

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

Happy Holidays

December 15, 2015

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

MCI expects to enter 2016 with new owner, management

DES PLAINES, Ill. — Motor Coach Industries, North America's largest coach manufacturer, is ending 2015 with increased profits and will roll into 2016 under new ownership and management.

KPS Capital Partners LP, which acquired MCI in 2010, has agreed to sell the company to Winnipeg-based New Flyer Industries Inc. in a deal valued at \$480 million. That includes \$455 million in cash and the assumption of \$25 million in liabilities.

The deal is expected to close in late December.

"In my opinion, there couldn't be a better owner for MCI going forward than New Flyer," said MCI Chief Executive Officer Rick Heller, who said he plans to step down after the sale closes.

Heller, noting the company's various owners over the past 20 to 30 years, said the sale "sort of gives MCI a permanent home or a permanent ownership going forward."

The deal combines MCI's position as the No. 1 maker of motorcoaches with New Flyer's position as the No. 1 manufacturer of heavy-duty transit buses.

MCI, which has three manufacturing facilities and nine service and parts distribution centers, has the largest installed base of motorcoaches in North America, with about 28,000 units, almost twice that of its nearest competitor, according to New Flyer's announcement on the planned acquisition.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ►



Winnipeg-based New Flyer Industries Inc. has agreed to purchase Motor Coach Industries in a deal valued at \$480 million. The sale is expected to close by the end of this year.

Procrastinators running out of time to register for IRP

WASHINGTON — Attention last-minute shoppers: the holiday rush is on to sign up motorcoaches and buses for the International Registration Plan (IRP), which becomes mandatory on Jan. 1 for most vehicles engaged in interstate travel.

"A bus operating on a base state — intrastate only — plate after Jan. 1, 2016, could be subject to being cited for improper registration for

not being registered as IRP-apportioned," said Tim Adams, chief executive officer of IRP Inc., which administers the plan.

Operators who ignored advice to start early to learn their state's filing processes and gathering essential paperwork are now facing an end-of-year crush at department of motor vehicle offices.

IRP was created through a reciprocity agreement among the 48

contiguous U.S. states, the District of Columbia and 10 Canadian provinces. The plan issues apportionable registration credentials for commercial vehicles based on the mileage traveled in each jurisdiction.

"There is still the option for a carrier to purchase a trip permit in lieu of having IRP," Adams said. "This is really only feasible for a carrier who would only make a

couple of trips outside of their base state as it would just get too costly to trip-permit all the time for a carrier who operates interstate on a regular basis."

Operators also should consider which vehicles require apportioned tags — those that operate only locally or intrastate do not require IRP registration. Contingencies, such as out-of-state breakdowns, should be considered, how-

ever, so carriers do not find themselves short of apportioned buses when they are needed on short notice.

Carriers registering through IRP for the first time will find their fees vary according to their base states and the states in which they do a lot of business. A fee estimation calculator can be found at the IRP website, <http://IRPonline.org>.

Drones that can repair potholes under study in England

LEEDS, England — We've all heard of drones that can hunt down terrorists, patrol our borders, film movies and even deliver packages.

So why not make drones that can repair potholes?

The University of Leeds is looking into that possibility with the help of a \$6.4 million grant from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, a non-departmental government body.

The university is using the grant money to develop small robots that are capable of identifying and repairing damaged streetlights and utility pipes as well as filling potholes.

The idea is to create a repair system that won't require the use of large machinery that disrupts traffic and city operations.

"We want to make Leeds the first city in the world to have zero

disruption from street works," said Phil Purnell, a professor in the university's school of engineering. "We can support infrastructure which can be entirely maintained by robots and make the disruption caused by the constant digging up the road in our cities a thing of the past."

The school plans to work on three types of repair drones:

- "Perch and repair" drones

would perch like birds on elevated structures to perform maintenance on things like streetlights and power line transformers.

- "Perceive and patch" drones would autonomously scan the streets for damage and fill potholes.

- "Fire and forget" drones would be deployed inside utility pipes to report damage and perform repairs.

Still unclear is how the drones will carry out these maintenance tasks, although significant steps have been taken in past years to use drones in construction projects.

Researchers at ETH Zurich's Institute for Dynamic Systems and Control recently demonstrated a walkable rope bridge built autonomously by flying robots. The technology for aerial mapping and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7 ►

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Low gas prices continue to erode Greyhound's earnings

ABERDEEN, Scotland — Lower gas prices, weakness in the Canadian oil sands market and the loss of two rail franchises in the UK helped push FirstGroup PLC's revenue and profit lower during the first half of 2015.

The parent company of Greyhound Lines, First Student and First Transit in North America, plus large rail and bus operations in the UK, reported a 33 percent decrease in pretax profit and a 17 percent decline in revenue.

The company said the numbers were in line with management's expectations.

FirstGroup reported a pretax loss of \$11.4 million for the six months that ended Sept. 30, compared with a profit of \$15 million in the same period last year. Revenue declined to \$3.7 billion from \$4.5 billion last year.

After stripping out amortization charges and other one-off items, adjusted pretax profit was \$34 million, compared with \$50.7 million a year earlier.

"Overall trading for the Group during the first half was in line with our expectations, with outperformance in some areas offsetting the more challenging market environment in others," FirstGroup CEO

Tim O'Toole said in a statement.

"Our expectations for the Group's overall trading performance for the full year are slightly increased as a result of the change in the basis of estimate for rail pensions."

All three of FirstGroup's North American divisions experienced financial declines during the six-month period.

Greyhound, First Student and First Transit produced combined revenue of \$2.1 billion in the first

six months of 2015 and operating profits of \$87.9 million.

That compares with last year's first-half combined revenue of \$2.2 billion and operating earnings of \$105.6 million.

Greyhound's revenue decreased to \$481.6 million from \$527 million a year ago, a 6.2 percent decline that the company attributed to lower customer demand across the intercity coach industry because of lower fuel prices, which has made travel by private automo-

bile cheaper.

Greyhound's adjusted operating profit was \$40.2 million, down from \$50.3 million, resulting in an adjusted operating margin of 8.3 percent, down from 9.5 percent last year.

The company said Greyhound Express, a point-to-point bus service, was more resilient, with revenue decreasing 3.1 percent in the first half.

FirstGroup expressed optimism about Greyhound's future

returns because of the new yield-management and pricing systems the company began rolling out in late September.

"Compared with previous periods of significant fuel price reductions, Greyhound's business model is now better able to flex in response to the resulting changes in demand," the company said.

"We expect that these systems, together with the other customer relationship enhancements already delivered, will help us to deliver our target of 12 percent margins over the medium term, recognizing that longer-term oil price trends will impact the timing."

First Student, the largest private school-bus contractor in the U.S. and Canada, reported first-half revenue of \$1 billion, down only slightly from the 2014 period. But its operating profit declined to \$1.4 million from \$6 million last year.

The decline was attributed to fewer operating days because of the timing of school calendars.

"Compared with the same period in the prior year, there were fewer school days on which First Student operated in the first half due to the timing of Labor Day, which resulted in many schools

NY man takes joyride in Greyhound

NEW YORK CITY — A man known for his obsession with buses and trains and his penchant for taking them for joy rides decided recently to commandeer a Greyhound bus.

New York police said Darius McCollum, who has been arrested more than two dozen times over the past three decades for similar offenses, stole the bus from the Port Authority Bus Terminal in Midtown Manhattan.

The bus was discovered missing not long before it was scheduled to leave on a trip to Richmond, Va.

Authorities were able to quick-

ly track its whereabouts to Brooklyn. Lanesha Gipson, a spokeswoman for Greyhound, said the bus, like all of the company's coaches, was equipped with a GPS tracking device. No passengers were on board.

Around 4 p.m., police officers spotted the bus and stopped it near Third Avenue and Union Street in the Gowanus section of Brooklyn.

McCollum was taken into custody and charges were pending.

The New York Times reported that McCollum has Asperger's syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder. He was first arrested in

1981, when he was 15 and took the controls of a subway train.

