to protect mass transit.

Together, the agencies staff what TSA calls Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) teams, which send federal air marshals, surface transportation security inspectors, transportation security officers, behavior detection officers, and canine teams to probe for vulnerabilities and to deter plots against transportation infrastructure, including — occasionally — at Greyhound bus stations.

## NLRB actions are restrained by House bill

WASHINGTON — On Nov. 30, the U.S. House strongly approved legislation aimed at stopping Obama Administration-appointed regulators at the National Labor Relations Board from forcing “ambush elections” on employees and employers, and reining in so-called micro-unions.

In a bi-partisan vote of 235 (54 percent) to 188 (43 percent) the House approved and sent to the Senate the Workforce Democracy and Fairness Act, HR 3094.

The legislation had broad support from small businesses and business organizations, including the Coalition for a Democratic Workplace. The only motorcoach industry member of the coalition is the United Motorcoach Association. (See Oct. 1 and Oct. 15 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The legislation was opposed by union leaders and their allies in Congress who critics said were attempting to enact “card check” through regulation.

Under regulations proposed by the NLRB, the agency would have encouraged so-called ambush elections that dramatically shorten the time employers have to speak with their employees about union representation, potentially shortening the entire arcane election process to just 10 days from current median of 38 days.

The effect, said critics, would be to make a mockery of real elections and impose “card check” by regulation. It would unfairly tip the scale toward union organizers and leave employees without enough information or time to make a real decision in a real election, said critics of the proposed NLRB rules.

The NLRB also opened the door to “micro-unions,” which make it easier for unions to organize in smaller bargaining units and exclude employees who oppose unionization, disenfranchising them.

As a result, businesses faced the possibility of having to manage multiple, small bargaining units of similarly situated employees with potentially different pay scales, benefits, work rules and bargaining schedules.

The Workforce Democracy and Fairness Act stops the proposed NLRB rules.

## Congressional report says TSA is ‘bloated’

WASHINGTON — A scathing congressional report says the Transportation Security Administration is a bloated agency plagued with significant problems.

The report, which was issued 10 years after the agency was created, was criticized by a TSA spokesman, who called it a disservice to the agency's workers.

According to the report, entitled “A Decade Later: A Call for TSA Reform,” the agency is:

- An inflated bureaucracy with 65,000 workers, including nearly 4,000 at headquarters and 9,656 administrators in the field.

- Ineffective, with 25,000 security breaches in the past decade.

- A sponsor of inadequate technology, including 500 advanced-imaging technology machines costing \$122 million that are “easily thwarted” and \$39 million wasted on explosive-detection “puffer” machines that were unreliable.

“Unfortunately, TSA has lost its way,” said Rep. John Mica, R-Fla., chairman of the House Transportation Committee. “It is time for reform. TSA must become...a thinking, risk-based, flexible agency that analyzes risks, sets security standards and

audits security performance.”

But TSA spokesman Greg Soule said the agency has developed a highly trained workforce that has screened five billion passengers and prevented more than 1,100 guns from being brought onto planes this year.

“At a time when our country's aviation system is safer, stronger and more secure than it was 10 years ago, this report is an unfortunate disservice to the dedicated men and women of TSA who are on the front lines every day protecting the traveling public,” he said.

TSA is developing risk-based

security measures, such as an experimental pre-check program for frequent fliers to move more swiftly through screening at a handful of airports.

“Each of these initiatives... enhances our ability to provide the most effective security, focusing on those who present the highest risk, in the most efficient way possible,” Soule said.

Among other things, the congressional report recommends:

- Revising the luggage-screening program to allow more competition with private security companies
- Reducing staff



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# FMCSA rewrite of EOBR rule to consider harassment

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has decided not to appeal the court decision vacating its electronic onboard recorder rule scheduled to take effect next June.

Instead, the agency is addressing the court's concerns about possible driver harassment by revising the rule.

In an August ruling, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit vacated the EOBR rule and sent it back to FMCSA for review, saying it does not do enough to prevent harassment of drivers. (See Sept. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The decision was in response to a petition filed by several inde-

pendent truck drivers and the Owner-Operator Independent Driver Association, which were challenging the rule that would require habitual violators of hours-of-service rules to install electronic hours-of-service recorders.

The agency has estimated the

rule would affect roughly 5,700 interstate truck and bus operators. It is the precursor to a much broader FMCSA mandate that will cover practically all carriers, probably several years from now.

The panel of three appeals court judges found the agency did

not provide enough detail on how it intends to prevent companies from harassing their drivers through the devices.

The agency said in its rule it is legally required to prevent harassment, but it does not go into detail on how that will be accomplished.

The court said the agency needs to describe exactly what steps must be taken to prevent harassment. It needs to consider what types of harassment already exist, how frequent and extensive the practice is, and how EOBRs will either allow or prevent harassment.

## Effort to cap N.C. fuel tax falls short

RALEIGH, N.C. — North Carolina legislators failed in a bid to freeze the state's fuel tax rate for six months.

Meeting in special session late last month, the North Carolina House agreed to keep the 35-cent-per-gallon state fuel tax unchanged through June 30.

However, the state Senate decided to leave the capitol without considering the bill, meaning the tax on diesel fuel and gasoline goes up Jan. 1.

According to state estimates, the tax will climb to as much as 38.9 cents per gallon. The tax grew by 2.5 cents on July 1.

Senate leaders cited concerns about an estimated loss of \$95 million from the fuel tax for not voting for the freeze.

## 'Straight-on-red' law is adopted in Illinois

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — At least a dozen states allow motorcycle and bicycle riders to go straight through a red light after coming to a complete stop, with Illinois being the latest state to adopt such a practice.

The Illinois law goes into effect June 1.

Motorcycle groups lobbied for the law, saying riders sometimes get stuck at red lights for several traffic-light cycles because the lighter weight of two-wheel vehicles does not trip sensors that cause stoplights to change at some intersections.

Illinois joins such states as Missouri and Wisconsin in allowing motorcycles and bikes to go straight on red lights.

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## USDOT secretary comments on hand-held cell phone ban

By Ray LaHood

WASHINGTON — If you're looking for some of America's safest drivers, it's easy to find them behind the wheel of our nation's large trucks and buses.

Safe driving is their livelihood and I know that most of them take safety as seriously as we do at the USDOT.

And that applies to talking on a cell phone behind the wheel.

As one commercial driver, Tim Cox, told a Texas news program recently, "If it's in the truck while I'm driving I don't answer it; I don't text. It's just too dangerous; you're endangering your life and the lives of others."

