

## ABC diversifies its product line

### Helps operators diversify theirs

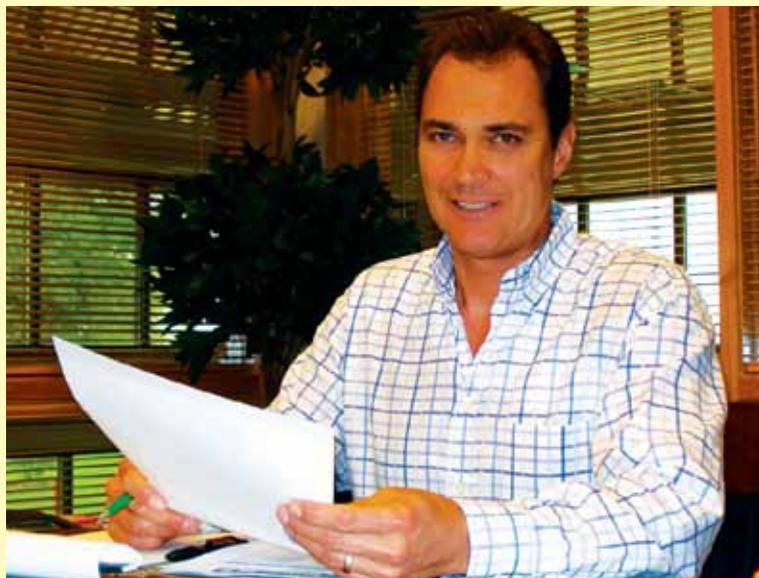
WINTER GARDEN, Fla. — ABC Companies is big on diversity.

It believes that the more diversified it is, the more diversified its customers can be.

“We think that by offering a diverse product line, operators have greater advantages over competitors with solutions that enable a wider variety of fleet applications, which in turn can help them attract new revenue streams,” explained Dane Cornell, president and chief executive.

To demonstrate the depth of its diversity, ABC will be bringing a little of just about everything it offers to Las Vegas in February for the 2010 United Motorcoach Association Expo.

Included will be its two motorcoach mainstays, the workhorse Van Hool C2045 and the luxury Van Hool T2145. Additionally, it will have its hot-selling double-decker TD925, and its mid-size specialty coach, the 3035RE. ABC also will even be showing three pre-owned Van Hool coaches — a 1998 T2145, a 2001 C2045 and a 2002 C2045L.



Dane Cornell of ABC Cos. probes for customer trends.

### Second in a series

And, as a special feature, it'll have on display a European Altano High-Deck 65-seat luxury touring coach that visitors will be able to take on a test ride.

“The diversity of our equipment lineup gives operators many exciting choices for their businesses,” said Cornell.

He notes that the higher capacity equipment, such as the TD925, gives operators more seats for larger bookings, while specialty equipment such as the 3035RE

can adapt easily to innumerable smaller passenger groups like shuttle service, corporate and church outings, and school sports while providing a high-end big coach feel for a smaller price tag.

### New options aplenty

Also, he suggested the T2145 and C2045 should draw interest because of the new safety options available for them, including a lane-departure warning system, electronic stability control, three-point seat belts, adaptive aiming

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## Charter rule is dealt huge blow by senator

WASHINGTON — A U.S. senator's successful effort to allow Seattle's public transit agency to operate shuttle services that are illegal under the federal charter service rule could be the beginning of a major assault on the rule.

Tucked away in the 2010 U.S. Department of Transportation appropriations bill that was approved by Congress in December and signed by President Obama was a provision that exempts King County Metro Transit from the charter rule that was issued 21 months ago by the Federal Transit Administration.

Under the rule, public transit agencies that are supported by taxpayer dollars are not allowed to operate charters if a private carrier is available and capable of performing the work.

The exemption for King County Metro Transit came courtesy of

Washington Democratic Sen. Patty Murray, who said she was responding to complaints from residents who she said were unhappy



Sen. Patty Murray

about private carriers taking over the shuttle services for some professional and college sports teams in the community.

Apparently Murray has no problem with Seattle fans paying mega-bucks for a stadium beer but gets heartburn when they have to pay market rate to ride to the game.

“This rule has gotten between fans and an affordable, convenient way to get to games in our region,” Murray stated in a news release lauding the exemption she slipped into the appropriations bill.

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## Public-private cooperation is major success in Oregon

EUGENE, Ore. — A big-time college football game here has become a show piece for how private motorcoach companies and public transit agencies can work together.

And, it gave doubters in the public transit sector a look at how well a private carrier can pull off a large-scale shuttle operation for a major sporting event.

Starline Luxury Coaches of Seattle earned kudos for its handling of the shuttle service for the annual Civil War football game between rivals Oregon and Oregon State University.

“We were very pleased with the way it was all handled,” said Vicki Strand, who manages special event

services for the host University of Oregon team.

She said the university had to turn to the private sector because the game, which was won by Oregon 37 to 31, had been moved to a Thursday night from its traditional Saturday afternoon and the regular shuttle service providers were unable to work the game.

“We hadn't had a weekday game in about 13 years, so it was a challenge for us,” she noted.

The university had been using Lane Transit District and First Student for the shuttle service for many years, but because the game was on a weekday all of their buses

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## Feds poised to issue seatbelt rule

WASHINGTON — The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration expects to publish — by the end of the first quarter of this year — a proposed rule requiring the installation of seatbelts in motorcoaches.

The rule would apply, according to an NHTSA document, only to “newly manufactured motorcoaches” and would mandate combination lap-and-shoulder seatbelts.

An abstract of the proposed rule, contained in the NHTSA doc-

ument, states the new regulation “would require the installation of lap/shoulder belts in newly-manufactured motorcoaches. Specifically, this rulemaking would establish a new definition for motorcoaches in 49 CFR Part 571.3.

“It would also amend Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 208, “Occupant crash protection,” to require the installation of lap/shoulder belts at all driver and passenger seating positions. It would also require the installation of lap/

shoulder belts at driver seating positions of large school buses in FMVSS No. 208.”

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has been actively considering passenger seatbelts for motorcoaches for more than two years. It conducted a series of crash tests, the first ever by the federal government, to study the effectiveness of various passenger restraint systems in coaches.

The agency's motorcoach pro-

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# N.Y. operator files suit to block transit money grab

NEW YORK — Frustrated by having to pay a newly-imposed employer tax that subsidizes his public transit competitors, a private motorcoach operator is suing to get the levy declared unconstitutional.

William Schoolman of Hampton Luxury Liner and Schoolman Transportation Systems filed suit in State Supreme Court in Suffolk County against the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority and several state officials.

“This latest tax grab by our elected officials and appointed bureaucrats has wounded my business,” Schoolman maintains. “This tax hurts my ability to be competitive and profitable.”

He said the tax — \$20,000 a year in his case — is being used to subsidize his competitors, including Long Island Rail Road, Metro North and several public bus systems.

“I’ll have to cut expenses some-

where to pay the tax,” he noted.

The annual tax, which went into effect in March for businesses in a dozen counties and boroughs where New York MTA operates, requires employers to make annual payments of .34 percent of their payroll.

It is designed to rescue the financially strapped transit agency that was facing a budget shortfall of \$1.8 billion and numerous service reductions. The MTA received an

estimated \$1.35 billion in the initial collection of the tax that took place in November.

The suit, which was filed Dec. 14, claims at least six causes for the tax to be declared unconstitutional.

Among them are alleged violations of a requirement that legislation affecting property and the appropriation of money for local purposes pass by a two-thirds vote of the State Assembly and the State

Senate. The tax bill, according to the suit, fell short of the requirement, passing in the senate by 52 percent and in the assembly by 62 percent.

Other claims in the suit include constitutional violations of provisions that require state legislators to pass separate spending bills for single purposes, and prohibit the state from accepting liability for indebtedness issued by a public

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## Cut risks by hiring good drivers

STERLING, Va. — Hiring risky motorcoach drivers can result in more crashes, higher insurance rates and poor customer relations.

So, why risk it?

Robert Crescenzo, vice president of Lancer Insurance, says motorcoach operators who want to avoid such problems need to pay more attention to the type of people they hire to drive their coaches.

“If you can say ‘no’ to customers who are asking too much, then you must be able to say ‘no’ to driver applicants,” he told operators attending the United Motorcoach Association’s sixth annual Safety Management Seminar.

“And that can be particularly hard, espe-

cially when you are attempting to get a full staff of drivers.”

He said operators can reduce potential problems simply by recognizing drivers who studies have shown to be risky when they get behind the wheel of a coach.

People who are aggressive or angry top the list of drivers who are considered to carry the highest risks and cause the most harm to a company.

“It’ll show up when they’re driving in a construction zone or in heavy traffic,” Crescenzo noted.

Others with the potential to cause trouble include drivers who are impatient, have little driving experience, don’t care for their jobs,

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## Driver training should be ongoing

STERLING, Va. — Teaching newly hired drivers how to safely operate a motorcoach shouldn’t end when they’ve successfully completed the company’s training course for new drivers.

Instead, the classroom and behind-the-wheel training that most operators offer their recruits should be considered just the beginning.

“You (also) need a very good in-service training program because you need to train them after they’ve been hired,” safety consultant Tom Carrigan of Deacher Consulting Group told operators at the sixth annual Safety Management Seminar sponsored by the United Motorcoach Association.

He said regular follow-up training should

be conducted for all drivers and special sessions should be developed for individual drivers who require additional one-on-one training to eliminate specific problems.