Since then, McCollum has stolen buses numerous times and, in one instance, dressed as a transit employee and managed to get inside the control room at the 57th Street subway station.

McCollum, who worked for a time in a train museum, has spent about a third of his life in jail or in prison.

A police official said that even while McCollum was being held in Brooklyn he gave no indication that he would change his ways. The official said McCollum told detectives, "I'm stealing a plane next."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 ►




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THE DOCKET

Proposed FMCSA rules in various stages of completion

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has several major rulemakings in various stages of completion, as well as a few that were expected to be published in recent weeks.

Here is a rundown on some of the rulemakings being considered by FMCSA:

Electronic Logging Devices — This long-delayed rulemaking would establish minimum performance and design standards for electronic logging devices (ELDs), requirements for the mandatory use of ELDs by drivers, and measures to address concerns about harassment resulting from the mandatory use of ELDs.

A final rule was expected to be published in the *Federal Register* late last month or before the end of December and will be effective in two years.

Prohibition of Coercion — This rulemaking would ensure that an operator of a commercial motor vehicle is not coerced by a motor carrier, shipper, receiver or transportation intermediary to operate a commercial vehicle in violation of FMCSA regulations.

The final rule was scheduled for publication late last month.

Carrier Safety Fitness Determination — FMCSA proposes to amend the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations to adopt revised methodologies that would

result in a safety fitness determination. The proposed methodologies would use the BASIC scores, investigations, or a combination of on-road safety data and investigation information to determine a carrier's safety fitness.

Publication was expected before Christmas.

Commercial Driver's License Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse — The rule would create a database of drivers who have failed or refused to take a drug or alcohol test. Carriers would then be required to query the database when making hires and upload drug testing information.

Publication is expected early next year, but it could take a while

to implement the database.

Heavy Vehicle Speed Limiters — This rule would require the installation of speed limiting devices on heavy vehicles. Many vehicles already are equipped with speed limiters, although some vehicles do not have the limit set.

The comment period on the proposed rule was set to end earlier this month.

Entry Level Driver Standards — A proposed rule to set minimum training standards for new entrant commercial vehicle drivers has been sent Office of Management and Budget for approval, the last step before publication.

FMCSA will take comments from the industry, stakeholders

and the general public for 60 days following the rule's publication. The rule has not been made public yet, so what it will require of drivers and carriers is not yet known.

The rule was produced via a so-called "negotiated rulemaking," meaning a committee of drivers, fleets, regulators and other industry stakeholders met several times to create the basic form of the rule before submitting it to FMCSA to finalize and put into the regulatory pipeline.

The committee's key recommendations for the rule included requiring 30 hours of behind-the-wheel training, establishing a registry of driver training providers and developing certified curricula for CDL applicants.

Special NYC parking regulations in effect for holidays

NEW YORK CITY — Special regulations and additional parking areas in Manhattan are in effect until Jan. 2, 2016, to improve tour and charter bus operations and maintain traffic flow during the holiday season.

Buses bringing parties to Manhattan's core (Rockefeller Center and Radio City Music Hall) loca-

tions cannot park or layover in the core.

Buses must drop off passengers and immediately withdraw to private off-street parking or to the limited on-street peripheral areas.

Buses should return to the core at the scheduled departure time and wait in "No Parking," "No Standing" or "No Standing except

Trucks Loading & Unloading" zones for no more than 20 minutes (15 minutes for Rockefeller Center and Radio City Music Hall) for passengers to rejoin the bus.

Buses heading to Radio City Music Hall should drop-off passengers on the north side of 51st Street between 5th and 6th avenues and the south side of 50th

Street between 6th Avenue and Rockefeller Plaza.

At the drop-off point, the driver will be given a voucher specifying the pick-up time and location after the show.

Buses must comply with New York City regulations prohibiting engine idling. No idling is allowed if the temperature is 40 degrees or

higher. If the temperature drops below 40 degrees, idling is permitted for only three minutes.

If you have questions, call 212-485-7200. For maps of city parking restrictions go to: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/holiday-motor-coach-2015.pdf?ET_CID=holiday_motorcoach_103015&ET_RID=6544327.

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Local roads also need more money for repairs

NEW YORK CITY — Federal funding for state road projects has been getting all the attention in recent months, but local highways also are in need of repair.

A study by the Manhattan Institute found that most cities, towns and counties, whose roads and streets are for the most part ineligible for federal funding, also need more road money.

Most roads Americans travel on are local roads, and most local governments depend on local taxes for road maintenance and repair and to build new ones.

State aid helps, the study said, but 70 percent of the money spent on local roads comes from local revenue, mostly property taxes and other general-fund sources.

Partly as the result of the Great Recession and its effects on local revenue, capital spending for local roads is at a 20-year low.

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New York-area jitney drivers committing dangerous acts

NEW YORK CITY — A New York television station conducting an undercover investigation caught jitney drivers committing such dangerous acts as texting or talking on cellphones and speeding on New York and New Jersey roadways.

WPIX-TV said it conducted the investigation after scores of complaints, safety violations and a crash that killed an infant.

Some jitneys are mid-sized buses, while others are simply re-outfitted school buses. All pick up commuters for as little as one dollar.

The station said one driver took or made as many as nine phone calls while racing down a street in New Jersey. Another took her eyes off the road to text or scroll on her smartphone while navigating traffic outside the Lincoln Tunnel in Manhattan.

Some of the private jitney companies have racked up almost 100 unsafe driving violations in the past two years, with only a handful of drivers on staff. Federal violations accrued include driving without a commercial license,

driving with a suspended license, and driving while intoxicated or fatigued.

There is no absolute limit for the number of violations one company can accrue. An official with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration said that imminent hazard and “out-of-service” determinations are made on a case-by-case basis. Companies with a poor safety rating are given priority for investigation or intervention.

Sphinx Transportation, which

operates in New Jersey and New York, has received 196 violations in the past two years, KPIX found. A Sphinx driver was charged in 2013 with death by auto, reckless driving and using a cellphone behind the wheel after his bus careened into three parked cars and a light pole, which toppled onto the stroller of an 8-month-old girl.

“That’s the second that changed my entire life,” the baby’s mother told the station. “My daughter would have been 3 this

year.”

Federal regulators have investigated Sphinx Transportation eight times in the past 10 years. The carrier has been flagged for serious driver fitness violations and problems with vehicle maintenance. When undergoing inspection, their buses have a 30 to 40 percent out-of-service rate, but the company continues to hold a satisfactory federal safety rating.

KPIX’s undercover investigation found Sphinx drivers talking

or texting behind the wheel repeatedly in the past two months.

“I apologize for what’s happened, but I will take care of it,” Magdy Abdallah, president of Sphinx Transportation, told the station.

Abdallah said the company’s safety policy prohibits drivers from speeding, reckless driving, driving without a proper license, using a cellphone behind the wheel and other hazardous behavior.

But most offenses, according to company policy, leave room for a second or even a third chance behind the wheel.

When asked how the company would handle the driver who used his phone nine times while driving, Abdallah responded that he would not be fired, only suspended for a week.

“It truly is a sad thing that after the laws have been enacted, that after we’ve done enforcement, that there are still bus operators out there that are violating the law,” said Steve Lee, acting director of the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs.

Congressman backs fuel-tax boost

WASHINGTON — Even though by now Congress should be done with the drawn-out debate over federal transportation funding, an Oregon lawmaker has vowed to continue pushing for a fuel-tax increase.

Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., told a major trucking publication that he would try to get support for such an increase when Congress works on a tax-policy overhaul later this year.

Blumenauer has been trying in recent months to drum up support

for increases in gasoline and diesel taxes to pay for infrastructure projects, but neither Republican nor Democratic leaders have backed his proposal.

President Obama also has voiced his opposition to a fuel-tax increase.

The last time fuel taxes were increased was in 1993, when they were raised to the current levels of 24.4 cents per gallon of diesel and 18.4 cents per gallon of gas.