But, because of the size of their vehicles and the weight of the loads they carry for us, when drivers of large trucks, buses and hazardous materials lose their focus for even a few seconds, the outcome can be deadly.

So, last week, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration issued a final rule specifically prohibiting interstate truck and bus drivers

from using hand-held cell phones while operating their vehicles.

Through the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, drivers hauling hazardous materials within a state are also included in the ban.

Research from FMCSA shows that using a hand-held cell phone while driving requires a commercial driver to take several risky steps beyond what is required for using a hands-free mobile phone.

Commercial drivers reaching for an object, such as a cell phone, are three times more likely to be involved in a crash or other safety-critical event.

Dialing a hand-held cell phone makes it six times more likely that commercial drivers will be involved in a crash or other safety-critical event.

The new rule — the next step in an ongoing process — will save lives and prevent injuries by helping commercial drivers stay laser-focused on safety at all times while behind the wheel.

*Ray LaHood is the U.S. Secretary of Transportation.*

## House members introduce bill to boost tourism

WASHINGTON — A bill has been introduced in the U.S. House aimed at promoting domestic tourism by partnering public-and-private dollars through a competitive matching grant program within the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Rep. Sam Farr, D-Calif., co-chair of the Congressional Travel and Tourism Caucus, Rep. Mazie Hiron, D-Hawaii, and several colleagues introduced the Travel Regional Investment Partnership (TRIP) Act (H.R. 3484).

The legislation is designed to help promote tourism, as well as create jobs.

"Tourism is one of our nation's greatest resources," said Rep. Farr. "The U.S. boasts some of the most pristine and exciting tourist destinations in the world, with the potential of bringing jobs and dollars into our communities. And at a time of fiscal belt tightening, the TRIP Act brings together private-and-public dollars for smart investments."

The TRIP Act will support the

## PennDOT, Penn. Turnpike to use multi-lane snow plows

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Pennsylvania has become the latest state to adopt a new tool to clear snow from multi-lane highways.

In addition to traditional plows mounted on trucks, snow removal crews also will be using a 30-foot-long, tow-behind snowplow.

Because of their size, the tow plows are only used on limited-access roadways, interstates or other multi-lane roads.

"A tow plow allows one truck to do the work of two," said State Transportation Secretary Barry Schoch. "By freeing up a truck and operator, we'll be better able to focus on lower-priority roads that normally would not receive as high a level of service until major routes are cleared."

After two winters of testing in various counties and on a variety of roadways, PennDOT plans to have

tourism industry by giving local destination marketing organizations, such as convention and visitors' bureaus, the opportunity to partner with other regional tourism entities, such as parks or resorts, to put together a proposal

at least one tow plow operating in each of its 11 engineering districts. The Pennsylvania Turnpike expects to have four tow plows.

PennDOT and Turnpike plow trucks are normally equipped with a 10- or 12-foot wide front plow. A tow plow increases the plowing width to 24 feet, allowing for two, 12-foot-wide lanes to be cleared at once.

As the name implies, tow plows are towed behind a conventional plow truck equipped with a front plow. When plowing snow, the tow plow truck is driven on the left lane and when the operator deploys the tow plow it "steers" out into the right lane, allowing the truck to clear both lanes simultaneously.

Tow plows cost between \$99,000 and \$106,000 based. A typical, tandem-axle PennDOT truck costs nearly \$175,000.

for a matching grant.

In turn, the grants will allow for regional promotion of tourist destinations across the country.

The legislation has been introduced in the U.S. Senate by Sen. Mark Begich, D-Alaska.

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# Image, inconsistency help 'gray' the industry

By Mark Gagnon

When was the last time any of us who drive coaches looked at our sons or daughters, or more realistically our grandkids, and said: "When you grow up I want you to become a motorcoach operator just like me?"

What we do for a living should at least be considered as noble as an electrician, carpenter or plumber.

It takes as much skill to maneuver a vehicle that's longer than many people's homes down a crowded street as it does to wire a light fixture, miter a corner or fix a leak.

Conduct a quick poll at your next drivers meeting and see how many diverse backgrounds there are.

If your place is at all like ours you'll find former truck drivers, school bus drivers, business owners, firemen, salesmen, teachers and the list goes on.

The other thing you'll discover is that there will be a few late 30-somethings, many more 40-somethings and a lot of over 50s. If there's anyone in their early 20s, it's the owner's kid.

## Starts with image

Part of the lack of interest in choosing motorcoach operator as a first career is our public image.

One of my many part-time jobs was working as a provisioning agent for Southwest Airlines. Having unrestricted access to the flight line, I was able to observe the pilots walking their aircraft during pre-flight inspections; kicking the tires and doing the same basic things a good bus driver does.

I mentioned this to a few pilots I got to know and, except for a couple who were appalled that I would try to drag their profession down to our level, most agreed with the

comparison.

The thing is, Hollywood gives pilots graying temples, steely eyes and square jaws — as personified by John Wayne, Dean Martin and Sam Elliott. We got Ralph Kramden.

The image issue may be a surface problem but there are more meat-and-potato problems that need to be addressed. Line runs and transit companies are able to offer their employees predictable schedules and regular pay checks. Charter companies are subject to the whims of the customer, and there is no such thing as regular or predicable in the charter world.

The older worker is more adaptable to this poorly structured lifestyle. Family is less demanding because, as much as we granddads like to think we are important, if we miss a soccer or little league game it's not as big a deal as mom or dad missing it.

Financially, the older worker can generally handle the income swings a little better, too, because he or she may already have a house or car that's paid for and no kids coming home with lists of school supplies or other unexpected expenses.

## Demands take toll

So, if the older person is a better fit, why should we care if the younger generation isn't getting involved? Here's four quick reasons:

# Pennsylvania inspection blitz nets 19 coaches

MEDIA, Pa. — A statewide, multi-agency motorcoach inspection blitz late last month resulted in the Pennsylvania State Police placing 19 coaches out of service.

During the five-day strike force, 341 coaches were inspected at travel destinations, including casinos

and amusement parks, throughout the state.

The out-of-service rate for the enforcement action was under 6 percent. In the Media area, 41 coaches were inspected and 2 were parked for an out-of-service rate of under 5 percent.

Older workers retire; they go back to a previous profession that's more stable; their reaction time gets slower, and their eyes get poorer.

