

## *News Update on the U.S. Intercity Bus Industry*

*Autumn 2022 E-News*

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### Editor's Letter:

Advocates of intercity bus services in Colorado are experiencing something that might be likened to a “Rocky Mountain High”. **Three remarkable developments** were evident on my fact-finding trip to the state in late August.



First, Colorado offered free public transit and **half-price fares on publicly funded intercity bus** services throughout August, part of a month-long program to reduce zone emissions and traffic, with apparent successful results. Second, a significant **expansion of Bustang**, the state's publicly supported intercity bus line, is afoot and generating “buzz” in places that have long wanted better ground transportation to Denver. Third, United Airlines has a budding partnership with motorcoach operator Landline, which links several small markets to Denver's international airport. **The coaches have United's familiar logo** and are operated like airplanes, offering a glimpse of the future.

These three developments, described below, show how “thinking outside the bus” can strategically position scheduled motor coach travel for expansion. **Intercity bus services need smart branding** and heavier promotion, terminal designs that support intermodal connections, and a place at the table when looking for ways to relieve our overburdened highways and airports. That is happening in a big way in Colorado.

Separately, while **we had hoped to report** that our earlier projection that traffic for the United States this past summer would be about 65–70% of pre-pandemic levels was far too low, it appears to have been

about right. Despite this, we are thankful that the market is gradually rebounding.

- **In the Mountain States and South**, despite driver and mechanic shortages and frightful traffic congestion, the recovery appears to be strongest. RedCoach reports that its Florida traffic is approaching pre-pandemic levels.



- **In California, the Midwest and the Northeast**, the recovery appears to be much slower, with comparatively fewer new services popping up.

This edition of *Intercity Bus E-News* shows that the sector is gradually regaining its vitality, even if the pace of the recovery isn't as fast as we had hoped.

Check out the latest news below, including our *Talking Transportation Podcast* with FlixBus's Pierre Gourdain [here](#).

Joe Schwieterman, Ph.D.  
*Intercity Bus E-News Editor*  
*Professor and Director, Chaddick Institute at DePaul University*

Caption (Masthead): Greyhound Station in Dallas, TX on January 6, 2022  
Caption (bottom): A Flatiron Flyer departure at Boulder, CO on August 18, 2022

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## Saddling up for Bustang's Colorado Expansion



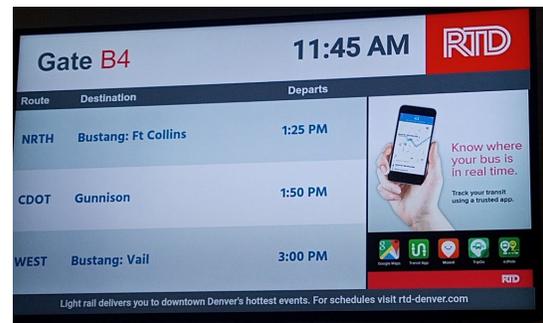
Colorado is doubling down on long-distance bus travel through another **major expansion** of Bustang, the intercity bus unit of the state's transportation department. Not only is more Bustang service in the works, but Bustang Outrider, which involves smaller buses with around 35 seats, and Bustang Pegasus, which involves vans, will expand as well.

At the start of the summer, Bustang ran four daily round trips on its West

Line from Denver, with one running all the way to Glenwood Springs, the line's terminus. Traffic had reached 135% of pre-pandemic levels on this **busy "I-70" route** by last March. It recently added two more round trips to Grand Junction, and in 2023, it will expand to 9–10 daily trips, all to Grand Junction. By 2024, there will be 13-15 daily. The state has **allocated \$30 million for the pilot**, which includes the cost of purchasing more buses and covering the operating costs of Bustang's private operators.

On the South and North Lines, which are more commuter-focused, traffic is still down considerably, but a gradual recovery is underway. Plans call for adding two more trips in each direction on these routes on weekdays, from six to eight round trips, later this year, while keeping weekend trips to two. In 2023, the number will **grow to 10 roundtrips** on weekdays and four on weekends, with several more roundtrips added in 2024.

Bustang travelers also enjoyed the benefits of fare-free transit connections on local public transit services in August, and half-price fares on intercity trips in August, made possible by a **special state government appropriation**. All but a few of the state's public bus operators took part, with the exceptions mostly involving agencies' concerns that the **lack of drivers** would hamper their ability to meet the demand.



Caption (top): Bustang arrives Loveland, CO on August 19, 2022

Caption (middle): Departure board at the Bustang gate in the Denver Union Station bus concourse

## Flying "Coach" on a United Airlines/Landline Bus



*Intercity Bus E-News* editor Joe Schwieterman headed to the Northern Colorado Regional Airport in Fort Collins on Friday, August 19 to check out an afternoon United Airlines service to Denver International Airport. This service was **not a flight but a motor coach part of United's Landline**

**partnership.** The Fort Collins airport is currently bereft of scheduled passenger flights, so the terminal is tranquil by aviation standards. Among the other perks are free parking, an Avis car rental counter, the avoidance of long walks, and ample seating.