Meanwhile, in Blumenauer’s home state of Oregon, Gov. Kate

Brown said she doesn’t expect any new funding for infrastructure projects until 2017.

Despite the need for more funding, the Oregon Legislature was unable to reach an agreement by the end of the 2015 session. With a short, 35-day session planned for 2016, and no consensus for infrastructure funding, there is little hope for action next year, Brown said, adding that she will work with the business community to back a funding plan in the 2017 session.



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IMG adds Karst Stage in Montana, now has 55 members

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. — The International Motorcoach Group has added Karst Stage of Bozeman, Mont., to its North American network.

Karst's membership brings the IMG network to 55 companies in the U.S. and Canada and helps expand the organization's national footprint to a popular area for motorcoach travel.

"We are excited to have Karst Stage join IMG as they will bring great coverage and service to some of the United States' most wonderful states for touring — with motorcoach travel being the primary

and best way to experience Montana and the national parks," said IMG President Bronwyn Wilson.

Karst Stage President Dan Martin said the company has been growing at a fast pace and its future business plan is to keep up that pace over the next five years.

"In order to do that, we wanted

to align ourselves with a premium industry organization and operators to try and leverage their knowledge," Martin said. "The move into IMG, the industry's most progressive organization, and partnering with their outstanding operators will undoubtedly help us achieve this.

"Similarly," he added, "we feel that we fill an important part of the regional map for IMG benefitting the members at large. Flying the IMG flag is a major milestone in Karst's century-plus history."

Karst Stage operates tours, charters, school buses and transit services.

IMG members operate more than 7,000 vehicles and provide services to more than 21 million charter and tour customers in the U.S. and Canada each year.

Member companies must adhere to strict standards and qualifications for invitation-only membership.

Drones

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

surveying is already well developed, so identifying areas that need maintenance shouldn't be a problem.

A bigger issue is overcoming the payload limitations of drones. For a drone to fix a pothole, it must be able to transport heavy construction materials such as cement or asphalt. While there are efforts to create drones that can carry more weight without being too cumbersome and clumsy themselves, a more realistic solution appears to be using multiple drones flying in formation to carry heavy payloads.

In 2012, Vijay Kumar of the University of Pennsylvania robotics lab demonstrated that small drones could operate in tight formations with centimeter precision.

And *Gizmag* reported recently that the Aerial Robotics Cooperative Assembly System, a consortium of European robotics professors, is working on a "cooperative free-flying robot system for assembly and structure construction" — drones that can fly in cooperation to share the weight of heavy building materials.

The University of Leeds said it will work with the Leeds City Council and the UK Collaboration for Research in Infrastructure and Cities to make sure the robots are thoroughly tested before being used in trials in a safe and responsible manner.

"Detecting faults and weaknesses early and then quickly performing smart repairs is the key," said Rob Richardson, director of the National Facility for Innovative Robotic Systems at the university.

"Our robots will undertake precision repairs and avoid the need for large construction vehicles in the heart of our cities. We will use the unique capabilities of our robotic facility to make new, more capable, robots."



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Smartphone apps can improve small-business efficiency

By Kit Eaton
The New York Times

Successfully operating a company often requires that speed and efficiency be priorities.

Luckily, there are plenty of apps for smartphones or tablets that can help people collaborate and make quicker, smarter decisions.

Slack. Slack is quickly becoming the go-to app for team communications.

The app is essentially a chat room that allows real-time messaging between team members. You can start different chat rooms and name them.

For example, you could have an open chat room for discussing general ideas or day-to-day events, and a different room for planning strategies.

A chat can be for a group of people, or you can have private, one-on-one discussions. You also can share images, videos, and files that are pertinent to your business, as well as plain text messages.

Slack integrates with external services like Dropbox and Twitter, and its search function is excellent, so it's easy to find details of a previous discussion without combing through lots of text.

A recent update added a feature for the Apple Watch that alerts you to new chat messages sent via Slack.

The app's interface looks great and it feels like a lot of time has been spent making it easy to use. Best of all, Slack is free for an unlimited number of users and an unlimited amount of time, and the app is available on iOS and An-

droid. There is also a commercial version for a fee.

Trello. When you want to move beyond discussing a new business plan and start enacting it, the Trello app is a fabulous option. Trello is described by its makers as a "whiteboard with superpowers" and this is a great description of how it feels to use it.

Think of it like a digital planning tool: You can keep notes, create to-do lists and checklists, and so on.

Boards can be populated with text, images, and other items, and you can even create notifications and alerts so you can make a plan and act on it.

As with Slack, the information you create inside Trello is synchronized through the cloud so team members can collaborate through

their own devices, and the app can show you who is logged in and working on a particular board.

Trello is powerful, and easy to use.

But the app does have a learning curve, so you'll need to allocate some time to teaching your team to use its whiteboards, information "cards" and so on.

It's free on both iOS (including an Apple Watch extension) and Android, and your boards can also be retrieved on the Web.

Expensify. Keeping on top of expenses can be time-consuming, but the Expensify app can streamline the process. It allows you to scan a sales receipt, identify the text and figures, and create an expense filing without lots of typing.

There's no need to keep those annoying paper receipts.

Expensify can also track time spent working and the number of miles driven, including automatically tracking distances using your phone's GPS.

It has timed alerts for itineraries, plus an automatic currency conversion.

LogoScopic. If you need a new logo design for your company, you can create one quickly with the LogoScopic app.

The app has more than 850 logo designs that are separated into categories.

When you've found one you like, you can edit characteristics like size and color and add text in about 100 fonts.

There's a free version with a limited number of templates for those who want to try it out. It costs \$5 on iOS.

Obama missed chance to raise fuel tax, LaHood claims

By David Shepardson
Detroit News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Former Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood says the Obama administration could have won support for a gas tax hike to restore the nation's crumbling roads — and says he would have pushed for a national law on distracted driving if he had served a second term.

LaHood — who headed the 55,000 person department with a \$77 billion budget from 2009 through early 2013 — writes of frustrations in his job in a new memoir: "Seeking Bipartisanship: My Life in Politics," published last month by Cambria Press.

"When (Obama) took office, most everyone accepted the need for action on transportation. They

knew where the bad roads were. They knew about bad bridges that needed to be fixed. They knew we suffered with outdated transit systems. But we could never figure out a way to pay for the fixes.

"The administration would not lobby for an increase in the gas tax when it had the votes," LaHood said. "Failing to seize the opportunity to redo transportation in a large way was the biggest disappointment during my time in the administration... But part of being on the team is that once a decision is made, you have to go along."

He said the administration in 2009 could have passed a six-year highway bill — one proposed by Rep. Jim Oberstar, D-Minn, who then chaired the House Transportation Committee. He called for a six-year, \$500 billion plan. The White

House told LaHood to oppose the plan and only back a short-term increase until the White House could settle on a longer-term plan.

"I think we could have paid for the Oberstar plan. It would have required President Obama to make an aggressive play to raise the gas tax as a first step," LaHood said.

In 2009, he noted that one option would be a vehicle miles traveled fee — only to see then-White House spokesman Robert Gibbs instantly reject it.

"I did not appreciate the way Gibbs handled it. In any event, the options for funding a vigorous transportation policy never received a full hearing at the White House."

The administration in 2011 proposed a \$556 billion, six-year plan that was not approved.

Instead Congress has infused

about \$70 billion into the highway trust fund from the general fund over the last five years in a series of more than 30 short-term bills. The growing fuel efficiency of cars and trucks — and a gas tax that hasn't risen since 1993 — has led to shrinking revenue to pay for road repairs.

At press time, Congress was on the verge of approving a six-year, \$325 billion plan — far less than the \$478 billion over six years the administration proposed earlier this year.

LaHood made distracted driving a big part of his agenda.

"If I had stayed for a second term at DOT, my goal would have been to get Congress to pass a national law to prevent distracted driving," LaHood said.

The book does not mention

major auto safety issues during his tenure, including Jeep SUVs that could catch fire and sudden acceleration recalls of Toyota vehicles.