Also, the physical demands of the job: loading luggage, sitting for long periods and irregular sleep schedules takes a greater toll on an older person. The older you get the less likely you are to pass a DOT physical.

We need the younger generation to get involved because as the Baby Boomers exit the industry there will be more coaches sitting idle with no one to drive them. If a coach is sitting, it's losing money.

If a customer can't book a charter because there is a lack of drivers, then they'll find another way to get where they want to go. If this happens on a regular basis, the industry will become irrelevant.

In the future, owners will need to find a way to pay better and offer benefits that will make it worthwhile for a 20-something to give up a stable schedule.

Better pay and benefits? How can the already financially strapped bus company owner offer more than he is already?

## No easy answers

Like all complex questions, there isn't a simple answer. One piece of the puzzle might be to re-visit the image issue. If a bus arrives at a customer's location with dents and scratches, faded paint and

belching black smoke, the first impression is "what a piece of junk."

The same holds true about the driver. If he or she shows up in jeans sneakers and a tee shirt, two days of stubble (usually applies to men) and a shaggy hair cut, the first impression is not that of a true professional.

Drivers should be in some type of uniform and buses should always be clean and well maintained. The airlines sell image well and so should we. The only way to get more for our trips is to make people feel what we offer is worth it.

Unfortunately, every market has its cut-price, bottom feeders that will always take some of the business. If we as an industry can improve our image and get more for our product we should be able to attract the better drivers and the young recruits.

The cheap guys eventually won't be able to afford the better drivers, and they either come up to the higher standards of the rest of us or go out of business.

Unlike people, companies and industries can be rejuvenated with an infusion of younger workers with fresh ideas and increased energy. Issues need to be addressed now before there aren't enough of us old guys to go around.

Mark Gagnon is sales manager of Cowtown Bus Charters in Fort Worth, Texas. Contact him by email at [mga-gnon@cowtowncharters.com](mailto:mga-gnon@cowtowncharters.com).

# Christmas gift: Books on buses

HUDSON, Wis. — Looking for a gift for the bus aficionados on your Christmas list?

How about a bus book?

There are 22 specialty bus books available from an outfit called Enthusiast Books.

The books range from photo archives, containing scores of images of various makes and models, to histories, references and guides.

Roughly half the books were assembled by or co-authored by William Luke, former editor and publisher of *BusRide* magazine. The Luke books are mostly photo archives of both long-gone nameplates, such as Fageol, Flxible, ACF and Yellow Coach, and more contemporary coach builders like Prevost and MCI. One of the most popular is *Highway Buses of the 20th Century*.

Other authors and editors have assembled books on such buses and bus companies as GM New Looks, RTSs, Crown Coach, and Greyhound.

The books range in price from about \$15 to \$35.

Enthusiast Books maintains a web site, at [www.enthusiastbooks.com](http://www.enthusiastbooks.com), where the books can be viewed and ordered.

Since bus nuts are also often car nuts, Enthusiast also publishes upwards of 50 specialty car books.

And then there's Amazon.com, which offers scores of bus-related books, dozens of them aimed at children, including the iconic *The Wheels on the Bus*. You know: The wheels on the bus go round and round...

ensure the safety of everyone traveling throughout Pennsylvania," said State Police Commissioner Frank Noonan said.

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# Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

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# A few hard truths about tracking and safety systems

By J.R. Buzzell  
Comlink GPS Tracking Systems LLC

I suspect most of you already know this, but I know for a fact I can drive a nail with a crescent wrench.

Granted, it's not the right tool and I'd hate to build a house that way, but in a pinch it'll get the job done.

Just to stretch the metaphor to its breaking point, I can also share that using high-tech electronics to beat on a nail is significantly less productive (not to mention hard on the electronics), and using only harsh language generally accomplishes little, if anything.

So, what's my point?

The answer is that the exact same principles apply to electronic tracking and safety systems. Even with the exact right tool, nothing happens if you don't use it.

Please don't get me wrong, having the right tools makes a huge difference, both in the result and also with the ease of which they accomplish their task. Worse, if you have faulty tools or have them and don't use them, you can easily become the nail for somebody else's hammer.

I have read articles in this very publication discussing two predominant camps in the safety discussion — call them the "industry" and the "regulators."

Our industry strives to develop professionalism; the regulators want to expand enforcement and rely on "gee-whiz technology" to do it. They realize technology is a tool to manage the industry.

I hope, if we step back for a moment, we might find there is at least some common ground.

I believe the overwhelming majority of operators are responsible and place a high priority on safety. To survive as responsible operators, they must also be profitable. This means controlling costs, too.

Designed and used correctly, much of (the new safety) technology helps develop more professional drivers, while concurrently managing costs (including its own).

In healthcare and manufacturing software, we call this process of management "continuous-improvement," or "activity-based management." The same concepts apply here.

If all you want is a cheap, one-time fix, you probably have a pretty good idea who your risky drivers are; just do what needs to be done. You will probably improve the safety of your fleet initially, but there it ends.

To continuously improve, you have to identify and measure activity and then manage accordingly.

Here is where the old adage "people don't do what you expect; they do what you inspect" applies

perfectly. When you can walk up to a driver or your maintenance department and say "we need to cut this activity by this much," and then be able to document how they're doing to do it and adjust to it over time, you begin to control the situation.

We all know that certain behav-

iors statistically predict where we can expect problems. Drivers who speed, follow too closely, change lanes rapidly or fudge on their hours/rest have more near-misses than the average driver. The more near-misses a driver has, the more likely they will have an "event."

The more events they have, the

more likely a "major event."

The beauty of modern safety systems is that they can quantify and help you manage at the behavioral level — at least that's what the good ones do.

Constant improvement is an ongoing process. It requires a focus, effort and management. To be truly

effective, it also requires a way to monitor and measure real activity.

Mandating that a person buy a hammer does not mean the house is going to be well built. However, buying the right tools and learning how to use them well, tends to keep the inspectors focused elsewhere, and your customers safe and warm.

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## MCI coaches recalled for ESC issue

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — A defect in Meritor WABCO pneumatic electronic stability control modules has resulted in a voluntary safety recall by Motor Coach Industries of 1,962 late-model coaches.

The D-, E- and J-model coaches were manufactured from October 2002 through October of this year.

The models being recalled are:

- 2007-12 D4000, D4000IS-TV, D4005, D4500 and D4505
- 2003, 2007-12 E4500 and J4500

Under very specific road and driving conditions, operation of the electronic stability control system (ESC) could cause steering issues that may lead to a crash.