In addition, he emphasized that drivers also need to be monitored on a regular basis to make sure they are not overlooking or ignoring company policies and procedures or picking up bad habits.

“Many fleet managers wait for a crash and then react to it by looking into bad driving habits,” he added.

The monitoring, which can be done by ride-along observations, video cameras, on-board recorders or other methods, are good ways to find out if a driver has developed

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# THE DOCKET

## Success seen in efforts to block bad operators

STERLING, Va. — Federal motorcoach safety regulators have stepped up their efforts to keep carriers that lose their operating authority from resurfacing as new businesses.

And it just might be paying off.

Although the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is not sure how many rogue companies have been prevented from getting new operating licenses, statistics seem to indicate the number could be quite high.

Since late 2008, the agency has reviewed 1,194 applications for motorcoach service and 166 of them have been turned away, according to Pete Chandler, a team leader for the federal agency's Commercial Passenger Carrier Division.

He said most of them — 144 — dropped out of sight after being notified by mail that regulators needed more information about them because they were concerned they might be associated with companies that had lost their operating authority.

"We never heard back from

them and their applications were dismissed for not replying," Chandler told operators attending the sixth annual Safety Management Seminar hosted by the United Motorcoach Association.

Their refusal to respond to the letters was seen by some as a strong indication the persons who filed the applications had been involved with businesses that had lost their operating authority and were trying to make a comeback under a new name.

Chandler said another 25 companies withdrew on their own and one other was rejected after it was uncovered that the applicant was associated with a carrier that had recently been put out of service by regulators.

All of the applicants were undergoing a new FMCSA vetting process that was expanded after an illegally operated carrier crashed in Texas in August 2008, killing 17 passengers and injuring another 38.

The coach was owned by a company that had just lost its operating authority because of safety violations and had applied for a

## Standards raised for new operators

### Feds 'serious about safety'

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has implemented its "New Entrant Safety Assurance Process" rule, which requires newly registered bus and truck operators to meet stricter safety requirements.

The rule raises the compliance standards for passing new entrant safety audits and requires that new carriers correct safety deficiencies before being granted permanent registration.

"Safety is our highest priority," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood in announcing the program.

"This new rule says we are se-

rious about having safe trucks and buses on the road. This is important for those behind the wheels of these big rigs and those who share the road with them," LaHood said.

New FMCSA Administrator Anne S. Ferro added: "This new rule helps to ensure that only the safest carriers can enter the industry and continue to operate on our roadways. By strengthening the new entrant process, our agency supports new carriers as they establish and maintain critical safety management controls that enable them to operate in full compliance with federal safety regulations."

Under the beefed-up requirements, a newly registered bus or truck company will automatically fail its safety audit if violations of any one of 16 essential federal regulations are discovered.

Among those things covered by the regulations are controlled substances and alcohol testing, hours-of-service requirements, driver qualifications, vehicle condition, and carrier insurance responsibility.

Failure to pass a new entrant safety audit may result in revocation of a carrier's registration, unless that carrier takes corrective action within a time period established by FMCSA.

Additionally, if certain violations are discovered during roadside or other inspections, the new carrier may be subject to an expedited safety audit or a compliance review that can result in fines or an out-of-service order.

For more information on the New Entrant Safety Assurance Process rule, go to [www.fmcsa.dot.gov](http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov).

new permit under a different name.

The new process includes a much broader screening of applicants and the collection of much more state and federal data and insurance history than in the past.

"If it seems like a rogue operation, then we send them a verification letter," said Chandler. "If there

is no response then we reject them."

The FMCSA also has expanded its enforcement of ADA regulations, which until 2008 was the sole responsibility of the U.S. Justice Department.

Chandler said 33 inspections of coach companies have been conducted, and steps are now being taken to make ADA compli-

ance checks a part of new-entrant safety audits and regular on-site inspections of all motorcoaches.

The FMCSA also continues to monitor industry response to its call for operators to begin making pre-trip safety announcements on all of their coaches or face being forced to do so. Last year, the agency warned that if companies did not begin doing it voluntarily, there was a good chance it would seek a regulation making the announcements mandatory.

Chandler said the number of companies now making them has doubled from 30 percent to 60 percent, but that still might not be enough to avoid regulatory action.

"Your passengers need to know what to do in case of an emergency and if we find that motorcoach companies are not embracing the announcements, then you'll likely find that it will become a requirement," he warned operators.

He said he rides motorcoaches frequently and has yet to hear an announcement, even once.

Chandler said the FMCSA also is concerned about drivers not wearing their seatbelts as required by law and the agency is gearing up to begin a campaign to encourage them to start using the belts.

The campaign, which will feature the message "It only takes three seconds, buckle up — it affects everyone" will include a request that operators get their drivers to sign pledge cards promising to wear their belts at all times.

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# FMCSA likely to propose more EOBRs to monitor drivers

WASHINGTON — Many more problem truck and bus companies would be required to use electronic onboard recorders to monitor their driver hours under a retooled proposal being prepared by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

The safety agency reportedly is readying its revamped proposal before completing a rule that was started by the Bush administration but must now be completed by the Obama administration.

Under the Bush concept, which was never officially made public, only carriers that failed multiple compliance reviews would have had to use EOBRs.

However, former FMCSA Administrator John Hill said before leaving office that the final rule would expand the number of fleets required to use the technology beyond what had initially been proposed.

The Obama team reportedly is preparing an even tougher proposal.

Larry Minor, FMCSA associate administrator of policy and program development, told a leading trucking publication, Transport Topics, that the new proposal "would require EOBRs for a larger

population of carriers."

The FMCSA's new intention surfaced in the agency's monthly report on significant rulemakings.

The report also indicated the FMCSA plans to consider addressing requirements for hours-of-service supporting documents. Such requirements spell out what evidence carriers need to retain to

verify logbook entries.

The trucking industry has been frustrated by the FMCSA's failure to address the supporting-documents requirement on a timely basis, and reportedly is upset the agency seems intent on tying the oft-delayed requirement to the EOBR rules.

Truckers think it should be

part of the agency's review of the hours-of-service rules for truckers, which is on a faster track than the EOBR rule.

Minor told Transport Topics that to further expand the population of carriers subject to proposed EOBR rules, the agency must move forward with a new notice of proposed rulemaking.

He said that in the final rule, FMCSA was "trying to go as far as we can" within the scope of the original notice of proposed rulemaking. Because that formal document "didn't propose a universal mandate or a larger population of carriers," Minor said, "we couldn't address that issue in the final rule."

## Pa. governor sees tolls OK for I-80

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell believes the federal government will approve his state's application to toll Interstate 80.

"I'm optimistic we'll get the permission to do it," Rendell told a newspaper in a phone interview.

Last year, Pennsylvania initiated a second attempt to get federal permission to toll the east-west highway as part of its state transportation funding plan, called Act 44.

In 2008, while the Bush administration was in office, the Federal Highway Administration sent Pennsylvania's application back without approving the tolling.

Under current law, the U.S. Department of Transportation may allow three tolling pilot projects, but Rendell said that limitation should be "uncapped and that any state that wants to toll a previously federal-aid highway can do so."

Tolling interstates "is a great way of avoiding Washington having to raise (fuel) taxes because tolls are user fees and there is a great deal more acceptance for user fees than there are for taxes," said Rendell.



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## Hiring drivers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

suffer from sleep disorders, have an unhappy home life, are deep in debt, and are dishonest.

Older and younger drivers can lead to problems as well.

"The age of a driver causes increased risks," Crescenzo said, noting that younger drivers are more likely to be more aggressive, drive faster and get more tickets, while older drivers are much slower to react to road situations, which could increase their chances of having an accident.

Drivers who have little or no social or people skills can be troublesome, too.

"They might be very good driv-

ers but they should be driving trucks, and you might want to make that happen for them," he said.

To reduce the potential for problems, he suggested that operators develop hiring procedures that include structured personal interviews, personality testing, medical examinations and road testing.

In addition, he said they should have ongoing programs that evaluate driver performance and investigate complaints from customers and motorists as well as driver training courses that are targeted to correct specific insufficiencies of individual drivers.

Crescenzo also urged operators to be cautious when they call in someone to handle a trip last minute. Some, he said, might not be

prepared to take on a trip with short notice, perhaps because they had been looking forward to a weekend away from work or they had not slept for some time.

"If you can't do a trip because you don't have a driver, then farm it out," he suggested.

He reminded operators that the hiring and managing of their drivers is one of their most important responsibilities because drivers play critical roles in the settling of accident claims and in jury decisions.

Crescenzo said drivers can say the wrong thing after an accident — "the brakes didn't work" or "I thought I could make it" — that can be harmful to a case or they may not be very good in a deposition or on the witness stand.

## Driver training

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

any bad driving habits that could lead to an accident or other problems.

Carrigan said some long-time drivers tend to repeat and stretch dangerous driving habits because they have been doing it for a long time without any negative consequences.

"With following too closely, four seconds eventually becomes three and a half seconds and three

and a half seconds becomes three seconds," he said. "If you leave drivers out there long enough, they're going to get comfortable."

He also recommends that all training courses — the material and the drivers in attendance — be carefully documented.

"The lack of documentation may come back and bite you some day," he emphasized. "The driver who follows too closely can come back and say they were never told about that four-second rule."

With proper documentation,

the driver can be shown that the rule was discussed during an in-service training session that he or she attended.