LaHood said no member of President Obama's cabinet in the first term "cracked the inner circle" of the president. Instead, Obama relied on a close group of advisers like the first lady, Rahm Emanuel, David Axelrod, Valerie Jarett, Robert Gibbs and Vice President Joe Biden.

"As time passed, the president seemed to be to become more isolated, more insulated from those outside the in-group, less engaged with others," LaHood wrote. "It is arguably one reason why commentators have accused the president of losing touch with such issues as the rollout of Obamacare midway through his second term."

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'Cybernating' is great, unless you're driving a bus

By Dave Millhouser

Darn. I was hoping to accomplish every writer's dream and invent a word.

Sadly, someone beat me to it, and "cybernate" is already in Google.

My definition would have been "becoming so dependent on computers taking care of us that we hibernate."

In ye olden days we drove with one eye on the dash gauges, looking for signs of minor problems or impending doom. When a needle was moving in an undesirable direction, we'd tap (then slap) the dash, hoping to intimidate it back to normal.

On rare occasions, that actually worked. If we paid attention, we had plenty of warning before the aptly named "idiot lights" illuminated our failure.

Many modern dashes work differently, with computers monitoring systems and, as an afterthought, throwing a little information the driver's way. In some cases, gauges appear on the dash screen only when retrieved by a magical sequence of keystrokes, or when the

world is turning to poop.

For example, you can be blissfully cybernating down the road unaware that the engine temperature is gradually rising. When it reaches a threshold, the gauge pops up on the dash display, and lights glare at you.

If you don't quickly make the computer happy, it decides who it likes best, the engine or you. You lose.

If you had been watching the gauge, you might have caught that underhanded engine headed for overheating. If you were climbing a long grade, slowing down might help. If it's something more serious, catching things early provides an opportunity to stop safely where you want, instead of having that cranky computer choose.

Oil and air pressure are just as sneaky as temperature. The coach's computer will respond to their desires, too, so keeping an eye on them is a good idea. Heaven knows what the electrical system is thinking.

Models of coaches differ in terms of what is displayed full time. On some you can scan all the important things like in ye olden

days. On others you have to call them up.

It's worth the effort to do that periodically, but pick your spots (flailing at dash buttons in traffic might be counterproductive, while checking engine temperature climbing a grade makes sense).

Cybernating isn't limited to monitoring the health of a bus. Increasingly, computers are enforcing driving safety.

Adaptive cruise control helps reduce tailgating, while lane departure warning makes an electronic effort to keep you on the "straight and narrow." GPS tells you where to turn and automatic stability control keeps you from turning too fast.

No need to thump tires because they're monitored. Event recorders, electronic logging — aw heck, you get it.

Pretty soon employers everywhere are gonna be saying the same thing all my bosses have said: "What do I need you for?"

First, this stuff breaks (and the jury is out on how reliable it will be as coaches age). When it works, it does a decent job of overcoming the momentary lapses we all have, but

it's never as smooth as a good driver.

Second, when we cybernate down the road we're failing to do the one thing that real drivers excel at — anticipating traffic conditions so that sudden maneuvers aren't necessary.

Alert (and experienced) drivers see flashing blue lights ahead and recognize their significance. They spot erratic drivers and avoid them. Drivers who pay attention are able to interpret what they see and avoid problems that a computer can only react to.

They have the ability to "understand" what is developing ahead of them, a skill that grows with experience and training.

The new "stuff" will probably enhance safety in the future, but it's best use is as a backstop for those moments we all have, not as a primary instrument of safe, smooth driving.

Cybernating comes with a couple of risks. In addition to the fact that mechanical things fail and software isn't all knowing, the temptation for some drivers to cede responsibility to a machine can lead to all sorts of legal mis-

chief down the road.

Remember the computer Hal in *2001: a Space Odyssey*?

A number of years ago, after dropping off a demonstrator bus in Maine, I caught a Concord Coach out of Portland headed to Boston. About halfway through the two-hour trip I felt mildly uncomfortable and couldn't, at first, put my finger on what was "different."

The bus was quiet, a movie was playing, the temperature was fine. In fact, it felt like I was sitting in the first-class section of an airliner, so much so that it felt wrong not to have a seat belt on. (This was years before they were available.)

The driver was doing such a good job of anticipating stops and lane changes, and even avoiding rough pavement, that I forgot I was on a bus. No computer can drive a bus that smoothly.

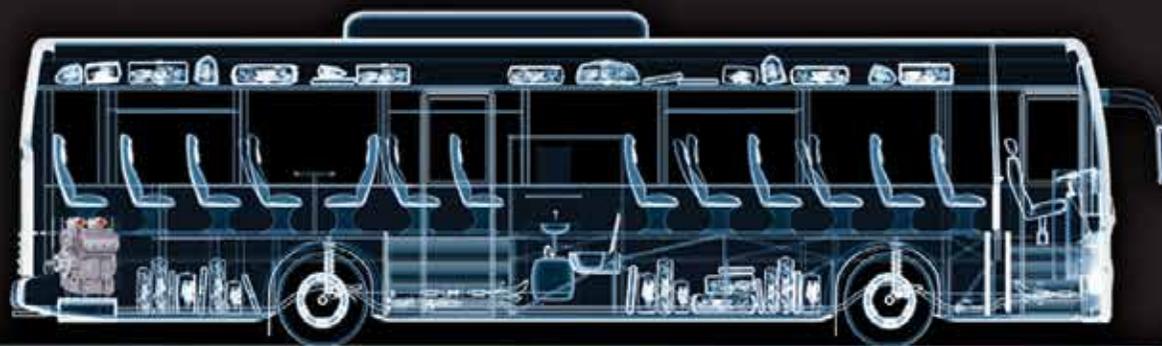
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Graphics companies transform coaches into works of art

The modern motorcoach is nearly the world's largest mobile billboard and certainly much more stylish than the longer but plain boxy truck trailer.

With the help of modern computer technology, the motorcoach graphics designer can put any artistic vision onto that coach canvas.

"Anything goes. It is definitely open to the imagination," said Esther Morissette, executive vice president of the coach division at Turbo Imaging in Saint-Georges, Quebec.

"You have a 45-foot vehicle that is 10 feet high if you cover the windows. It can be bigger than some fixed billboards. Using the entire canvas to design, print and install on these vehicles is great. You can certainly get more creative than a plain red stripe along the side."

Currently, computers are behind even the simplest designs due to the ease and cost of duplicating art.

"Painting on coaches is way in the past," Morissette said. "You can count on your fingers the number of people who paint buses."

Ron Leblanc, director of the motorcoach division at Team Coach Imaging in Sainte-Marie, Quebec, said operators that still have painted coaches know they will have them for several years and won't want to change them.

"It is more expensive and has a quality finish, not that (printed) graphics aren't as

good," Leblanc said.

Simple but classy statements can be made with an older but still popular technology using solid-color vinyl films.

"We do computer cutting with the rolled vinyl," Leblanc said. "We can do over 100 colors and have reflective, non-reflective and special metallic colors. When a company has several coaches coming out of the factory with the base paint, all they have to do is put their name on it. There are still companies that do that but there are less."

The newest brushes in the graphic designer's box are digital printing heads that deliver solvent-based inks onto adhesive-backed film at resolutions of up to 1,440 dots per inch. For motorcoach use, designs are typically printed on rolls up to 62 inches wide. One strip can go around the entire bus and strips can be overlapped for taller designs.

"We can go 500 feet long," Leblanc said.

The vinyl films used for vehicle wraps, mostly manufactured in the U.S. by 3M Company, can serve as nearly permanent fixtures on a coach or can be produced for temporary decoration.

"There are two main material films," Morissette said. "If a need is temporary, we use an easily removable film. Some of the campaigns for advertising will last just a weekend. We can install graphics on 20 buses for 10 days and then remove them. We



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Hitting the highway with the flashy logo of your sports team serves as prestige advertising for the school and for the carrier hauling the team.

have to use a highly premium film designed specifically for that so there is no damage to the substrate of the vehicle or the existing graphics upon removal.