The Meritor WABCO ESC module contains a yaw-rate sensor,

a lateral accelerometer and stability-control software that provide some of the inputs that enable the ESC system to determine the stability of the vehicle in potential roll-over and loss-of-control situations.

In the defect notice issued by Meritor WABCO, the company said that when driving in tight, successive and highly-banked curves, vehicle body roll and road banking may, in effect, confuse the slip-angle calculation by the ESC module.

This could cause the ESC system to sense an oversteer situation and apply the front-axle outer brake until the vehicle is perceived to be stable by the system.

If the driver is slow to react to the ESC intervention, the vehicle

could deviate from the intended line of travel, increasing the risk of a crash.

All known incidents involving misapplication of the brakes by the system have occurred on tight, S-type curves that are banked above 6 degrees.

MCI is notifying owners about the recall and will replace the control module free of charge. Owners may contact MCI Customer Service at (800) 241-2947.

Owners also may contact the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Vehicle Safety Hotline at (888) 327-4236, or go to the agency website at [www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov). Reference NHTSA Campaign ID #11V524000 and MCI Safety Recall #351.



**Veterans Day Showpiece.** A military-themed bus owned by York, Pa.-based Bailey Coach served as a backdrop for a Veterans Day breakfast at the York Fairgrounds. More than 1,200 veterans and guests attended. John Bailey, president of the company, dedicated the bus to the memory of his father, a World War II veteran.

## DriveCam buys Rair Technologies, raises capital for purchase

SAN DIEGO, Calif. — DriveCam Inc., the maker of motorcoach and truck-cab video recorders, has announced it's buying Rair Technologies, a provider of compliance services for commercial fleets.

No terms for the purchase were disclosed, but DriveCam revealed it's raising \$85 million from a private equity firm and using the money to compete in the commercial vehicle compliance segment.

DriveCam said both the investment and the acquisition should close this month.

San Diego-based DriveCam installs dash- and mirror-mounted video recording system that continuously record road events and incidents.

When risky driving occurs, such as sudden braking or hard

turns, the recorder saves that portion of the video along with the preceding 12 seconds and then uploads the recording to DriveCam servers.

DriveCam wants to buy Rair because the Brookfield, Wis., company offers web-based safety and compliance services, said a DriveCam spokesman. These services include hours-of-service log and driver qualification file auditing, vehicle

inspection reporting, drug testing, and CSA safety scores analysis.

Buying Rair gives DriveCam a complete suite of regulatory compliance products, said the spokesman.

"DriveCam's management team has been at the forefront of industry innovation and operational excellence and, as a result, we see the very strong momentum in the business today continuing into

the future," said an executive with the private equity firm that made the investment in DriveCam.

In September, Rair introduced "Dashboard," which summarizes a driver's hours of service and qualification information in its database.

Rair also offers a product that helps carriers manage their responsibilities under the federal Compliance, Safety, Accountability program.

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# Employees considered first in Iowa operator's facility

WEST BURLINGTON, Iowa — When Ron Moore's term as chairman of the Trailways Transportation System ends later this month, you can bet he'll be more than a little relieved.

Moore, who's president of Burlington Trailways here, has had a busier-than-usual year. Not only did he hold the reins at Trailways but his company opened a spanking-new corporate office and maintenance center.

Although the Burlington Trailways' facility has been operational since May, the official ribbon cutting ceremony wasn't conducted until this past fall — with hundreds in attendance.

One who attended was Mark Szyperki, Trailways Transportation System vice president. Szyperki, who has traveled to lots of facilities operated by Trailways members, said he had never seen one the likes of which Burlington Trailways had built.

"The driver sleeping rooms are comfortable, roomy and each one has its own full bathroom," said Szyperki.

"Everything, from these rooms, to the air-conditioned maintenance area, to the full motorcoach-size paint booth, to the spacious office area, shows that the employees are the most important assets of Burlington Trailways," he noted.

Said Ron Moore: "We're thankful to be able to provide a great working environment for our employees."

Added Szyperki: The attention to detail in the 53,000-square-foot plus facility is impressive.

Burlington Trailways is in its 29th year a Trailways member. The company has evolved from a four-bus operation to 28 motorcoaches and more than 100 employees. Its fleet size grew as it expanded its scheduled routes in Midwestern, Northern Plains and Rocky Mountain states.

The company also has been an innovator, serving as a test bed for global positioning systems, and has installed onboard observation systems and cameras in all coaches for extra security, safety and passenger assurance.

### Driver recovering

If you have an extra Christmas card when sending out this year's list, you might consider posting one to Michelle Anderson, a driver for Burlington Trailways.

The 50-year-old Anderson, who

has been driving for Burlington Trailways for seven years and had more than 860,000-accident-year miles before a crash in October, is in rehabilitation and recovering.

Her coach struck an overturned



Maintenance of Burlington Trailways' 28 coaches is handled in the company's new 53,000-square-foot facility.

semi-trailer in the 2 a.m. crash and she was critically injured.

To send her good wishes, mail cards to: Michelle Anderson, Burlington Trailways, P.O. Box 531, West Burlington, IA 52655.

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## ABC responds

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

**North American bus industry. Some of ABC/Van Hool's competitors own engine and transmission manufacturing operations. What advantages and pitfalls does this trend represent? How does this trend influence or impact Van Hool's place in the market? Are there advantages to NOT being owned by one of the giants?**

A. Perceived advantages of vertical integration can be more beneficial to the manufacturer and not the customer. Most of the engine and transmission suppliers

that also manufacture motorcoaches rely heavily on truck dealers for service and warranty support. This can be a pitfall as it is first-come, first-serve at truck dealers.

From ABC and Van Hool's perspective, being independent from the constraints of vertical integration allows customers to maintain long-standing relationships with existing suppliers and dealers for their preferred type of engine and transmission combinations.

It also allows them the flexibility to customize their coach specifications based on their specific circumstances or environment in which their fleets will operate. We

all want to have options when we are shopping — this is the nature of any business.

ABC, combined with Van Hool, is in the best position to provide customized solutions and products to our industry, whereas a vertically-integrated supplier has little or no flexibility.

**Q. You're currently doing a major refurbishing program for Greyhound Lines in Nappanee, Ind., and seem to be making an effort to sell similar services to other operators. How is the Greyhound project going, and how are you doing selling refurb to other customers?**

A. The Greyhound project is going very well. More than 275 coaches have been delivered from our Nappanee facility. Our quality and throughput are at high levels and we are receiving good feedback from Greyhound on the project.