If an accident does occur, the driver should not only be quizzed about how it happened but also be encouraged to discuss things that possibly should or could have been done differently to avoid the incident. Such a discussion is likely to uncover a bad driving habit that could be corrected so a similar incident is not repeated.

Carrigan also reminded opera-

## Texting ban plows ahead

WASHINGTON — U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said his department is working to complete work on a regulation to ban texting by commercial drivers, and that it would be finished "sooner rather than later."

"We feel a great sense of urgency about this," LaHood said.

"We've met with some of the industry people about it, but I can't really give you a time, sooner rather than later is probably the best answer.

"We just feel that this is something we really need to do... it is a big issue and its not just texting while driving in cars, it has to do with all of these activities that take place in trucks and bus drivers and train drivers," LaHood said.

This past fall, LaHood convened a summit on distracted driving where he announced he was ordering the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to issue rules banning texting by truck and

bus drivers, and limit the use of cell phones and other communication devices as well.

Meanwhile, Colorado and North Carolina have joined what is now nearly two dozen states that have banned texting while driving.

As of last month, police in the two states can ticket drivers distracted by the digital habit, which traffic safety experts say is especially hazardous.

The new Colorado law also bans talking on a cell phone but only for drivers under the age of 18.

According to the Governors Highway Safety Association, the Colorado and North Carolina bans bring to 21 the number of states that have texting bans.

The District of Columbia also bans texting while driving, and on Jan. 1, Toledo will become the second city in Ohio to ban the practice, following Cleveland's ban that took effect in July.

tors of the importance of training drivers on new models of coaches that are added to the fleet and when new equipment is installed on existing buses.

Additionally, instruction classes should be held for specific issues

such as driving in bad weather, what to do if a front tire blows, and proper seat and mirror adjustments.

"If you stick with it long enough, drivers will realize their performance really matters," Carrigan said.

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## Talk about vehicle miles tax grows, but transition appears very difficult

WASHINGTON — For months and months, Washington politicians and policy makers have been casting about for a replacement for the fuel tax.

With a steady decline in revenue produced by federal taxes on gasoline and diesel fuel, the search has been on for a new or different source of revenue to support the nation's highway system.

One alternative that has gained considerable interest is a vehicle-miles-traveled tax.

Now, though, many lawmakers, U.S. Department of Transportation officials and taxing experts are expressing concern with elements of the proposed tax. They also caution that a transition to a vehicle miles tax could be a slow process.

Roy Kienitz, a USDOT undersecretary for policy, said during a Senate Environment and Public Works Committee session this fall that any solution for overcoming sliding revenue from the fuel tax

would be "technically difficult and politically difficult."

Kienitz was pressed by Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., about what USDOT was doing to prepare for a transition to a new sustainable funding stream.

"It is a matter on which we've given a fair amount of thought," Kienitz said, but he added that while USDOT was "working really hard to prepare internally, none of that is something that's become a proposal."

Earlier this year, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood floated the idea of a vehicle miles tax as a replacement for the fuel tax, only to be rebuked by the White House.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., chairwoman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, said she could not support such a fee, even though Congress will be looking at "a new sustainable source of funding" as it develops a new highway bill.

"It seems to me, within the VMT realm, without getting into those things that I would not vote for — which is meters in your car and Big Brother checking in on you — I wouldn't have any of that," she said.

Sen. George Voinovich, R-Ohio, agrees that Congress has "to look at other methods."

He said that for the near term nothing other than an increase in the fuel tax would generate "the dollars you need."

"Most people in the House and Senate are all worried about a vote on an increase in the gas tax," he said. "You can't do it without increasing the gas tax. There's just no other alternative."

Deron Lovaas, federal transportation policy director at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said road pricing and vehicle mileage fees are slowly gaining traction because there is "a growing consensus about the need to price transportation goods which

## UCRA fees languishing

WASHINGTON — The year 2009 came and went and the Unified Carrier Registration Agreement fees for 2010 didn't get published.

Early in September, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration began a rulemaking to reset the fees, which replaced the old Single-State Registration System three years ago.

The FMCSA asked for public comments on the fees it proposed, and received nearly 200, most from private truck and bus operators who were highly critical of the proposal to more than double the UCRA fees on a per-vehicle basis.

During the final three months of 2009 there was not a word more out of FMCSA.

All the delay means that bus and truck operators won't have to pay any UCRA fees until the final rule is officially issued.

pay any UCRA fees until the final rule is officially issued.

Under federal law, the states that participate in the UCRA program may not collect anything for 2010 until the fees are reset by FMCSA.

At the same time, roadside enforcement officials should not be issuing citations to carriers for nonpayment while the fees remain unsettled.

Moreover, states may not impose any fees connected with the renewal of intrastate operating authority on carriers that hold both intrastate and interstate authority. Such fees are preempted by federal law for carriers that hold dual authority, and the preemption does not depend on a carrier's payment of UCRA fees or registration under that program.

will help to reduce emissions and improve traffic flow."

Attorney Jack Schenendorf, who was vice chairman of one of two congressional commissions that studied transportation finance,

said that a transition to a vehicle miles tax would take time.

"There's no way to institute a large-scale pricing system in a two-year time frame," he said "It is going to take a lot longer than that."

## USEPA greenhouse gas decision paves way for more limits

WASHINGTON — To the surprise of virtually no one, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has declared that greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and industrial facilities are a danger to human health.

The declaration is a first step the agency must take before developing regulations limiting the levels of combustion by-products from exhaust tailpipes.

While it is unclear how EPA's "endangerment" finding might directly affect the commercial vehicle industry, many transportation industry executives think that reg-

ulation of bus and truck greenhouse gas emissions is likely at some point.

The USEPA is known to be working on various approaches on how to establish a carbon metric and how to regulate carbon emissions from mobile sources.

USEPA Administrator Lisa Jackson announced the endangerment finding at a news conference last month, even as climate-change legislation makes slow progress in Congress.

The House already has passed a cap-and-trade bill to reduce carbon emissions, but the Senate bill

has yet to be adopted.

If the Senate is unable to agree on a climate change bill, the Obama administration has made it clear it would move forward with its own regulations to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Jackson said that scientific evidence convincingly shows that greenhouse gases are the primary driver of climate change, which can lead to hotter, longer heat waves and increases in ground-level ozone pollution linked to asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

"Business leaders, security experts, government officials, con-

cerned citizens and the United States Supreme Court have called for enduring, pragmatic solutions to reduce the greenhouse gas pollution that is causing climate change," Jackson said.

EPA's finding "continues our work towards clean energy reform that will cut greenhouse gases and reduce the dependence on foreign oil that threatens our national security and our economy," Jackson said.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., author of the Senate's leading climate change legislation, said EPA's endangerment finding "confirms

what we have been told by America's top scientists and leading scientists of the world — that unchecked global warming is perilous to human health and our environment."

The EPA's action was a response to a 2007 U.S. Supreme Court decision that concluded the Clean Air Act required EPA to regulate greenhouse gases if the agency established that they harm public health.

The finding covers six key gases — CO<sub>2</sub>, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulfur hexafluoride.

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## Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

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## Stertil-Koni gains review in wireless-lift patent case

STEVENSVILLE, Md. — Stertil-Koni, a major supplier of heavy-duty lifts to the motorcoach and vehicle maintenance industries, announced that there have been “significant developments” in its fight against a patent infringement lawsuit filed by competitor Gray Manufacturing.

In its response to the suit filed by Gray last year, Stertil-Koni filed a request for reexamination with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for the two patents being disputed.

Stertil-Koni says the Patent Office has granted its request for a reexamination of the two patents, which are related to wireless lifting systems.

“The government is acting based upon evidence submitted by Stertil-Koni, that suggests Gray’s patents are invalid,” said Jean DellAmore, Ph.D., president of Stertil-Koni USA.

“The patent examiner looked at Stertil-Koni’s prior art, predating Gray’s original June 10, 2002 patent filing, and felt the evidence was compelling enough to call for a reexamination.”

Reexamination in a patent case re-opens a patent to new scrutiny by the Patent Office. And, as a result of a detailed investigation by trained examiners, existing claims may be lost or new claims of a narrower scope may be approved.

The next procedure to be undertaken by the Patent Office is to issue an office action stating its findings regarding whether Gray’s wireless products will continue to be patentable. Until then and throughout any ensuing appeals process, U.S. Patent Law allows the establishment of intervening rights if none of the originally-issued claims are found to be patentable.

Intervening rights protect those who might have — in good faith — made, purchased, offered to sell or used a product.

That means Stertil-Koni USA will continue to make, market, distribute and service its own wireless lift products and its distributors will continue to sell and distribute Stertil-Koni wireless lift products.

“We directly or indirectly employ more than 320 American workers and serve the needs of thousands of heavy-duty lift customers across the nation and around the world,” DellAmore said. “We simply can’t and won’t let them down.

“We believe in competitive fair play and contend that we have every right to make our wireless lift products,” DellAmore said. “We will

continue to vigorously pursue our rights to the fullest extent of the law and we put our full faith and trust in this nation’s Patent Office to adjudicate this matter in a fair and balanced fashion.”

## REI unveils e-catalog, YouTube presence

OMAHA, Neb.—Radio Engineering Industries (REI) has launched an electronic catalog and developed a presence on YouTube.

By going to <http://ipaperus.com/REI/2010Catalog/>, visitors can view the 20-page electronic REI catalog. Users can flip through the catalog’s pages just like

a hardcopy version.

In addition, readers can perform keyword searches, print pages, send pages by e-mail, or download a PDF version.