"If a client wants to portray his own services and wants to fully wrap the buses for many years, we will use a permanent, pre-

mium film that will last five to seven years."

Designs that continue over a coach's side windows are printed in a film dotted with millions of tiny holes, she said.

"It reduces vision but people can still see through it."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11 ►

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A motorcoach is a moving billboard that promotes schools, events and attractions.

Graphics

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

Current tastes in motorcoach graphics range from basic and dignified to full-blown modern art, Leblanc said.

“A lot of companies want their buses to look the same. They want to make sure their name and the DOT numbers are in the same place so you could line up all the buses and wouldn’t see a difference.”

Different look

Then there are carriers who view their fleet as a traveling art gallery.

“They don’t want their buses to look the same. They want a different look for each one and it has to be something special,” Leblanc said.

Fleet owners want to pass on their core values and service through their image, Morissette said.

“They want people to perceive them as the type of company that they are.”

And, Leblanc said, “They want people to see their bus pull up and think, ‘I want to get in that one.’”

Digital printing enables operators to go beyond logos and favorite basic colors to visually depict their services and destinations at reasonable cost.

“You can do a coach for \$4,800 to \$7,000. If you are touching the windows you can range from \$6,000 to \$10,000,” Morissette said. “We have top-of-the-line printing equipment. The technology has improved greatly so the printing is very high-definition. The clarity and brightness of the colors

is incredible.”

Leblanc said Team Coach Imaging is doing a lot of scenic wraps for operators who are promoting tourism in their areas.

School logos popular

“Also, we are getting a lot of demand for designs of colleges and universities,” he said.

Hitting the highway with the flashy logo of your Big State U. sports team serves as prestige advertising for the school and for the carrier hauling it, he said.

“It is a moving billboard that promotes the college or university and shows people how proud the carrier is to be with their sports team,” Leblanc said.

Mobile motorcoach billboards are sometimes used to carry paid advertising, Morissette said.

“Bus wrapping with advertising for sponsors will generate revenue for the fleet owner. The client could be a casino, a university or a temporary event. A marketing agency may approach an operator to use their bus for a sponsor who is sponsoring the event. We are being requested more and more to completely wrap buses for advertising for companies like Bridgestone and Disney.”

Team Coach Imaging and Turbo Imaging can handle graphics for a coach or fleet from design through printing and installation, which can be done at their shops in Canada or at the carriers’ own shops. Wrap installers certified by 3M are located across North America.

“Once a customer decides what they

want to do, there is the process of designing on the computer and placing the design on the bus or coach frame, then having it approved,” Leblanc said. “Once it is approved you can count on about 10 days to produce and install.”

Easy to ship

“We can ship an entire bus wrap — or many bus wraps — in a small box,” Morissette said. “It is light so shipping is not an issue. We have done installations from the East Coast to the West Coast and in Hawaii and Puerto Rico.”

The graphics companies often dispatch their own installation teams to special events.

“We have done projects in five days if something crazy comes up,” Leblanc said. “We did a 13-bus wrap in a week and a half. Sometimes you have sponsors come in at the last minute for an event like the Super Bowl. You can do a whole coach wrap in a day, but to do a good job you need a day and a half.”

Morissette said Turbo Imaging has teams that travel to large events. “We handled the FIFA women’s World Cup soccer tournament this summer and had to install in every different city across Canada.”

Coach wraps were changed as national teams advanced.

“We would follow the coaches and change the team logo at the quarterfinals, semifinals and finals,” she said. “We had to be on the road with these coaches and be ready to switch logos and turn them around overnight so the teams would be in the right buses.”



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Escot providing free downtown shuttles in Florida city

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Escot Bus Lines of Largo, Fla., has begun running a free shuttle service around downtown St. Petersburg under a six-month pilot program.

Escot President Brian Scott, a United Motorcoach Association board member, said the company

is running two transit buses on Friday and Saturday nights from 5 p.m. to midnight as part of the city of St. Petersburg's Park Once Downtown Shuttle Program.

The program is designed to make locating parking downtown easier and to cut down on traffic jams.

City officials are encouraging people to park in one of the city's parking garages, then ride the free shuttles around downtown.

"We're trying to help people out who are trying to get more than a couple blocks away from the parking garages," director of transportation Evan Mory said. "We're trying

to get people to use the garages and not circle the block looking for parking. We have plenty of capacity in our garages. They really barely fill up. Both garages have over a thousand spaces."

Escot already has a contract with the city to provide special event services, Scott said.

People

ANAHEIM, Calif. — **AmericanStar Trailways** received the 2015 CHP STAR Award as California's top commercial bus company for its outstanding safety record in driver compliance, bus operations and terminal inspection procedures.

Commissioner *Joseph Farrow* of the **California Highway Patrol** presented the award to AmericanStar during this year's CHP's Commercial Vehicle Safety Summit in Anaheim.

AmericanStar President *Trudy Dockerty*, Vice President *Robert Dockerty*, and Director of Maintenance *Michael Davis* were on hand to accept the award.

The CHP STAR (Safe Transportation Achievement Recognition) Awards program judges bus and truck companies on specific safety performance, including accident frequency, personnel and hiring practices, documented safety policies and procedures, driver-safety training, internal accident self-assessments, driver retraining, maintenance program, and all terminal inspection records.

The Grover Beach-based AmericanStar Trailways is a woman-owned small business in its 25th year of operation. The company has experience in all types of motorcoach services, as well as vehicle maintenance and driver safety training.

GERMANTOWN, Pa. — *Pearl E. Bast*, who founded **Riteway Bus Service** with her husband, *Rollie*, in 1957, passed away peacefully last month.

She was 94.

Pearl Bast drove a school bus for many years and participated in the growth of the bus company, which became GO Riteway Transportation Group. She traveled with her husband on the motorcoaches and was often a tour guide for group tours.

Bast is survived by her children, Ronald and Rochelle, two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

CHERRY HILL, N.J. — *Patricia A. Cowley* has been named executive director of **Greater New Jersey Motorcoach Association**, effective Jan. 1.

Cowley has been involved in activities related to the bus industry since the early 1990s, initially working with **Bowers, Schumann and Welch**, which managed a large purchasing program for transportation clients throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest.

Eight years ago, she was involved in the development of an industry peer group called **Motorcoach Partners with Integrity (MPI)** and still serves as the group's facilitator.

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'Reach out and touch' your customers and employees

By Christian Riddell
Motorcoach Marketing Council

If you were watching an episode of "The Golden Girls" in 1987, chances are you would have seen the latest advertising campaign from AT&T.

It was a real heartstring puller in which Robbie, huddled in his dark dorm room at college, picks up the phone to call his bustling family back home. It was a minute of pure 1980s gold.

The message of this successful ad campaign was the importance of connecting with the people who matter to us.

The slogan? "Reach out and touch someone."

Although the ad focused on connections forged between friends and family, I'd like to emphasize this same idea in our industry, focusing on meaningful connections between customers and employees.

This is a great time of year, a time when we have the opportunity to think outside the normal day-to-day grind, contemplate what we have done this year, and plan for

what we hope to accomplish in the one that lies ahead.

Often, as we spend time reflecting, we feel gratitude as we find ourselves thinking of many individuals who have helped us along our way.

As someone who works with motorcoach operators around the country, I find that this time of year also brings lots of projects for companies planning their holiday cards and corporate gifts. From boxes of candy to Starbucks gift cards, we have helped people design and deliver greetings of all kinds.

Although these types of thoughts and gifts can be an important part of the season for many, I want to remind us all not to forget about little Robbie and his call home.

As almost any office can attest, this time of year can flood our mailboxes (and inboxes) with holiday greetings, and it's obvious that many of these companies put a great deal of thought and attention into their designs and messages.