In response to many customer inquiries related to comments outlined at the beginning of this article, ABC has added an entirely new dedicated building at Nappanee to specifically refurbish Van Hool coaches.

Van Hool coaches can undergo many upgrades and modifications in the production style that ABC has refined in the Greyhound project. We feel there are great opportunities for operators to refresh their existing fleet at a fraction of the cost of new coaches, or purchase pre-owned coaches from ABC that have passed through this facility.

Additionally ABC is actively looking for other projects, such as engine/transmission re-power packages, wheelchair-lift installations, or complete body make-

overs, based on resources and knowledge we have gained from the Nappanee Greyhound project.

**Q. Does ABC/Van Hool see any possibility of new coach prices stabilizing in the near future? With fuel economy standards and a raft of safety features looming over the next three-to-five years, is that even possible?**

A. New coach pricing has stabilized or has actually declined due to some excess inventory levels. There have been, however, other elements which have caused increases over the last few years.

For instance, there have been three emission events (2004, 2007 and 2010).

Also, safety standards mandated by the federal government have affected final coach pricing in recent years. Some manufacturers have opted to offer these items now, as either standard or optional equipment.

Since there are many more federal mandates being proposed, price stabilization will be hard to predict for some time yet.



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## Diesel to end year at around \$4 Calif. lots higher, gasoline is \$3.30

WASHINGTON — It looks like the price of diesel fuel will end 2011 roughly 80 cents a gallon higher than it was a year ago.

The U.S. average price of diesel climbed above \$4 a gallon last month, the first time it had topped that level in six months, but moderated slightly by the end of the month and early this month.

While year-end, \$4-a-gallon diesel is commonplace in many parts of the country, two regions have not seen it return to that level in months.

The priciest regions for diesel are New England, central Atlantic states,

the Midwest, Rocky Mountains and West Coast. California continues to be the high-price leader, with diesel topping \$4.15 a gallon.

Diesel tends to be a around a dime-a-gallon cheaper in lower Atlantic and Gulf Coast states.

Gasoline, meanwhile, will finish the year with a national average price of around \$3.30 a gallon. However, the nationwide spread for gasoline varies widely, ranging from close to \$3 a gallon in the nation's midsection to above \$3.70 a gallon in California.

Gasoline was under \$3 gallon in some states around Thanksgiving.

A year ago, gasoline was selling 40- to 60-cents a gallon less in the U.S.

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## People

PERTH, Scotland — **Stagecoach Group** has named a new top executive of its **megabus.com** operation in North America.

*Edward Hodgson*, who has been director of megabus in the U.S. and Canada for the past three years, has become managing director of **Stagecoach West Scotland**.

Replacing Hodgson is *Bryony Chamberlain*, who previously held the Stagecoach West Scotland position Hodgson has assumed. In other words, the two swapped jobs.

During the years Hodgson headed megabus, it became North America's largest curbside operator. Prior to that, he was commercial director at **Stagecoach South**.

Chamberlain joined Stagecoach in 1996 as a graduate trainee. After rising steadily through the company's bus division in the United Kingdom, she joined **Coach USA** in 2006 to help develop the initial megabus services in the U.S.

Two years ago, Chamberlain returned to the U.K., where she became managing director of **Stagecoach Bluebird and Highlands** before becoming managing director of Stagecoach West Scotland last year.

Said *Dale Moser*, president and chief operating officer of Coach USA: "We are looking forward to Bryony rejoining our team ... and working with her to further expand the very popular megabus.com service in the states."

LONDON — Stagecoach Group co-founder and Chief Executive *Sir Brian Souter* formally received his knighthood at an investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace last month.

Souter, 57, was awarded a knighthood — in the Queen's



*Darwin Rubeck*     *Chris Shigley*

Birthday Honours List in June — for services to transport and the voluntary sector. He co-founded Stagecoach with his sister, *Ann Gloag*, in 1980 with two buses, and developed the company into a leading international transport group in the U.K. and North America with 35,000 employees and an annual revenue of more than \$3.14 billion.

OMAHA, Neb. — **Radio Engineering Industries** has announced the promotion of *Darwin Rubeck* to national sales manager-transit and motorcoach, and *Chris Shigley* to national sales manager-school bus.

Rubeck has been in sales for more than 30 years and has been a member of the REI sales team since 2006. A graduate of Wayne State College in Wayne, Neb., Rubeck holds a bachelor's degree in radio/television broadcasting.

Shigley has 10 years of sales experience, including two years with REI, and a strong background in transportation electronics. He is a graduate of the University of Nebraska-Omaha with a bachelor's degree in business.

WASHINGTON — *Robert L. Sumwalt* has been sworn in for a second five-year term as a member of the **National Transportation Safety Board**. Nominated by *President Obama*, his term will run until Dec. 31, 2016.

Sumwalt joined the NTSB in August 2006, after being nominated by *President George Bush*.

# Operator Paul Elmore of Va. dies

NORFOLK, Va. — Paul A. Elmore, co-founder of Fun Tours in Virginia Beach, died here late last month. He was 81.

Mr. Elmore and two friends founded Fun Tours in 1981. The trio would see tour companies bringing groups to the area and they wanted to get in on the fun, so they decided to form their own bus company.

Within a few months they had purchased a coach and set up Fun Tours with idea of taking people to Atlantic City.

Within three years, Fun Tours was offering packaged tours and a half dozen years later it began offering customized tours, eventually serving more than 150 groups.

From the start, Mr. Elmore was joined by his wife, Nancy, who was the company's first receptionist. The Elmore family, including his son Charles and daughter-in-law Gwen, eventually purchased the entire company, which today operates a fleet of 17 coaches.

Paul and Nancy Elmore "semi-retired" in 1997. Nancy Elmore

died in September of last year.

In addition to his son and daughter in law, Mr. Elmore is survived by a daughter, Paula Bray, two sisters and a brother.

Mr. Elmore was a retired Norfolk Police lieutenant and a Police Honor Guard participated in graveside services.

A memorial in Mr. Elmore's name has been established with the American Cancer Society, Fun Tours Relay for Life, P.O. Box 22718, Oklahoma City, OK 73123-1718.



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## Calendar

### JANUARY 2012

**6-10 ABA Marketplace,** Gaylord Texas Resort, Grapevine, Texas. Info: [www.buses.org](http://www.buses.org).

**8-9 Bus Industry Safety Council,** Gaylord Texas Resort, Grapevine, Texas. Info: [www.buses.org](http://www.buses.org).