Listed in the catalog are all of REI’s products, including a variety of monitors, the ELITE System, BUS-WATCH and BUS-TRACK-

ER components, plus radios, microphones and speakers. The catalog also contains warranty information.

REI’s YouTube channel features informational and product demo videos, all on one page. YouTube users can subscribe to the channel to receive updates.

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# Operator dilemma: To retrofit coaches with seatbelts?

STERLING, Va. — Seatbelts: To retrofit or not to retrofit? Motorcoach operators will have some pretty tough decisions to make once federal regulators settle on their upcoming mandate for safety belts on coaches.

The U.S. Department of Transportation and the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration have yet to officially announce if the belts will be required only on new coaches or if existing buses will be included as well. However, there are indications the pending requirement will only cover new coaches. (See article on Page One.)

Either way, operators will be faced with a dilemma — spending thousands of dollars to retrofit their buses or potentially losing thousands of dollars in revenue if they don't.

The USDOT announced in November that it plans early this year to begin a rule-making procedure to mandate seatbelts. However, it said nothing about the requirement being for both new and used coaches, or if it would require two-point lap belts or three-point shoulder and lap belts.

"We just don't know what they're going to do," said safety consultant Matthew Daecher of the Daecher Consulting Group during a panel discussion at the United Motorcoach Association's sixth annual Safety Management Seminar.

He and others indicated the requirement on new coaches is a given, while extending the rule to cover existing coaches is uncertain, generally because of the high cost of ret-

rofitting older buses and some legal concerns that regulators may not have the authority to issue an order affecting existing fleets.

"Most speculation is that they do have the right to do it, but if they do, they also would need to have some kind of funding program for the operators," Daecher said.

The cost to add lap belts to most existing coaches would be between \$6,000 and \$8,000 for each bus, while installing three-point belts on them would run between \$45,000 and \$50,000, according to Louis Hotard of ABC Companies.

The wide difference, he said, is because the two-point belts could use the existing rails on most Van Hool buses that ABC sells,

while the three-point units would require the installation of two large braces to the underside of the coach.

Virgil Hoogestraat of Motor Coach Industries suggested that some older buses still being used might be difficult to retrofit because of the way they were manufactured.

"The requirement probably would have to be restricted to the age of the bus," he said.

Aloke Prasad of the NHTSA said crash test preliminary results show that lap belts alone are not adequate to protect passengers in an accident. "Two-point belts in a frontal impact are not a good situation," he said.

Daecher said if existing coaches are not included in the rule, operators would be faced

with the quandary of installing belts on at least some of their existing buses to meet the demands of customers.

"Customer demand and competitor pressure may dictate them," he said.

A number of operators attending the seminar said many of their customers already are requesting that only coaches with seatbelts be used on their charters and if they can't fill the order they could be out substantial amounts of revenue.

Insurance issues also will play a critical role in the seatbelt issue because more and more judges across the country now are allowing the absence of them to be part of accident liability suits, according to Paul Berne of Lancer Insurance.

"It's the feeling of jurors that the absence of seatbelts is wrong," he added.

However, he warned that operators should be cautious if they decide to retrofit any of their existing buses with seatbelts.

"You need to insulate your company from liability," he said.

Berne suggested that only coaches that are structurally capable of handling seatbelts should be retrofitted, only certified installers should be used and all work should be carefully documented.

Daecher said the only issue that seems to be missing from the seatbelt discussion around the industry is if passengers will use them. "That's the question: are they really going to use them," he said.

## Seatbelts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

rogram is a response, in part, to recommendations made by the National Transportation Safety Board for improving bus safety. NHTSA also has heard the voices of crash victims and their families, as well as critics in Congress.

Simultaneously, while NHTSA has been engaged in its testing and evaluation, bills have been introduced in Congress that would either mandate seatbelts for motorcoaches or require the NHTSA to investigate and come up with passenger restraint rules for over-the-road buses.

NHTSA also has been probing the diffi-

cult issues of bus fires, roof strength, and passenger ejections through windows during rollovers.

The federal agency began its formal seatbelt rulemaking initiative last August after its tests were completed. Since then it has been formulating a rule, which is expected to gain White House approval by the end of March. As soon as that happens it will be published and a public comment period of around 60 days is expected to follow.

When implementation would begin is apparently not yet on the agency's radar screen.

And, it ought to be noted, no one should plan their life around projections in a federal rulemaking calendar. Deadlines seldom, if ever, are met.

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## Charter rule

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The lifting of the rule will allow King County Metro to again provide parking lot shuttle service for the Seattle Mariners baseball team, Seattle Seahawks football team, Seattle Sounder soccer team, and the University of Washington football team, as well as shuttles for some public events.

Although the Mariners were allowed to use King County for an extra year after the rule's start date in April 2008, the other teams dropped the transit agency after the rule became effective.

### Charter rule targeted

Murray chairs the Senate Transportation Appropriations Committee and had little opposition in her adding the provision to the spending bill that passed the House 221 to 202 and the Senate 57 to 35 and was signed into law by President Obama on Dec. 16.

While the exemption was directed only at King County Metro — no other public transit agencies in the country are affected — Murray made it clear that she is looking for bigger things down the road. She initially offered a provision that would have exempted the entire state of Washington from the char-

ter service rule, but eventually limited it to just King County, calling it a "first step" toward changing it.

She stressed in her news release that while the provision she added to the transportation spending bill takes up only the specific concerns voiced in the Seattle area, she is intent on working to address the issue on a larger scale as the Senate moves toward reauthorization of a critical surface transportation bill in the coming year.

Her office said Murray believes the rule is flawed and not in the best interest of the public, according to spokesman Eli Zupnick, who added that she plans to work with others in the Senate to "review the rule and improve upon it."

The United Motorcoach Association, the American Bus Association and others in the industry have for some time been warning operators that public transit agencies probably will be mounting a push soon to get it changed or eliminated.

### Murray blasted

Industry reaction to passage of the exemption was quick and stern.

"It is clear Sen. Murray favors using taxpayer dollars without consent from the community to subsidize Seattle sport franchises and other events," said Ken Presley, vice president of UMA. "It is

difficult to believe Sen. Murray has any credibility with the unemployment problem when she has single-handedly caused so many drivers to be unemployed."

He stressed that now that the industry knows the senator's stand on small business, motorcoach operators elsewhere should look to see how the elected officials in their states feel about the issue, and then take action.

"It should be the task of every operator to find out where their congressional and senate representative stand, then campaign and vote accordingly," he stressed.

Clyde Hart, vice president of the ABA, said he found the action by the senator very disappointing, especially since the charter rule was negotiated by a bipartisan committee of representatives of the public and private bus transportation sector with the FTA in the room, and that 80 percent of the rule was approved unanimously by those involved.

"It seems to us that they are trying to circumvent the rule that was adopted after eight or nine months of negotiations," he added.

Thomas C. Casazza, president of the Northwest Motorcoach Association, said the exemption will have a devastating impact on more than 100 motorcoach operators in

the state who employ about 2,000 people and pay in excess of \$14 million in state taxes.

"At a time when our economy is in one of its worst recessions in decades, it is shocking that our senator would have such disregard for struggling businesses in her own state," he said.

Casazza pointed out that King County Metro's fare collections account for only 17 percent of its revenues and the balance is subsidized by tax dollars. "The provision is essentially an earmark for King County Metro on the backs of taxpayers," he added.

Jim Cameron, association vice president, added, "Sen. Murray is permitting our tax dollars to be used to put ourselves out of business. How's that for stimulus?"

Additionally, Casazza noted that the transportation services that private carriers provided the community in 2009 were successful, and the Seahawks shuttles this fall were widely praised by fans for their service, including the onboard broadcast of pre-game activities and availability of restrooms.

### Attack on small business

Godfrey LeBron, chairman of UMA and vice president of Paradise Trailways in Hicksville, N.Y., called the exemption an attack on

taxpayers.

"As a small businessman, but especially as a taxpayer, I am appalled at this, really appalled," he said. "If someone can afford the luxury of going to a ballgame, they can afford to pay for what it costs for private transportation services."

LeBron said the time may have come for motorcoach operators to begin concentrating on defeating elected officials who share Murray's views on small businesses and the motorcoach industry. "When are we going to say enough is enough?" he asked.

Tom Cook of Silver City Charters and Tours in Silverdale, Wash., said allowing tax-subsidized public transit agencies to operate charters in competition with private carriers will cost the state tax revenues and hurt motorcoach operators.

"You have no idea what you have single handily done to our private motorcoach industry," he wrote in an e-mail to the senator. "You cost the state much-needed tax dollars that we pay."

He said he knows that someone has to pay for the use of the buses, but it should be people attending the sports events, not taxpayers.

"If those going to the games are paying the ticket price, \$9 beers and \$7 popcorn, why can't they pay to ride a charter motorcoach?" he asked.

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# Soldiers home for Christmas, operator joins others to help

LANCASTER, S.C. — Thanks in large measure to the largesse of Lancaster Trailways, a local tour bus operator, members of a National Guard unit bound for Afghanistan early in 2010 got to spend Christmas with family and friends.

Lancaster Trailways not only transported the soldiers home from their training base at Fort McCoy in Wisconsin, but cut the price of the charter by \$10,000 and contributed another \$5,000 for the project.

“These soldiers have sacrificed so much for us,” Frankie Sistare, senior sales representative at Lancaster Trailways told the local newspaper. “We ought to open our hearts and make sure the soldiers get home to see their families for the holidays.”