Our break rooms and driver rooms often fill with candies, pop-

Marketing Minute
GoMotorcoach
It's the Smart Move

corn and other treats delivered daily, tokens of appreciation from suppliers and those with whom we have done business. These tokens are a cherished part of the holiday season.

However, they often miss the mark when it comes to conveying sincere appreciation for the role that certain customers play in your business.

Now, for the record, I want to be clear. I am not suggesting a boycott of these traditional holiday greetings. In fact, they are an important way to show that we are thinking about those we work with during the holiday season.

What I am trying to say is that there is something more you can do, something that will truly make a difference, leave an impression and show your customers just how much they mean to you.

As is demonstrated in the AT&T commercial, pick up the phone and "reach out and touch someone." No holiday card, box of chocolates or salty snack (no matter how good) can create the same impression as a personal two-minute phone call from one owner of a company to another, especially because this kind of gesture rarely happens these days.

Imagine yourself at your desk. The phone rings, and on the other end is the owner of the company where you buy your toilet chemicals.

"Bill, I don't want to take a lot of your time. I know you're a busy guy, but I'm calling because you have been buying your toilet chemicals from us this year and I just wanted to personally thank you. Your business means a lot to us and I know you have choices. Thank you for choosing us. We truly appreciate it."

(Oh, and I forgot to mention, imagine your name is Bill.)

In just a few seconds, with just a few words, you can express something that no greeting card can. You can communicate genu-

ine feeling and appreciation. In effect, you can "reach out and touch someone."

In a world that is driven by emails, texting and social status updates, this throwback to the past is something that will help you convey candid, authentic thanks to customers, employees and others who have truly impacted your business this year.

Remember: Everything we do is marketing, because marketing is nothing more than the management of a perception of who we are as a company, what we do and what we stand for.

I'm inviting you to take a few minutes this year to connect, one-on-one, with those who matter most to your business. It is probably not feasible to do this with every customer, but choose those who really impact your daily operation: employees, vendors and customers — even your banker.

Try not to outsource this or leave voicemails. Don't rush it or have a script. Instead, just call and tell them how you really feel about their contribution to your business,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

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Motorcoach Marketing Council names executive director

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. — The Motorcoach Marketing Council has named Christian Riddell as executive director.

Riddell, principal at Chinook Holdings, has been spokesman for the council for the past two years and has been instrumental in the

development of the organization's products, services and training programs.

"We are excited at this new chapter in the history of the council," said Peter Shelbo, the council's chairman.

"This is a very exciting new di-

rection for us. We are thrilled at the opportunities this presents to us and to the industry we serve."

Riddell has a long history in the motorcoach industry, starting his career as a driver and sales manager for a small operation in Portland, Ore.

He left the industry for 10 years, working to hone his marketing skills and serving as the creative director for a large West Coast company. He then returned to the industry and used his experience to help operators market their companies.

During the past five years, Rid-

dell has created several companies offering the motorcoach industry services such as website development, marketing materials and newsletters.



Christian Riddell

Riddell also writes the monthly "Marketing Minute" column for *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

"I love this industry," Riddell said. "It is something that I am very passionate about. It is an industry filled with good people, working day in and day out to deliver a service that makes North America a better place to be."

"I am thrilled that my company can continue to help operators sell more charters to more people for more money. This new position allows us to help take the council to the next level. The future of this great organization is very exciting."

The Motorcoach Marketing Council is a nonprofit organization whose volunteer board members are motorcoach operators and members of motorcoach associations from around North America.

The council's GoMotorcoach program has recently been receiving international attention and has helped hundreds of operators around North America create powerful, inexpensive marketing materials, train their sales staff, create social media campaigns, recruit new drivers and market more effectively.

Marketing Minute

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

your family, even your life.

We live in a world where a social connection means something totally different than it did when Robbie called home to his mom, but the message delivered via that commercial is timeless. It's just as important today as it was back then.

For more information about the Motorcoach Marketing Council and its programs, go to www.motorcoachmarketing.org.



Join the Club.

UMA membership provides programs and benefits to help your business succeed, but it also provides so much more. UMA members are a **community** of motorcoach operators who can *learn* from each other, *share experiences* with each other and *help* each other in times of need.

If you're not already a UMA member, don't miss out on these valuable relationships—**join the club** today.

"Our company wanted to **thank UMA and all of its resources**. When it came time for us to increase our fleet, and add insurance and benefits, our **UMA membership really paid off** and we were able to reach out to our UMA partners to help us with our needs."



— Ray Sargoni, President
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Education sessions set for UMA Motorcoach Expo 2016

ATLANTA — The United Motorcoach Association will present a variety of educational sessions on topics of interest to operators during UMA Motorcoach Expo 2016.

The sessions will focus on four areas: operations, finance, marketing and small fleet operators.

Attendees of the operations sessions will learn about regulations and challenges that will affect their businesses, attracting and retaining drivers, managing growth, and maximizing fleet utilization.

People attending the finance sessions will learn about effective strategies to manage cash flow, securing the best financing options, and methods of saving time and money.

The marketing sessions will focus on pricing optimization techniques, how to integrate marketing channels, reaching new customers/markets, and maximizing the current customer base.

Small fleet operator topics will be presented in a three-part session and will include pricing strategies, insurance requirements, up-to-date compliance information, filing for tire and fuel tax refunds, and maintaining your equipment.

Here are the educational session schedules for Feb. 1 and 2:

MONDAY, FEB. 1

11:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

Operations: Creative Ways to Attract and Retain Drivers. Learn new and unique ways operators are attracting top talent — and how they keep them when business is slow.

Finance: Cash-Flow Management. A business that is improving is in the perfect phase for installing a sound cash-flow management program. Learn strategies to manage your cash to ensure that you have available revenue to cover expenses during slow months.

Marketing: Being the Highest-Priced Player in Your Market. Don't allow your competition to dictate your pricing. Sell your service for the right price and earn what you deserve. This session will review the hidden costs of doing business and highlight the importance of considering them when you determine rates and price points.

Small Fleet Operator: Session 1

Big Ideas — Small Fleet — The fundamentals of meeting customer expectations are always relevant and small fleet operators have many ad-

vantages in the marketplace. This course will review ways to position your company in your marketplace to be the “go-to” motorcoach resource. (Marketing)

Business 101 — Small fleet operators often find themselves in big trouble by not anticipating the harsh realities of owning a small business in today's society. This fast-paced course briefly illustrates the foundation of long-term success by building an essential team, and, perhaps more importantly, peace of mind. (Management)

Subcontracting, Farm-Outs, and the New Leasing Requirement — A final rule by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration fundamentally changes the way other bus and motorcoach operators engage each other to supplement their service. This course will highlight the changes, new responsibilities and possible solutions. (Management)

2-3 p.m.

Operations: Electronic Logging Devices (ELDs) — What Now? FMCSA plans to issue a final ELD rule by the fall. This is Part 2 of a standing room-only session held in New Orleans. Learn the technical and performance

requirements FMCSA has mandated for these devices, as well as smart business applications for ELDs.

Finance: Spader Business Management — Part 1: Financial Trends. Reviewing the financial trends that we see in 20 Group we have observed this year that we are trending upward from a net income perspective. Learn what is contributing to that upward trend and discuss the continued control over all expenses.

Marketing: Integrating Online Marketing — Email, Website, Social Media, etc. — With More Traditional Offline Marketing — Print Advertising, Broadcast/Cable, Direct Mail, etc. This session will impart multiple strategies for determining how to handle each marketing channel, highlighting that tactics and costs can vary significantly between channels. You'll learn methods to help you make sure that tactics in each marketing channel work together and support each other.