**9-11 International Motor Coach Group Maintenance and Safety Meeting 2012,** Gaylord Texas Resort, Grapevine, Texas. Info: [www.imgcoach.com](http://www.imgcoach.com).

### FEBRUARY 2012

**8 2012 State Association Summit,** Long Beach, Calif. Info: [www.motorcoachexpo.com](http://www.motorcoachexpo.com), or call (800) 424-8262.

## Diabetic drivers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

suffering from diabetes.

While the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration prohibits drivers who have Type 1, or insulin-dependent diabetes, from working as interstate bus drivers, those with Type 2, or non-insulin dependent diabetes, are allowed to do so.

However, their disease must be well controlled and most carriers have specific policies to help them monitor those drivers.

Coach USA allows Type 2 diabetics to work as long as the company determines their disease is being controlled, said company attorney Christina Stoneburner.

"It is alright for them to drive as long as their diabetes is under

control with diet, medication and adequate medical supervision," she said.

Most companies, including Coach USA, monitor diabetic drivers through blood tests that track a patient's average blood sugar level for the previous three months. If the results show a level of less than 7, then the diabetes is considered under control and the drivers may continue working.

Those with higher readings could be subject to blackouts while behind the wheel and are not allowed to drive.

Stoneburner said each of the suspended drivers was taken off the job because of issues related to their Type 2 diabetes, including one who was not compliant and often had high blood sugar readings, another refused to turn in required medical records, and the third was newly diagnosed with the disease.

She said the suspensions lasted for various periods and all three drivers were returned to work each time after the company determined their disease was back under control.

Two of them, Kaleem Muhammad, 51, and Anthony James, 56, continue to drive for the company, while the third, Walter Kautz, 59, is retired.

Attorney Robert Hermann, who represents the drivers, contends the suspensions violated state employment discrimination regulations that protect workers from such treatment.

"The company took a proactive position here," he said, suggesting it suspended the drivers because of something that might happen in the future. He likened the action to punishing smokers because they might later develop lung cancer.

Motorcoach safety expert Matthew Daecher, president of Daecher Consulting Group, said motorcoach operators need to be aware of the medical condition of their drivers and review their medical forms carefully.

"Drivers sometimes lie on this form, indicating it is Type 2 and controlled via diet and pills, which makes medical qualification possible," he noted.

He said although there are no federal rules requiring diabetic drivers have more frequent medical checkups than other drivers, physicians who examine them have some leeway in qualifying them for shorter-than-the-current-two-year period if they have concerns about the progression of diabetes.

"Companies also are free to set internal policies on more frequent medical certifications as long as they treat all drivers the same," he noted.

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# Over-the-road trucks vs. buses: Only the road is the same

By Dave Millhouser

Perhaps you may recall the story, a couple of columns ago, where my boss dispatched me, with a flatbed truck, to bring back a burned bus. (You DO memorize these things, right?)

Perhaps I failed to mention that I'd never driven a tractor-trailer before, but figured "how different can it be from a bus?"

Everything went smoothly until I reached the garage and had to back the rig into a stall. The whole gang marched out to the parking lot to see the coach carcass, and got more entertainment than they expected.

Gotta tell ya, I learned the hard way (and with an amused audience) that backing a trailer requires skills, and they are counter-intuitive. I still smell burning clutch, hear clashing gears, and recall creative cursing, every time I recall that day.

Trucks and coaches are different in lots of ways, and it behooves us to remind legislators and regulators of that fact.

Trucks carry cargo, which rarely complains. As a result, their

builders put less effort into amenities like suspension, noise control and HVAC. In North America, tractor suspensions are so firm that manufacturers normally add springs to the cab mounts and driver's seat. These absorb some of the thrashing the driver might otherwise be taking.

Buses carry passengers who generally don't enjoy beatings, so manufacturers spend tons of effort smoothing the ride for the whole vehicle. In addition to coddling customers, those suspensions are gentle on the road surface. The effort to control the wheels' violence to the coach also works in the other direction, and a 50,000-pound bus pounds the pavement substantially less than a 50,000-pound truck.

Currently, coaches enjoy a measure of immunity from state weight laws, and it's important we keep it that way. In years past, operators had to either mechanically alter coaches, or lighten loads, to run in states with restrictive laws.

Properly loaded, coaches today meet a national standard, which supersedes state regulations, on federal highways.

On occasion, perhaps as a form

of revenue enhancement, states weigh (and fine) buses, citing local regulations.

If held to state truck standards, current 45-foot coaches could not operate legally in most jurisdictions. Imagine the consequences to our industry, the environment and the traveling public if we slip back into that mode.

Another important distinction between trucks and buses is the way they treat drivers.

Anyone who has been in a boat on a grumpy sea understands how tiring it is to fight constant motion. Coaches ride better than trucks, so drivers use less energy sitting in the seat.

Have you ever been driving around, searching for an address, and turned the radio down to avoid distraction? Crafty bus builders put the noisy engine in the back, and cover it with insulation, making the coach cockpit nearly as quiet as a luxury car. Things done for the passengers benefit often make the driver's job less stressful.

Freight rarely asks for meal stops or bathroom breaks, while most coach trips are punctuated by

such requests, offering drivers periodic changes of pace.

This is not to make the case that operating a coach is easier than driving a truck, only substantially different. Physically, bus driving is probably easier, but truckers don't have to contend with the whims of the traveling public. In some ways a coach driver is always "on."

Trucks outnumber buses by a bazillion, but our cargo is more valuable than theirs, and our industry deserves to be studied and understood as being unique. That's true when it comes to hours of service, coach construction, safety regulations and weight laws (I may have forgotten a few).

When regulators lump us with truckers, they are either uninformed or predisposed to take the easier course of action.

If they're looking for a comparable industry, they might take a peek at the public sector transit industry (currently exempt from many regulations the private sector must adhere to).

I've told this one before...but I'm hoping you forgot it.

Years ago, a call came in from

a gentleman in upstate New York who wanted to start a coach company. Since I was a hungry bus salesman, we quickly became best buddies.

He had operated trucks successfully for many years and had decided it would be easier to run coaches.

I asked him why he wanted to get into the buses, and he replied: "Because they load themselves." He hadn't given much thought to luggage.

Apparently the differences between trucks and buses were significant and stressful. When I checked back with him... he'd had a couple of heart attacks and was a candidate for a transplant.