The move involved four coaches and eight drivers to transport the 200 soldiers. Some of the drivers donated their time, Sistare said.

Lancaster Trailways also was able to help raise additional money through banks and other bus companies to make the trip possible.

“I think it’s wonderful,” Sistare said. “Christmas is a special season for a lot of reasons. This is probably

the best gift we could give to anyone, and it feels good to be able to do something for someone else. You get that good feeling in your heart when you do something like this, sharing the happiness of the Christmas season.”

The holiday homecoming effort began when it was learned that members of the 122nd Combat Engineers, which includes soldiers from South Carolina’s Lancaster and York counties, would not be able to make it home for the holidays before they are deployed to Afghanistan.

The unit needed upwards of \$35,000 to make a bus trip home. The military would not pay for it; the money needed to come from elsewhere.

The families went to work to raise the money, but they got a shocking surprise when they learned that donors, including Lancaster Trailways and Lowe’s Home Improvement, had come through for the unit in a big way.

Lowe’s donated \$25,000.

Mooreville, N.C.-based Lowe’s was founded by a World War II veteran, Carl Buchan, and



**Carrying the Spirit.** Dan Lehman (AKA Santa Claus) and his wife Delores (Mrs. Claus) often use their vintage Eagle during Christmas season to transport food and toys to needy families as part of their Carry the Light Ministries in Mechanicsburg, Pa. Lehman founded the ministry after he retired from operating a school buses fleet. He also is a vice president of the Museum of Bus Transportation, to which he has donated five buses. He is one of the museum’s most devoted workers.

12,000 veterans work for the company, Lowe’s spokeswoman Julie Yenichek told *The Lancaster News*.

Corporate executives heard about the homecoming project through store employees, Yenichek said.

“We are very happy to do it,” Yenichek said. “There’s no better place to be than home with family for the holidays, right?”

Individuals contributed another \$10,000.

“We’re just thankful to the peo-

ple of Lancaster, Rock Hill and York for pulling together to give us the chance to see my son, and these husbands and fathers for Christmas,” said Sandra Collins of Lancaster through tears. Her son, Christopher, serves in the unit.

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# Revenue, operating profits dip at Coach USA/Coach Canada

PERTH, Scotland — Revenue and operating profit dropped sharply at Coach USA and Coach Canada during the six months ended Oct. 31, the companies' corporate parent reported last month.

Stagecoach Group plc said revenue at Coach USA and Coach Canada, excluding megabus.com and Twin America, fell to \$201.1 million during the first half of fiscal 2010, from \$267.7 million for the same period in fiscal 2009.

Operating profit for the combined companies was \$14.6 million for the six months ended Oct. 31, 2009, down from \$38 million for the same period a year earlier.

The operating margin for Coach USA/Coach Canada for the fiscal 2010 period was 7.3 percent, versus 14.2 percent for the same period in fiscal 2009.

In discussing the results, Stagecoach Chairman Robert Speirs said that business in Stagecoach's

North American operations "has been challenging. High levels of unemployment have reduced the demand for travel and we have taken decisive action to control costs and reduce mileage."

megabus.com, the intercity curbside service operated by Coach USA, continued growing during the first half of fiscal 2010 but it also continued losing money.

Revenue at megabus.com climbed to \$20.1 million for the

six months ended Oct. 31, compared to revenue of \$15.4 million for the year-earlier period.

On an operational basis, megabus.com lost \$1.1 million during the fiscal 2010 period, versus a loss of \$800,000 during the like period in fiscal 2009.

Stagecoach Group's combined North American operations, including megabus.com and Twin America, the company that was created in March with the combin-

ing of the sightseeing service of Gray Line New York and City-sights NY, produced total revenue of \$262.4 million, and an operating profit of \$26.3 million, versus year-earlier results of \$283.1 million in revenue and an operating profit of \$37.2 million.

Stagecoach said the \$10.9 million decline in combined operating profit reflected efforts to cut costs in response to reduced revenue.

Stagecoach continues to have strong faith in its megabus.com operation, noting that it added more than one million customers during the first six months of fiscal 2010 despite the backdrop of a weak economy.

It attributed some of that growth to the addition of double-decker Van Hool coaches to its megabus.com fleet.

It expects full-year fiscal 2010 revenues of megabus.com to top \$40 million.

Stagecoach sustained its capital spending in North America during the first half of the fiscal year, investing \$22.3 million in new equipment, slightly more than it invested during the year-earlier period.

## Oregon cooperation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

were tied up on their regular transit and school transportation runs.

Lane Transit turned to Starline for help and the company agreed to round up enough buses to provide the service, according to Robert Ferguson, Starline's vice president of sales and marketing.

He said five other private carriers were recruited to join the operation, which allowed Starline to bring together a full contingent of drivers and a fleet of 40 coaches to transport people to the game over a four-hour period and 80 buses to return them to the parking lots im-

mediately after the game.

Ferguson said Lane Transit agreed to take on a role in the 8,000-person movement, too, and used its experience and expertise to help coordinate the effort.

"They were willing to do everything and anything to make it successful," he added. "It was an excellent example of how the public and private sectors can work together."

Andy Vobora of Lane Transit said he was happy to help and pleased with the way the entire operation ran.

"Overall, it went pretty smoothly and they were excellent to work with," he said.

Vobora said there were bumps in the road, but that was to be expected because it was the first time out for the private carriers and their drivers.

"We all learned a lot from it and that'll help us if we do it again," he said.

Gladys Gillis of Starline said the lessons she learned will become part of the game plan the next time her company gets an opportunity to provide the shuttle service for the university.

Among improvements that will be made are having more ticket sellers in the largest parking lots and assigning more stadium pick-up spaces after the game to coaches

serving those lots, she said.

Lane Transit, meanwhile, now will be waiting to see what role, if any, the transit agency will play in shuttle service operations for the university in the future.

Although the federal charter service rule provides that such shuttle service should be done by private carriers, none apparently has bid for the service in the past, leaving the work, instead, to the transit agency.

"We'll be sending out our service list for next year in a couple of weeks and we'll have to wait and see if there is any interest from any of the private companies," said Ferguson.

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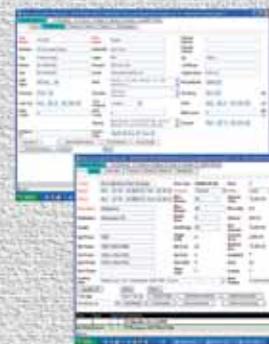
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# How about starting the year thinking outside the box?

By Dave Millhouser

BOOM! Like an F-16 lighting its afterburner, the 1947 Aero-coach blew thunder and blue flame out of its exhaust pipe.

We smart-aleck young drivers had learned that cutting the ignition on a moving, gasoline-powered coach — and switching it back on — lit the unburned fuel in the exhaust manifold.

The resulting explosion was particularly satisfying when touched off inside the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel.

This time the stunt backfired (just can't help these puns) and shattered the manifold.

Working frantically to install a new one in time for a trip, we got the job done but the bus wouldn't start and our boss decided it was time to sell it.

The market for ancient gas-driven coaches was limited but our boss was a creative soul and sold it to a politician. The last we saw of that beauty it was being towed off to become a temporary office for the "Spiro Agnew for Governor" campaign.

Who knows what might have been — if we hadn't broken the bus.

Selling the clunker to a politician was (at THAT time) thinking "outside the box." Marketing in the current business climate seems to require a bit of the same.

It would be nice if I could throw out a bunch of good ideas, but that can't happen for two reasons: I'm not that smart, and anything I know is NOT "outside the box."

But heck, ignorance hasn't stopped me before.

One creative idea comes from outside our industry. A college student knew that a lot of his compatriots would be traveling to the same area for the holidays. There was no direct service of any kind, so he chartered a bus and sold tickets himself. To learn more, go to [www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2009/11/syracuse\\_university\\_juniors\\_ru.html](http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2009/11/syracuse_university_juniors_ru.html).

Creative, but not entirely new.

During the Depression a New Yorker going to school in Michigan seized a similar opportunity. After graduating he came home, and using what he'd learned, started a bus line. Bert Askwith and Campus Coach was a huge, long-term success based on identifying and filling an unusual need.

A highly regarded company in

Arkansas figured out that folks on sightseeing tours aren't there for the ride, and turned their coaches into "Theater Buses." Their customers are entertained by a combination of knowledgeable drivers, step-on guides and video vignettes. It's all about the experience.

Many coach companies look longingly at operating tours, only to find out that the cost of entry is high. Deposits on venues and hotel rooms can be steep.

One clever New England charter company noticed that times are tough for venues, too. He searched out those willing to be flexible on deposits and began assembling trips that required minimal upfront cost.

Not only does this help his business now but he's building relationships with venues that will pay off in the future.

Some operators enter contracts with businesses, wrapping coaches in advertisements in exchange for a monthly payment. What you lose in identity you make up for in cash flow.

Many businesses have a consistent need for transportation between multiple locations. You may be able to save money, carbon

footprint and employee time by offering some sort of regular service connecting facilities.

You can offer anything from shuttles, to a line run between city pairs. Put their name on the buses and everybody is happy.

Actively sell your services. If you have a photogenic facility, invite potential customers. If not, have sales people take coaches to visit anybody you can imagine that might have use for a bus.

Now is a great time to start wooing Baby Boomers, a generation that's accustomed to flying and the freedom of car travel. The oldest Baby Boomers are very close to retirement age and many neither like the hassles of modern-day flying, nor the congestion of modern-day road travel.