Small Fleet Operator: Session 2

Cash is King — Always has been, and always will be. This short course highlights the fundamentals of having “cash-on-hand” and adequate re-

serves for a business that is often cyclical. From managing receivables to paying bills on time, these well-tested fundamentals continue to serve as guiding principles. (Finance)

The Fundamentals of Regulatory Compliance — Safety and regulatory compliance must be cohesive with every motion of the company. Checks and crosschecks are fundamental to safety and preventing breakdowns in management. Maintaining low “safety management scores” and a “satisfactory” USDOT rating are essential to consumer confidence, financial institutions and insurers. (Regulations)

IRP, IFTA, UCR, and URS — Small fleet operators have some important decisions to make when renewing their tags in 2016. The new IRP rules add to the programs designed to improve interstate commerce. These four plans are often confused. This short session covers the fundamentals of each program and their compliance requirements. (Regulatory)

3:15-4:15 p.m.

Operations: The Next Generation — How Are the Millennials Looking at This Industry? What do young

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 ▶

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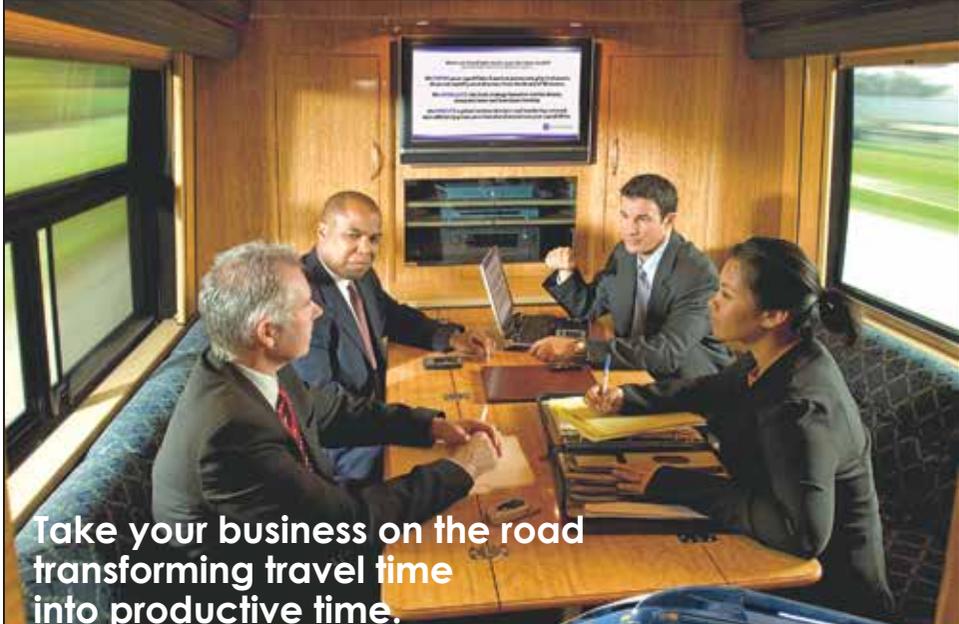
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Education

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

professionals in the motorcoach industry see as the industry's future challenges and growth opportunities? What do they plan to do differently than previous generations? This session will discuss the next generation's issues, challenges and accomplishments in their transition into their family's business.

Finance: Spader Business Management — Part 2: Managing Growth and Plateaus. Learn how to identify what plateau your company is in and how to manage your growth profitably through good plateau management.

Marketing: Reaching New Customers; Tapping into Emerging Markets. What are other companies doing, right now, to expand their customer base?

It's time to seriously think about attracting new customers while you have cash available to spend on marketing. You'll also learn how to capitalize on emerging markets that will include faith-based, group tours, cruise, international and more.

Small Fleet Operator: Session 3

Equipment Maintenance for Small Fleet Operators — Breakdowns and

out-of-service orders are particularly punitive for small fleet operators, harming reputations and operating reserves. This session covers fundamental methods to avoid the effects of mechanical defects or failures. *(Management)*

Managing a Breakdown — Breakdowns are costly and can damage your reputation and cash reserves. Despite best efforts to prevent road-

side failures, unanticipated delays can happen. This session utilizes the fundamentals of a response to a serious crash to minimize the impact. *(Management)*

Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance — Small fleet operators have unique compliance responsibilities when it comes to ADA. Lift? No lift? Reports and preparing for an "ADA audit" are important components to meeting regulatory responsibilities. *(Regulations)*

TUESDAY, FEB. 2

Continental breakfast will be served prior to these sessions

8:45 – 9:45 a.m.

Operations: Maximizing Equipment Utilization. Shooting for 100 percent utilization has become the goal, but is it really the best approach? What is the true optimal utilization rate for your company and how do you achieve it? In this session, you'll hear how different operators approach equipment utilization to ensure that they are maximizing profitability.

Finance: Putting the Best Financing Strategy in Place for My Next Coach Purchase. Should you lease or secure an equipment loan? Should you use your bank or an equipment lease/loan specialist? How do credit ratings impact finance models? Answering these questions will help you structure payment terms that will preserve the cash when you need it the most. This session will discuss the steps required to determine and secure the best financing for equipment purchases.

Marketing: Leveraging Current Customer Base. Every single person on the bus represents a potential future customer. Everyone on board has connections to other profitable leads.

Greyhound

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

delaying the start of their academic year," the company said. "This reduced operating profits by approximately \$12 million."

On the positive side, the company said it completed its second bid season under a new pricing strategy, achieving a higher average price increase than in the first season. "We achieved average price increases of 5.3 percent on the approximately one-third of our bus portfolio up for renewal this year, while delivering a contract retention rate modestly ahead of our expectations at 86 percent."

First Transit's earnings continued to suffer from lower oil prices, leading to significantly reduced activity in the Canadian oil sands region and lower demand for the company's shuttle services. Revenue dropped 6.1 percent.

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Exhibitor education sessions planned for Expo show floor

ATLANTA — For the fourth year in a row, exhibitors at UMA Motorcoach Expo 2016 will offer educational sessions in the exhibit hall focusing on success-oriented topics.

Twelve sessions will be presented on the Expo show floor throughout the day on Tuesday, Feb. 2, and on Wednesday morning, Feb. 3.

Here are the topics and presenters:

TUESDAY, FEB. 2

10:15 - 11:15 a.m.

How Tracking Technology Can Make Your Business More Efficient — Todd Ewing, FleetMatics

11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Like New, Re-energized, Reman or As Is; What's what when purchasing pre-owned — Mitch Guralnick, Motor Coach Industries

Reduce Downtime and Save Money with the Use of Nickel Carbon Capacitors — James O. Burke, Kold-Ban International, Ltd.

12:45 - 1:45 p.m.

Passenger Safety & Defensible Use of Force — Dennis Shinault, Protective Insurance Company; Jesus Vilahermosa, Jr., Crisis Reality Training, Inc.

Heavy Duty Diesel Vehicle Regulation Training for Entering California — UC Davis Extension on behalf of the California Air Resources Board

2 - 3 p.m.

Managing Large Claims In a Volatile Legal Environment — Paul R. Berne and Bob Crescenzo, Lancer Insurance Company

Vehicle and Driver Certifications — improve your margins — save fuel, save money, and gain market-share! — David Kestenbaum, University of Vermont's Certification for Sustainable Transportation

3:15 - 4:15 p.m.

Passenger & Driver Safety — Technology & the Motorcoach Experience — Adam Hall, REI

FMCSA Record Retention & Recordkeeping Requirements — Reston Limousine

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 3

9:15 - 10:15 a.m.

E-logs & ELDs Workshop — Brad Georgal, J.J. Keller & Associates, Inc.

Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance Inspection Demonstration

10:30 - 11:30 a.m.

Using Your Coach as a Billboard for Your Company's Brand — Turbo Images



Exhibitors at UMA Motorcoach Expo 2016 will offer a dozen educational sessions in the exhibit hall focusing on success-oriented topics.

Green award nominations sought

ATLANTA — The United Motorcoach Association is seeking nominations for its Green Highway Award, which is presented annually to a coach operator during UMA Motorcoach Expo.

The award, which is sponsored by Motor Coach Industries, was introduced at UMA Motorcoach Expo in 2008.

It recognizes motorcoach travel as a viable solution for reducing carbon emissions and encourages industry leadership on environmental issues.