Hope he made it.

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



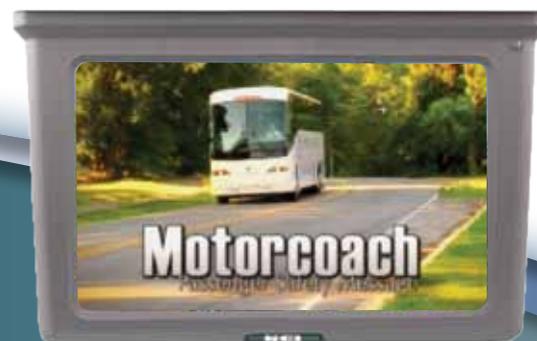
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# Bus parking spaces going, going, gone in downtown Toronto

TORONTO — Motorcoach parking in downtown Toronto has been significantly reduced by construction of a major new tourism attraction.

Toronto designates free, mostly time-restricted, on-street bus parking spaces in the downtown area. Some are available around the clock.

However, the spaces along Bremner Boulevard, near the city's landmark CN Tower and Metro Toronto Convention Centre, are no longer available.

The spaces have been lost to a construction staging area for the Ripley's Aquarium being built at the foot of CN Tower. The 135,000-square-foot aquarium is

expected to open during the summer of 2013. The completed facility will house an estimated 13,500 fresh and sea water creatures in its 1.51 million-gallon tanks.

The Ontario Motor Coach Association reports the project has permanently eliminated all bus parking spaces west of Lower Simcoe Street and most spaces east of

Lower Simcoe Street.

To make matters worse, it's likely all bus parking spaces on Bremner Boulevard and on Nelson Street (north of King Street) also will disappear.

The OMCA said it's pushing for the city to designate a "Motor Coach Loading Zone" on the north side of Bremner.

Meanwhile, the association says drivers requiring parking should consider using the Roger's Centre (paid) parking lot on the south side Bremner, west of Rees Street. It's the only off-street bus lot in the downtown area.

Alternatively, for free parking, drivers will have to leave the area after dropping their group and park at one of 30 free spaces in the Portlands (Villiers, Commissioners or Cherry streets).

The city told OMCA it plans to update its list and map of bus parking spaces, which can be found at [www.toronto.ca/transportation/parking/bus/index.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/transportation/parking/bus/index.htm).

## Tax relief

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

vide the service about a week before the event and he sent an e-mail to the school board complaining about what he contended was unfair competition by a tax-supported entity. The school district is funded by taxes collected in Williamsburg and James City County.

"This is very disappointing to know that the school system that we support through sponsorships, that we received our grade school education from and that now some of our kids attend, is using tax-payer dollars to compete with our business," he wrote.

He told the board that Oleta is ready to provide the shuttle service for the mall and he urged the school district to immediately withdraw its contract.

Smith, however, said he did not hear from the school district until four days after the sales event. That's when he received an e-mail from Burckbuchler in which the assistant superintendent apologized for not responding sooner and assured him the school district was not interested in competing with Oleta. He added that the district would not provide the service again.

Smith said the missed work meant that not only did his company lose revenue, but about a dozen drivers were deprived of making extra money, which would have been a nice holiday bonus for them.

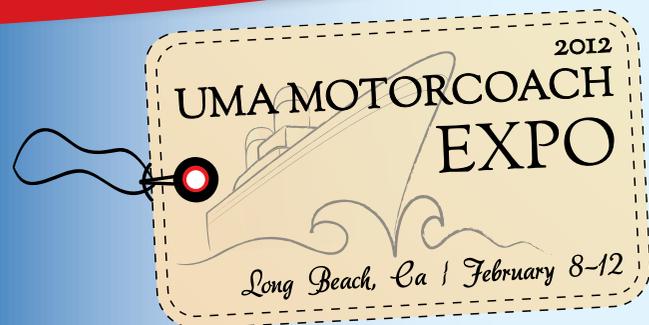
"Our drivers, by the way, are almost all residents of Williamsburg," he noted.

Despite not being able to provide the shuttle service this year, Smith said he is pleased with the outcome of the incident because of the school district's decision not to get involved in the shuttle service again.

"My only concern now is will they be providing charter service for others."



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## Family program

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

on your bus (that has been in a catastrophic accident), you could have over 100 family members calling you, and you may have buses out all over the U.S. that you're trying to deal with on non-accident-related stuff," she said. "Are you ready to handle having an accident of this kind?"

Catastrophic crashes are the kinds of events the NTSB transportation disaster assistance division was set up to handle, Sledzik said.

After a number of major airline accidents in the mid-1990s that resulted in tremendous loss of life, Congress conducted hearings into the poor treatment of victims' families by airlines, first responders and government agencies at all levels.

Lawmakers quickly passed a measure requiring airlines to set up family assistance programs and designated the NTSB as the coordinator. Similar legislation applying to Amtrak followed soon after.

With so much experience dealing with major transportation accidents, it seemed to make sense to offer NTSB expertise to the bus and motorcoach industry, Sledzik and Beckjord told the conference.

"We're just putting it out there because we see a lot of accidents," Beckjord said. "Why not offer you what we can provide the other (transportation) modes?"

### Industry input

Exactly what form the NTSB assistance would take is still taking shape and will be determined by industry feedback. Instead of waiting for legislation requiring the industry to take action (not that any is pending) they decided to approach the motorcoach and bus industry itself to see what kind of assistance they might want or need.

To that end, Sledzik and Beckjord outlined the kinds of issues operators will be confronted with when there's a major incident. They drew on their experience of investigating a number of serious bus crashes in recent years.

After a major accident with fatalities, they asked, who is going to answer the phones when victim families start to call? Who is going to deal with their questions about their loved ones — while you're still trying to operate a business?

Will that person be trained to deal with potentially hysterical or belligerent callers? Are you going to provide transportation for the victims' families to the accident site? Provide health care services to the injured?

Transport injured passengers to their hometowns? Cover burial expenses for the deceased? How

will you identify and handle victims' possessions and get them back into the proper hands?

These are the kinds of questions and issues the NTSB transportation disaster assistance division is equipped to handle, Sledzik said.

"We, at the board, can serve as a resource for family members who have those questions; we deal with this stuff all the time," he said. "You guys may not want to do that in your model if you decide to do family assistance going forward, but you will be involved with that because guess what — they are probably going to be calling you guys first."

### Industry interest

They also handed out a questionnaire to all attendees seeking to assess the level of interest within the industry.