When I was growing up, many local restaurants and taverns chartered buses to carry customers to Baltimore Colts' home games. In some parts of the country, this is common, but in others, it's unusual. Consider sending your sales people to those places in hopes they'll handle the bookings and charter your bus for all sorts of events.

Talk to peers, either at meetings

or informally, and see what's working for them. Take advantage of formal marketing training, either through the Bus and



Dave Millhouser

Motorcoach Academy, or local schools. Pay attention to what other industries are doing and look for ways to apply it to the coach business.

Right after 9/11, when business was in the dumper, a clever friend chartered a bunch of his older buses to a bank. They were lined up in front of the building as a barrier in case of attack. It may seem humorous now, but it was deadly serious then.

My buddy figured that, if things went well, he'd get paid for having his buses sit. If things went poorly, he'd be rid of his oldest equipment. He made sure the fuel tanks were full.

Dave Millhouser is a bus industry marketing consultant and freelance writer. Contact him at: [dave\\_millhouser@hotmail.com](mailto:dave_millhouser@hotmail.com).

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## Norm Thompson, retired insurance executive, dies

SUNLAND, Calif. — Long-time bus industry insurance executive Norm Thompson died here. He was 84.

Mr. Thompson spent nearly 30 years in bus insurance and safety, becoming widely known and respected.

He began his industry career in the mid-1950s as a bus operator and driver instructor for the old Southern California Rapid Transit District (now the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority).

Ten years later he joined Transit Casualty Co., which for two decades ending in the mid-1980s was the leading bus insurer in the U.S. At Transit Casualty, Mr. Thompson rose to divisional vice president of marketing.

After 18 years at Transit Casualty, he joined Transportation Insurance Brokers in Glendale, Calif., helping lay the foundation for TIB to become a national brokerage.

Next he joined Clarendon National Insurance Co. as vice president — national marketing.

After five years with Clarendon, Mr. Thompson moved to Lancer as vice president of marketing, retiring in 1995.

“Norm was a great friend and even greater mentor,” said Lancer Senior Vice President Randy O’Neill. “His professionalism, integrity and commitment to the bus insurance industry is best evidenced by the dozens of today’s bus insurance practitioners, myself included, who have him to thank for showing them the ropes in the turbulent bus insurance market of the mid- and late-1980s.

“This proud (‘don’t call me former’) Marine will definitely be missed, but not forgotten.”

Mr. Thompson is survived by his wife, Ann, and three children.



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# BCI revamps sales/service operation, promotes three

HENDERSON, Nev. — Bus & Coach International, which markets BCI Falcon motorcoaches, has announced a reconfiguration of its nationwide operations.

BCI said it expanded its Orlando sales, parts and service facility, making it the company hub for pre-owned coach sales and parts warehousing and distribution.

The Orlando location also will continue to support East Coast sales and new coach deliveries.

At one time, BCI distributed parts, handled pre-delivery inspections, and sold used coaches from its original company facility in Jennings, Kan., a remote location in the state's northwest corner that is subject to full four-season weather.

A company spokeswoman said that "to avoid potential impacts of weather and other logistical considerations, we have consolidated all parts in Orlando. The Eastern time zone location also maximizes responsiveness to customers."

Another key aspect of the reconfiguration is the closing of BCI's service center in Las Vegas.

The spokesman said that although the Las Vegas facility is being closed, the company will continue to maintain a parts and service presence in Las Vegas. She said a formal announcement will be made shortly regarding a location for a new Las Vegas operation. She indicated the new site will be close to the company's previous location on Polaris Avenue.

Additionally, BCI said it will be announcing a new Southern California sales and service center, along with a West Coast pre-delivery center, this year.

The spokeswoman noted that BCI maintains a network of "sub-dealers" that provide BCI service in San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Chicago and Jennings.

"Each of our sub-dealers maintains a service location that is staffed by qualified, BCI-trained service personnel," the spokeswoman reported.

"We are also formalizing a service location with a BCI employee in one of those locations, in addition to (company) field technicians based in the Northeast, Midwest, Southeast and West."

BCI reported that it had posted year-over-year increases in new coach sales. "This continues a pattern set in each of the last three years," the company said.

Separately, BCI announced the promotion of three key executives.

Eric Lea has been elevated to vice president/finance. BCI said that under Lea's leadership, BCI marketing and customer finance programs have improved signifi-

cantly during the past year.

In his new role, Lea will be taking on responsibility for developing and implementing corporate strategy and supporting BCI sales throughout North America.

Ken Carchidi has been promoted

to vice president/sales. Carchidi will be responsible for new and pre-owned motorcoach sales and sales personnel throughout North America.

Carchidi joined BCI as a regional sales manager and previously was national sales director.

Sharad Agarwal has been promoted to vice president/operations.

BCI said Agarwal had strengthened the company customer service and delivery process, implemented training initiatives, and built a strong support team.

He will oversee customer support, parts, dealership operations, new coach deliveries and risk management. Plus, information technology and quality control.

Chad Dixon, BCI chief operating officer, has left the company.

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# New World Tours founder Arnold 'Brownie' Brown dies

OCEAN VIEW, Del. — Arnold Lee 'Brownie' Brown, a founder of New World Tours in Bristow, Va., and Bethany Beach, Del., died last month. He was 66.

Mr. Brown worked out of the company's charter sales office in Bethany Beach.

Mr. Brown was a native of Wilmington, Del., and graduated from Fort Union Military Academy, before attending Louisiana State University.

He was the former owner of Holiday House Restaurant on the boardwalk in Bethany

Beach, which he operated until 1996.

In the mid-1990s he merged two smaller bus companies to form New World, which has grown to be one of the industry's best-known, family-operated companies.

Under the leadership of Mr. Brown and his son, Dave Bolen, New World has become widely known in the industry for its innovation and zeal for adapting new technology. As an operator, the company emphasizes safety, service and value.

Bolen is treasurer of the United Motorcoach Association.

In addition to his son, Mr. Brown is survived by his wife, Marie Bolen Brown, of Ocean View; two daughters, Donna Vernon and Dena Ennis, and a brother, Wil-

liam Torbert.

Memorials in Mr. Brown's name have been established with the Bethany Beach Vol. Fire Department, P.O. Box 950, Bethany Beach, DE 19930 and the Millville Vol. Fire Dept., P.O. Box 64, Millville, DE 19970.

## N.Y. lawsuit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

corporation.

Additionally, the suit charges that the tax bill violates a state law requiring the MTA to be self sustaining.

MTA spokesman Kevin Ortiz said the agency would have no comment on the legal action.

In addition to the constitutional claims, the suit also offers several examples of the MTA allegedly overstepping its legal authority and acting recklessly, including investing \$1 billion in speculative and volatile contracts that were offered by several national investment firms.

"This MTA gamble backfired, where they are now on the hook for about \$362 million because of their irresponsibility," Schoolman said.

The suit also took issue with MTA employee payment practices, charging the agency and its subsidiaries continue to pay much higher salaries and compensation packages to its employees than are paid in private industry.

"Furthermore, the ratio of MTA employees who are engaged in administrative bureaucracy when compared with those people actually performing hands-on operations of equipment and services, is much higher than ratios at other private transportation organizations," he said. "What many of these people do, where they do it, and how they do it is highly questionable."

As examples of the high pay, the suit cited a Manhattan Institute for Policy Research study done last June that showed that more than 10 percent of MTA's workforce of 8,200 took home \$100,000 or more

in total pay, including overtime.

Among them were 10 who earned more than \$250,000, which

## Schoolman expects NYMTA to unleash its legal team to fight him.

averaged \$102,000 over their base salaries; 44 who earned between \$200,000 and \$250,000, an average of \$89,000 over their regular pay; 600 who earned between \$150,000 and \$200,000; and 7,560 who earned between \$100,000 and \$150,000.

Schoolman said he expects the MTA to unleash its extensive legal team to fight him and the legal action.

"I am optimistic that other em-

ployers will answer my call to action," he added. "If we allow the MTA to get away with this latest tax, it has opened the door for more, similar MTA taxes in the years to come."

Schoolman's attorney, Joseph N. Campolo, said other businesses affected by the tax would be welcomed to join in the suit by filing their own briefs.

In addition to the MTA, others named in the suit are: New York Gov. David Paterson, State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, State Senate President Malcolm A. Smith, Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, MTA Commissioner Jay H. Walder and the State Department of Taxation and Finance.

Meantime, additional problems continue to pile up on the MTA.

State Sen. Brian Z. Foly, announced a day after the suit was filed that he plans to introduce state

legislation that would trim the new payroll tax by 68 percent in five counties and by 34 percent in two other counties.

A day later, the MTA board unanimously approved what has been called a "doomsday" budget that increases subway and bus fares to \$2.50 from \$2 and hikes commuter rail line fares and bridge and tunnel tolls. Additionally, the budget also eliminates two subway lines and 35 bus routes and reduces service on several other lines.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver said he plans to do everything he can to make sure that the action by the MTA board will not stand, while Gov. David Paterson said he and lawmakers will try to develop an agreement on a financial rescue plan for the agency.

To view a copy of the suit and other information, go to [www.mtataxpayerabuse.com](http://www.mtataxpayerabuse.com).

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# Expo sessions guide operators through difficult times

LAS VEGAS — UMA Motorcoach Expo 2010 will feature more than a dozen focused educational sessions designed to help coach company owners and managers make their operations more successful.