The award will be presented to

an operator that has demonstrated the greatest commitment to "green stewardship" in the areas of internal corporate initiative, external corporate stewardship, or community and industrywide green leadership.

Examples of award-worthy activities might include internal recycling programs, carbon offset programs, community green initiatives, and campaigns that promote motorcoaches as an eco-friendly means of transportation.

The winner will be selected by a jury of environmental and coach industry leaders.

The award is open to coach operators that are members of UMA. Operators and associates are encouraged to submit nominations.

Operators can nominate themselves or a peer.

The award will be presented in February during Expo 2016 in Atlanta.

Nominations are due Wednesday, Jan. 6. The nomination form can be found at www.motorcoach-expo.com under Quick Links.

Questions should be directed to Maggie Vander Eems at 800-424-8262 or mvandereems@uma.org.

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MCI

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“Putting these two businesses together will create a real powerhouse in the industry,” Heller said, noting plans to run MCI as a subsidiary within New Flyer.

“I really believe that MCI as a brand and as a business will be much stronger going forward under New Flyer than it would be as a standalone company,” he said. “New Flyer is publicly traded, first of all, so they have access to capital markets. Secondly, the combined business will have over \$2 billion in revenue, so the fact that it’s public and such a large size will provide a better ability to fund investments and growth in MCI going forward than would have been possible as a standalone company for MCI.”

Even though the two companies make similar products, they don’t compete, so the businesses are compatible and each understands the other’s business, Heller said.

KPS was no stranger to New Flyer before the MCI deal.

In March 2002, KPS Special Situations Fund completed a change-of-control transaction and recapitalization of New Flyer as part of a multi-stakeholder recapitalization and restructuring of the company, according to New Flyer’s history on its website. KPS Special Situations Fund invested

\$44 million (Canadian) to gain a controlling interest.

Then, in February 2004, KPS sold New Flyer to Harvest Partners Inc., a New York-based private equity firm specializing in middle-market investments, according to New Flyer’s website. New Flyer became publicly traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange in August 2005.

Foresight and vision

KPS’s prior ownership in the bus business played a role in its purchase of MCI in 2010, Heller said. At the time, MCI was saddled with crippling debt and was forced to downsize after filing for bankruptcy protection in 2008.

“They understood the business because of their ownership of New Flyer,” he said. “So back when MCI was struggling and the market was struggling in 2010, KPS had the foresight and the vision to buy MCI.”

KPS hired Heller as CEO of MCI after the purchase closed.

A New Flyer official did not return calls for comment, but Paul Soubry, the company’s president and CEO, said in a news release the deal gives New Flyer an opportunity to diversify and grow in



Rick Heller

areas where it can leverage its operational excellence, sourcing, manufacturing, parts distribution and service expertise.

Heller said MCI’s business would continue undisrupted.

“The existing infrastructure, all the employees, all of that will continue going forward,” he said. “It will continue to produce the same products on the same lines with the same people as we do today.”

Heller, however, will be looking for a new job. He didn’t say whether he is leaving voluntarily or if New Flyer asked him to step down.

“At this point I don’t have any plans,” he said.

The deal won’t end the relationship between MCI and Daimler AG that began three years ago, making MCI the exclusive distributor of Daimler’s Setra line of coaches in Canada and the U.S., a deal that gave Daimler a minority ownership stake in MCI.

Daimler supported the deal with New Flyer, Heller said.

“It was very important to New Flyer that we maintain our relationship with Daimler and, in fact, Daimler was very enthusiastic about maintaining the relationship with MCI going forward under New Flyer,” Heller said. “The exact same relationship that exists today under MCI as a standalone company will exist once New Flyer buys the business, so we will continue to represent the Setra brand.”

Andrea Berg, a Daimler spokeswoman for North America, said Daimler still owns its stake in MCI and that the existing contract will remain in place.

New Flyer also is part of a distributorship agreement with ABC Companies. Since February 2014, ABC has served as the exclusive distributor of New Flyer’s MiDi and Xcelsior transit bus models to U.S. private bus and shuttle operators.

ABC markets, sells and provides after-sales service for the New Flyer models. It’s unclear what, if any, effect the acquisition of MCI will have on New Flyer’s agreement with ABC.

Roman Cornell, ABC executive vice president and head of the company’s Specialty Vehicles Division, would only say, “It is busi-

ness as usual.”

New Flyer said it also has a strong relationship with Marcopolo S.A., which has almost 20 percent equity in New Flyer and offers global expertise in bus and coach design, sourcing and manufacturing.

Strong 2015 revenue

Heller said he expects MCI to finish 2015 with record profits.

Through the nine months that ended Sept. 30, MCI delivered 576 new coaches, resulting in \$315 million in revenue. It also generated combined revenue of about \$128 million for pre-owned coach and aftermarket parts and service, bringing total revenue for the period to about \$443 million.

“But I think even more importantly, the products that we’re producing today, the J coach and the D coach, what’s coming off the line today is coming off with unprecedented quality and reliability,” Heller said. “We have made so many strides in those areas over the last few years. Even though they’re the same basic coach, the products coming off the line today bear no resemblance to the products that came off the line three years ago. They’re just so much better and will be so much more reliable.”

Heller said MCI began looking for increased efficiencies a year ago in its sales and service centers, and since then major improvements have occurred.

“Basically, we took quality at the source and adapted it from a manufacturing environment to a service environment to be able to improve the efficiencies and the predictability of the service that we do at our service centers and that’s paying dividends as well,” he said.

MCI also made major investments in technician training this year to keep up with things like increasingly complex electronics in coaches, he said.

MCI’s focus has been on its J4500 and D-series models, not new coach models, Heller said.

“But part of being successful, I think, is evolving your existing models to make them better and better,” he said. “At some point, that goes beyond just reliability and quality, it goes to adding the

kinds of features and benefits that our customers are looking for.”

He said the public and private transit markets have shown healthy growth this year versus 2014, estimating units sold are up about 10 percent in the private sector.

In the public sector, big transit authorities have been purchasing this year, he said.

MCI has a signed contract to sell 772 coaches to New Jersey Transit. The \$395 million contract calls for MCI to deliver the coaches over six years, beginning in 2016, and includes parts, service and support, and training for drivers and mechanics. (See Aug. 15, 2015, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

New Jersey Transit didn’t have any say in the deal with New Flyer, Heller said, “but they were one of our first calls when the deal was announced to tell them about it, for sure.”

Good people

As he prepares for his departure, Heller reflected on MCI’s turnaround over the last five years.

Transformation always starts with people, he said.

“MCI has always been blessed with really good people,” Heller said. “We’ve brought in some additional good people. We have gotten on the same page, all of us, in terms of what our priorities are, like creating quality, reliable coaches, taking care of our customers, things like that. We’re working extremely well together as a team to make all that happen, and that’s been the real core of the turnaround.”

“We’ve made so many improvements to the business,” he said. “And yes, it’s resulted in better profitability, but more fundamentally it’s resulted in a more competitive company that’s better able to take care of its customers and that’s really been the key to the turnaround.”

MCI has built a strong foundation over the past five years, “and I believe it’s got a really strong strategic plan for the future, which I know the new owners have embraced,” Heller said.

“So I think that while we’ve made terrific progress, I fully expect that progress to continue going forward as well.”

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8-10 International Motorcoach Group Maintenance and Safety Forum, Louisville, Ky. Info: www.imgcoach.com.

12-14 Spader Workshop: Effectively Leading and Managing Employees, Dallas. Info: www.spader.com.

31-Feb. 4 UMA Motorcoach Expo 2016, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta. Info: www.motorcoachexpo.com.

31-Feb. 4 Travel Exchange/NTA Convention, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta. Info: www.ntaonline.com.

February 2016

9-12 Spader Workshop: Total

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7-10 Spader Workshop: Total Management 2, Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Info: www.spader.com.

30 Pennsylvania Bus Association Marketplace...a Group Leader Show, Spooky Nook Sports Complex, Manheim, Pa. Info: www.pabus.org.



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