The questionnaire asked:

- Do you believe the passenger motor carrier industry should address the topic of family assistance in the event of a transportation accident?

- Do you believe the passenger motor carrier industry would be interested in a full-length presentation on transportation disaster assistance—family assistance from the NTSB?

- If offered, do you think an NTSB training course on family assistance would be of interest to your industry?

- If offered, would your company be interested in enrolling in an NTSB family assistance course?

"We're just trying to gauge interest in the industry," Beckjord said. "I'll be honest with you — without it being a legislative thing, there are some folks even at NTSB who aren't quite sure you guys are interested."

"We thought there would be some interest so we wanted to come and present to a group that is really safety focused and get the feedback."

Possible approaches could be for the motorcoach and bus industry to send employees to the NTSB to attend one of the 'basic' family assistance training classes it currently offers twice a year, in March and October, at its training facility in Ashburn.

For information, go to [http://www.nts.gov/trainingcenter/CourseInfo/2012-Courses/TDA301\\_2012.html](http://www.nts.gov/trainingcenter/CourseInfo/2012-Courses/TDA301_2012.html).

Sledzik told *Bus & Motorcoach News* that if there were sufficient interest, a detailed course could be created specifically for the bus and motorcoach industry.

Contact Sledzik by email at [paul.sledzik@ntsb.gov](mailto:paul.sledzik@ntsb.gov) and Beckjord at [michele.beckjord@ntsb.gov](mailto:michele.beckjord@ntsb.gov).

## Court orders Oregon outfit shut down

PORTLAND, Ore. — A U.S. District Court here has issued a temporary restraining order shutting down a Portland bus and limousine operator.

Seemingly proving that some people don't get the message, the court took the action after the company, Prestige Limousines, apparently ignored a previous order by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to cease operations.

The FMCSA revoked Prestige's operating authority and ordered it be shut down at the end of August, but the company continued conducting trips, according to

the safety agency.

The court order prohibits Prestige from operating or providing passenger service.

A compliance review of the company in August led to an unsatisfactory safety rating and the initial order to stop operating. The review found Prestige failed to use properly licensed drivers and to implement a drug and alcohol testing program.

Additionally, the company failed to regularly inspect its vehicles and ensure its drivers were medically qualified.

Early last month, during its annual, two-week nationwide Passen-

ger Carrier Safety Inspection Strike Force, the FMCSA found Prestige buses were still on the road, and it declared the company an imminent hazard to the public and again ordered it be shut down.

Prestige, according to various websites, operated a fleet of eight or nine vehicles, including 32- and 44-passenger executive motorcoaches, a midsize party bus, a pair of sedans, two stretch limousines, and a van.

One website even lists a customer review dated Oct. 12, a month and a half after the initial cease-and-desist order was issued.

### Tailor-made approach

"We can tailor-make classes based on industry and location," he said. "That's what these surveys are trying to get at — to see what kind of unique issues are out there. We know how it works in the plane world, we know how it works in the rail world, what makes your situation unique and how do we deal with that?"

'If the industry embraces the concept, the NTSB could help it develop a model disaster-assistance plan.'

If the industry embraces the concept, the NTSB could even help it develop a model disaster assistance plan for companies to adopt and adapt, Sledzik said.

"What we have seen in some of the industries...is the idea of a model plan," he said. "Then you tailor-make that depending on what your specific needs are, where you operate, what kind of passengers you carry, and so on."

Customization of any model family assistance plan would be key because many of the services provided to victims families by the airline and rail industries can be tremendously expensive.

These services are generally paid for by airline insurance underwriters, and but insurers at the UMA safety conference warned that the airline and rail industries are so different from the bus and motorcoach industry that it might be difficult for bus companies and their insurance underwriters to provide similar services.

"A lot of you have seen a presentation I have done on dealing with a catastrophic accident," said Michelle Silvestro, assistant vice

president with National Interstate Insurance Co. "There's one particular slide that says, 'An insurance policy isn't a blanket that you throw over a catastrophic loss that covers everything.' So some of the things you're talking about aren't necessarily covered."

That said, planning for such an event is key to every stakeholder in the industry, she stated. "Planning, planning, planning is such a big part of being ready for that."

### What will work

Economic realities must play a role in each company developing or adapting a family assistance plan to their unique circumstances, Sledzik agreed.

"That's fine if they go in and say, 'Based on what our operating model is and how much we're earning...we're only going to pay for x, y, z and that's all I can afford. My underwriter will pay for a, b and c. For d, e and f, we'll just have to wing it and see what happens,'" he said.

Currently the NTSB transportation disaster assistance division becomes involved in a bus crash depending on the severity of the incident, whether NTSB investigators at the scene request its help, and if there are family members calling the NTSB seeking information, Sledzik said.

Only in recent years has the NTSB provided family assistance at motorcoach accidents. One of the first was the January 2008 accident involving a chartered ski bus that ran off a road and rolled near the remote town of Mexican Hat, Utah, killing 9 of 53 passengers on board and injuring many more, Beckjord said.

There were a variety of challenges facing everyone involved in dealing with the accident, she said. Because the area was so remote, victims were transported to hospitals in three states; there were multiple buses on the ski trip but the Phoenix-based bus owners did not

have a passenger manifest; the tour company that had put the trip together had a passenger manifest but did not know which passengers were on board the bus that crashed, and the families of people on the trip were all calling the bus company to try to get information on their loved ones.

### Arrow is proactive

The management of Arrow Stage Lines, which operated the bus, decided to provide a number of services to victim families, Sledzik said, including bringing injured passengers back to their homes, paying for burial services, and working to get personal possessions back into the proper hands.

"I helped the operator manage those things," he said. "They didn't have any legal requirement to do any of that stuff, yet they really wanted to make sure that they got taken care of."

One seminar attendee said he had personal experience with his the family assistance program his company had set up.

A number of years ago, a well-liked company driver was involved in an accident and killed in Seattle right after she had put Christmas cards in the other drivers' boxes, said James Colwell, a manager with HAP Alaska-Yukon, which provides land transportation and services to the Holland America Line and Princess Cruises.

"You can imagine the effect that had on drivers, to learn a) this driver was killed and b) there was a Christmas card from her in your box," he said.

"So, we activated the care program... It just made it so much easier. My team and I could investigate what was going on and deal with all the authorities and all that, and having a couple of care people deal with all the drivers and the family."

"It just makes it so much more easier," he told the conference. "To me, this would be an enormous asset."



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