The two days of workshops, presentations and panel discussions cover a variety of topics in three principal areas: Marketing, finance and operations.

Here are the educational sessions scheduled for Expo '10:

## Wednesday, Feb. 24

### 8–8:30 a.m. Bus & Motorcoach Academy: Learning How to Learn

Thinking of taking a course through Bus & Motorcoach Academy but intimidated by online learning? In this session attendees will learn the ins and outs of online academy courses, and see that online learning is just as simple as opening a textbook.

### 9 a.m.–4 p.m. Maintenance Interchange

This session, which is closed to vendors, is the only place where motorcoach owners, operators and maintenance professionals can participate in an open discussion about common maintenance issues.

### 9–10 a.m. Thriving in the New Economy

This session will focus on what operators are doing to not only survive these chal-

lenging times, but thrive by developing new markets and finding new, creative and profitable ways to utilize their capital investments. Learn from operators who have not only survived but, in fact, thrived on what the New Economy has to offer.

### 10–10:45 a.m. Legislative & Regulatory Update

Attendees will be brought up to speed on key federal legislative and regulatory initiatives, as well as gain insights into what we can expect from 113th Congress.

### 11 a.m.–Noon Concurrent Sessions

#### FaceBook, Twitter, YouTube: How Social Marketing Can Grow Your Business

New words and phrases have entered our everyday jargon. With FaceBook, YouTube and Twitter it has forced companies to rethink how they market, position and brand their companies. Find out how you can capitalize on these new social marketing channels to reach new markets, better position your company and increase market share.

#### Using Driver Training to Improve Retention

Everyone recognizes the value of making sure your drivers are trained regularly to keep up with new regulations and ensure their driving and decision-making skills re-

main sharp. In this session attendees will learn to turn their normal training routine into a tool that reduces driver turnover.

#### Protecting Your Assets While Maintaining Tight Relations with Your Lenders

During the past year, credit availability has dropped while criteria for securing a loan have become more stringent. Further exacerbating the problem, revenue from operations has dropped and equipment values have slid, leaving many loan portfolios upside down. Unless operators are proactive, lenders will lose confidence and pull back on their financial support. Attendees will learn how to protect their investment and still maintain an effective working relationship with their lenders.

### 12:15–2 p.m. Operator Lunch

### 2:15–3:15 p.m. Concurrent Sessions

#### Bargain Hunting: Buying Print, Broadcast and Cable Advertising

Advertising across all media channels is down, particularly in print and somewhat in cable. What this means is that there are bargains to be had, thus giving operators a more affordable chance to add these media to their marketing mix. Learn how to negotiate like a Madison Avenue pro and get the best advertising deal for your company.

#### FAQ'S about FMCSR's

This is a chance for attendees to ask questions, get information and clarify matters dealing with drivers, hours of service, medical qualifications, record keeping and other complex Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulation-related issues.

### 2:15–4:30 p.m. How to Exceed in a Down Economy

Just because the economy is struggling doesn't mean you should settle for below-par performance. Opportunities to not only grow but boost your business above the norm are out there. Learn what Duane Spader, founder of UMA's 20 Groups, has learned working with some of the top performing companies in our industry.

### 3:30–4:30 p.m. Concurrent Sessions

#### Staying Connected with Your Customers When They Are Not Traveling with You

Economic pressures have forced some of your best clients to postpone or cancel trips. You've not only lost their business but you've also been put in that awful position of "being out of sight and out of mind" with your customers. Learn how to ensure customers remain loyal to you and not fall into the clutches of your competitor.

#### Planning for Catastrophic Events

No one likes to think about accidents or other mishaps, but sadly they do occur, even to the best companies. This means you need to be ready for even the worst type of trage-

dy every time one of your coaches leaves the yard. Attendees will be taught a game plan to have in place, making sure everyone in the company knows exactly what to do when disaster strikes.

## Thursday, Feb. 25

### 8:30–9:30 a.m. The Future of Equipment Manufacturing: View from the Equipment CEOs

The greatest investment you make in this industry occurs when you purchase a coach. With prices now approaching a half-million dollars, the decision is an important one. Equipment changes are being mandated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The presidents of the Expo Platinum Sponsors will address these issues, plus discuss changes they may be making to accommodate shifts in consumer preference and the entry of new equipment into the marketplace.

### 9:30–10:30 p.m. Concurrent Sessions

#### Internet Marketing: Where Are We Today?

The internet has not only changed the way our customers shop, but has created an enormous opportunity for small operators to level the proverbial "playing field" and compete against larger companies. At the same time, savvy group-travel shoppers are finding new and creative ways to find the best company. You want to make sure that when these smart new consumers do a search for charter buses, your company shows up on their radar screen. Come and learn what tools are available to give motorcoach operators a leg up, as well as a competitive advantage over the brokers who merely skim profits off the top line.

#### Surviving a USDOT Audit

When the call comes that the local representative of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is coming to do a compliance review, panic often sets in. How do I prepare? What should I expect? What do I need to have available for the inspector to make the process smooth and quick? What should I do while the inspector is here? Learn what you need to do to be ready when the FMCSA inspector shows up at your door.

#### Applying for Federal Grants

One of the least understood and least utilized resources are federal grants. One example is grants available to help start line-run service in rural areas through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) 5311 (f) program.

There are other sources of federal funds and tapping into them is not that difficult, provided you know how to go about applying for these grants. Learn the ins and outs of getting federal grant dollars and how you can increase your company's value in your community.



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# Setra S 417 coaches are getting Mercedes-Benz engine

GREENSBORO, N.C. — In a move designed to give its motorcoaches a marketing edge, Daimler Buses North America announced that 2010 Setra S 417 coaches will use Mercedes-Benz OM 471 engines exclusively.

That means that Setras will be the first, and only, coaches available in North America with a Mercedes-Benz powerplant.

“The Mercedes-Benz engine clearly differentiates the Setra brand from the other offerings in the market and demonstrates our leadership in the luxury coach market,” said Tom Chezem, vice president of sales for Daimler Buses North America.

## Cummins touts engine mileage

COLUMBUS, Ind. — The tiff between diesel engine makers over emissions technology appears to have spilled over into other areas.

Cummins says it has “indisputable evidence” that prove its ISB engines get “significantly better” miles per gallon than International MaxxForce 7 and MaxxForce DT engines.

How much better? asks Cummins.

“On a closed track, simulating a rural school bus route, the ISB delivered 7.6 percent better fuel economy than the MaxxForce DT,” Cummins says in its latest bus engine newsletter.

“On a closed-track simulation of an urban school bus route, the ISB got 17.2 percent better mpg than the MaxxForce 7. The difference was even greater on an interstate route, simulating travel to an activity outside the school district, (where there was) 18.8 percent better mpg,” Cummins reported.

The testing, says Cummins, was conducted with an independent third party and Cummins’ in-house engineers, using Society of Automotive Engineers methodology, with like horsepower and torque for the competing engines, on vehicles with comparable specifications and loads.

According to Cummins, the test results have potentially significant financial ramifications.

“Based on these results, each ISB-powered school bus in a typical urban fleet running 15,000 miles per year will use 433 gallons less fuel and will cost (an operator or a school) district \$1,300 less to run than a bus equipped with a MaxxForce 7.

“This is assuming 15,000 miles driven annually and a fuel cost of \$3 per gallon.”

“This also illustrates the cohesiveness of Daimler,” said Chezem. “It is Daimler engineers designing and innovating products to work as efficiently as possible with Daimler vehicles.”

The Mercedes-Benz engine going into 2010 Setra coaches is based on a world engine platform developed by Daimler and shared

by Detroit Diesel, which is marketing its version, the DD13, to other North American coach builders. Detroit Diesel is owned by a subsidiary of Daimler.

The Mercedes-Benz OM 471 and the Detroit Diesel DD13 share the same emissions-reducing technology, selective catalytic reduction, and marketed under the name

BlueTec.

The Setra S 417 with the Mercedes-Benz engine will be publicly unveiled at the 2010 UMA Motorcoach Expo in Las Vegas.

“The Mercedes-Benz powered technology, coupled with the proven BlueTec diesel air purification system that addresses the EPA 2010 environmental regulations, allows

Setra a level of differentiation in the North American market,” Daimler Buses said in its announcement.

Detroit Diesel dealers will service Setra coaches with the Mercedes-Benz OM 471 engine.

Detroit Diesel has 800 service center locations in North America and 8 national parts distribution centers.



## Why you CAN'T afford to miss UMA Motorcoach Expo...

- New timely education sessions** – UMA's education sessions are recognized as the industry's best and this year's program is no exception. Moreover, with today's challenging economy staring everyone in the face, learning how to navigate through these uncertain times *is a must!* Each EXPO solution session is customized to meet the demands of the *new economy*. You'll learn new ways to market and manage your business that will help you not just succeed, but *thrive* with the knowledge and new insights you'll gain through this information-packed program. EXPO Solution Sessions are run by some of our industry's best operators who know and understand what you are going through. They're not shy about sharing their successes...or their failures. What you can learn from them will be priceless. You'll leave Las Vegas with proven, “shovel-ready” ideas that you can readily implement in your business.
- New motorcoach manufacturers** – Come and see what the industry's leading manufacturers have in store for you. Anything and everything you need to succeed in this new economy will be waiting for you when you step foot onto the industry largest trade show venue.
- Expanded Destinations & Attractions Isle** – Deciding where you take your customers is as important as the equipment you buy and the services you purchase to operate your business profitably. Thanks to our partnership with the National Tour Association (NTA), we've added new and exciting Destinations & Attractions to the EXPO exhibit floor.
- Invaluable networking opportunities** – UMA Motorcoach Expo is the only place where you'll be able to forge **powerful business partnerships** with operators around the Nation and Canada. EXPO's networking opportunities are a great way for you to learn first-hand how other operators are dealing with this *new economy*. Since all EXPO functions are open to all attendees you can build and strengthen your relationships with vendors and suppliers as well. Plus catch up with old friends, learn how they are staying the course, and have fun...*all in just 4 days!*
- New pre-owned coach section of the exhibit hall floor** – To meet the growing demands of customers, operators now are learning they must adapt and make equipment buying a marketing, as well as financial decision. The exhibit floor is not just a buyer's haven, but having sat through intensive education sessions, you will be able to decide what equipment and services you'll need that fit your new business model. Come and see the diversified exhibit hall floor.



## WHAT OPERATORS ARE SAYING ABOUT UMA MOTORCOACH EXPO



### David Brown, HOLIDAY TOURS

“During these uncertain times attending UMA Motorcoach Expo is critical. It may prove to be the most important business decision you make all year.”



### Mike Waters, COACH AMERICA/FRANCISCAN LINES

“Expo has always provided operators, large and small, the opportunity to see up close new vehicle equipment, supplies, and literally every item a bus operator will need to survive. It also gives us old timers the chance to see each other again and to meet new friends and colleagues through networking facilitated by UMA.”



### Larry Hundt, GREAT CANADIAN TRAILWAYS

“UMA Motorcoach Expo is the most important show I attend. EXPO helps me keep up with our ever-changing industry. I find the show and the solution sessions vital to our growth and success.”



### Ronald Bast, PRESIDENT, RITEWAY BUS SERVICE, INC.

“The UMA Motorcoach Expo is the ideal venue to expand our network contacts as well as nurture existing relationships. The importance of maintaining association memberships is essential.”



### Tom Giddens, PACIFIC COACHWAYS TRAILWAYS

UMA Motorcoach Expo is the one place where everyone who attends can benefit. Whether you are a small or large operator there is something to learn and apply to your business. The education sessions, networking opportunities, and showfloor allow me to meet with everyone in the industry in just 3 days. It is the one industry event I would not miss!



### Loren Jones, HAWKEYE STAGES

“We have come to every UMA Motorcoach Expo since 1994. The one-on-one networking times are always great. This is the one central show where we always know we will be able to see various manufacturers and suppliers face-to-face. There have been several products we would not have bought had we not seen them at UMA Motorcoach Expo.”

## Dane Cornell

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

headlamps and an additional grab handle near the entrance door.

He said two of the pre-owned coaches were added to the Expo mix to show that the life of older equipment can be extended with modifications.

Diesel particulate filters have been added to the engines of both, allowing the coaches to meet stiff California 2025 clean air standards.

Cornell said the company is especially excited about its most-recent addition, the double-decker TD925, which was introduced two years ago and is selling well. megabus.com, Coach USA and Coach Canada have been its biggest customers, although several smaller operators also have added them to their fleets.

"It's been a great success in the past year," he said, adding that operators use it for a variety of applications, such as regular-route service, tour-and-charter operations, and casino shuttles. "We expect the TD925 to have a good sustainable life in North America."

The model provides seating for 81 passengers and includes an on-board restroom, front-and-rear stairs, sky-view roof, and an oversized luggage area.

### A very different coach

A show piece is expected to be Van Hool's Altano High-Deck, a 65-seat luxury touring coach that could make its way to the U.S. market.

The coach consists of a deck and one-half, which places passengers above the driver and gives them their own windshield and a full frontal scenic view. The lower deck is used for luggage and accommodates much more than any other 45-foot coach on the road today.

"We think there is some additional safety because the driver is isolated and can't be distracted by the passengers," he noted.

Before deciding to bring the coach to UMA Motorcoach Expo, he said the company questioned its customers about what they might be interested in and they said they wanted a little more seating and much more luggage space for longer tours.

Cornell said the company is excited, too, about showing off its offerings at Expo because of the diverse audience the gathering draws every year.

"ABC continues to believe the United Motorcoach Association is an excellent organization to network with the industry, and Expo provides a unique venue to reach

out to a broad scope of operators, suppliers, financial and insurance

"We continue to look ahead to the coming year for some consistency."

providers, and national brand leaders," he stressed.

### Meeting challenges

He cautioned, however, that the weak economy presents challenges to the company, especially the uncertainty of what's ahead and the need to try to understand how it will impact the industry, both positively and negatively.

"But we continue to look ahead to the coming year for some consistency," he added.

Cornell said ABC has been focused on several key areas to take on the challenges and maintain its market strength. He identified them as controlling costs, finding new revenue streams, implementing internal system upgrades that better support customer communication, and emphasizing employee teamwork.

At the same time, it continues

to count on its sales and marketing efforts to steer its new product development efforts.

"Our main focus is to capture and clarify customer demands and needs, as well as regulatory items, via focus groups and surveys, product demos, national tours and product testing throughout the course of each year," he said. "As far as our mature flagship product offering, we've evolved and changed as market conditions warrant to give operators the most cutting-edge components, technologies and support available."

ABC not only has the customer in mind when it develops new coaches or modifies existing buses, but when it sells them as well, according to Cornell.

"We are sensitive to how the market is impacting our operators, and continually look for partnering opportunities to offer our goods and services at market prices that are fair and beneficial to business owners," he said.

### A good time to buy?

It's that attitude, he suggests, that makes this a good time for operators to purchase new coaches, despite the uncertain economy and uncertain future.

Cornell said ABC is determined to deliver value to its cus-

tomers now, noting that through product enhancements like seat-belt upgrades, emissions compliance and onboard passenger amenities like WiFi and 30-inch TV screens, operators can take advantage of market advances that preserve the long-term value of their fleet.

"Plus, we're motivated to sell," he emphasized.

Meantime, ABC continues to look ahead with guarded optimism.

For the short term, Cornell said the company plans to continue looking at niche opportunities that work within its product range.

That, he said, includes the pre-owned coach business, which ABC used early on to build its success in the industry, but which has slowed considerably under current market and economic conditions.

"We continue to support our pre-owned operation and appreciate that the market is changing," he noted. "This is an area that we evaluate consistently and we will strategically assess and adapt our business to market shifts."

### Eye on Buy America

Also, he said the company is looking into the federal Buy America program. Under the program, public transit agencies can buy foreign-made buses with tax dollars if the buses are assembled in the U.S. and use at least 60 percent of U.S.-made parts. It is designed to protect domestic jobs and manufacturers, including companies that build transit buses.

"The Buy America program is something quite frankly that has been on our mind for a number of years," he said.

He said ABC has been encouraging Van Hool to build an assembly plant in the United States and they are contemplating doing it, but have yet to make a decision.

"So we still have the interest there, but no clear path to get there yet," he added.

He said now may be a good time for Van Hool to make the move because there are a number of vacant plants in the U.S. and the price probably would be right to buy one. But, he cautioned, it would have to be a calculated business decision because the poor economy has slowed new coach sales.

Long term, according to Cornell, the company plans to continue to keep a close watch on strengthening and growing its business.

"We'll continue to identify areas to shore up and expand our service operations in both the transit and motorcoach industries," he said.

## CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

### Seeking Campaign Director for Get Motorcoachified Image Campaign

The Motorcoach Council is seeking a marketing and sales professional to work as an outside contractor to boost participation in the motorcoach industry's first nationwide image campaign entitled, "Get Motorcoachified." The Campaign is designed to boost ridership on private motorcoaches and buses. The primary vehicle for promoting the value of motorcoach transportation will be the motorcoach itself. To that end, specific graphics and a variety of taglines have been developed touting the ways in which both travelers and the environment benefit by more people using motorcoaches for their transportation needs vs. other forms of transportation — cars, planes, trains and others.

The initial focus of this campaign and the immediate responsibility of this individual will be to promote and drive placement of the Get Motorcoachified graphics on buses.

#### Position Goals and Responsibilities:

- The objective is to get 100 or more of the industry's motorcoaches to participate in the campaign and display campaign graphics within the first 90 days. Participation should be broad-based and geographically-dispersed.
- Within the first two weeks, develop a marketing plan consisting of Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Tactics, Timetables and Budgets.
- Submit the plan to direct report (Board member of the Council) for review and approval by the Motorcoach Council.
- Utilize all available industry communications publications including but not limited to *Bus & Motorcoach News*, *ABA Insider*, *Bus Exchange*, *Bus Ride Magazine*, *Metro Magazine*, *Busline Magazine* and others.
- Reach out to trade publications in the group travel and tour industries to promote the campaign and increase the deployment of the Get Motorcoachified graphics.
- At the end of the contract period, the Campaign Director shall provide a complete activities report and recommendations for next steps to help achieve the Campaign's goals and objectives.

Interested individuals should respond with a resume and list of marketing and sales accomplishments to:

**Heather Horton**

email: [pr@motorcoachcouncil.org](mailto:pr@motorcoachcouncil.org) or call 720-449-9000

[www.MotorcoachCouncil.org](http://www.MotorcoachCouncil.org)

### USED COACHES FOR SALE



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(1) 2008 BCI Falcon45 coach, \$290,000

For more information contact Kyle Fitzgerald at 800-207-9286 ext. 217 or e-mail [kylefitzgerald@fccef.com](mailto:kylefitzgerald@fccef.com)



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