Upon entering this diminutive terminal, you will find a United ticket counter that looks almost identical to their check-in areas at other airports. The **ticket agent, wearing United's insignia, handles checked baggage** and announces arrivals and departures. Boarding the coach occurs curbside, at the same spot as private-vehicle drop-offs. About a dozen passengers boarded that afternoon, nearly all using e-tickets, for an "on-time" departure. Passengers passed through security after arriving at DIA. Those not purchasing United flight connections are unable to ride the coach.

On the return journey, passengers at DIA board airside (i.e., behind security) at a gate in the regional concourse mirroring those for flights. To avoid surprises, the **service was displayed on the United departure monitor as being a bus service.** Standard airport ground equipment brought baggage to the coach, which departed with a heavier load than the previous trip and proceeded down the tarmac (see video), curiously surrounded by large planes.



Click for **8 second video** clip from Denver International Airport

This trip to Fort Collins, just 58 miles via highway and scheduled for an hour-and-15 minutes, is too short for a scheduled flight, making this Landline offering more about convenience than eliminating flights. Other key aspects of Landline's operations include:

- During the winter season, **a similar service between DIA and Breckenridge, CO** involves a 104-mile coach trip across Denver and through mountainous terrain, which makes auto travel unpredictable and stressful.
- **American Airlines' partnership linking Philadelphia's international** airport to Atlantic City, NJ and Allentown-Bethlehem, PA exclusively involves airside arrivals and departures. All passengers go through security before their journey begins. Unlike at Fort Collins, American continues to have bona-fide flights from Allentown, so passengers on some itineraries could depart on a flight and return by bus.

- In mid-August, Landline **added a route from Lancaster, PA to Philadelphia**.
- Landline has a **significant operation at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport** with Sun Country Airlines. These coaches, however, have Landline rather than airline branding and are available for bus-only travelers. These services cover longer distances, with a Duluth run being 162 miles.

Stay tuned for future reports in *Intercity Bus E-News*

Caption: A United Airlines departure by Landline is at Fort Collin, CO in August 2022

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## Flix North American Launches in Dallas



July brought important industry news: the creation of Flix North America by Flix SE, the parent company of FlixBus and FlixTrain. The new entity, based in Dallas, TX, will **oversee both Greyhound and FlixBus services** across the continent. The CEO of the new entity, Kadir "Kai" Boysan, is a bus-industry veteran and has been with Flix since 2019.

Along with the announcement came news that Greyhound's CEO, Dave Leach, will retire at year's end. The *Intercity Bus E-News* team offers heartfelt congratulations to Mr. Leach for his steady and skilled leadership at America's largest scheduled intercity bus line during these turbulent times. Bill Blankenship, already part of **Greyhound's senior leadership**, will take the reigns as CEO while continuing to be Chief Operations Officer. Pierre Gourdain, who joined Flix in 2015, will be FlixBus North America's COO. Be sure to check out our podcast (18 minutes) with Mr. Gourdain by clicking [here](#).

These corporate moves did not indicate that major changes at either Greyhound or FlixBus were in the offing. The **brands will likely remain largely distinct for the foreseeable future, although greater coordination** of services and customer support seems likely, particularly on routes where there is significant overlap and where passengers could benefit from cooperation when operational irregularities (such as cancelled departures) occur. Greyhound continues to have expansive

interline agreements with many carriers that provide the benefit of “through” ticketing and other conveniences.

Caption: A FlixBus departure in Washington DC

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## Electric and Charged Up!



This summer was a watershed for electric bus pilots, with a trio of significant developments.

- **Jefferson Lines** held a demonstration of electric motor coaches in Minneapolis in August. The rollout included a 52-passenger Van Hool vehicle with a 250-mile range, which was on a “Zero Emission Tour”.
- **FlixBus** operated a fully electric Van Hool TDX25E over the 143-mile distance between Seattle and Vancouver, BC, from June 22-23, 2022.
- **Flixbus** operated a J4500 Charge coach 139 miles between Philadelphia and Washington, DC, between August 11-19, 2022. With many buses having a range of 200 - 240 miles, these corridors allow for operations **without the “range anxiety”** that occurs when detours and other problems occur.

Expect 2023 to see the permanent adoption of electric buses on the ideal-sized routes.

Caption: A zero-emissions MCI J4500 Charge on display at Des Plaines, IL in May 2022

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## New Departures, More Options

© **NAPAWAY** Napaway attracted much attention last spring for its novel “premium sleeper coach service” and continues to focus on the Nashville, TN to Washington, DC route. Napaway coaches feature **private spaces with lie-flat beds**. The carrier

presently operates just one trip in each direction weekly, leaving Washington at 10 pm on Friday evenings and in the opposite direction on Sunday evenings. One-way fares are set at around \$125.



Megabus will begin selling state-supported services in September in Pennsylvania, operated by [Fullington Trailways](#), on [megabus.com](#). This brings nearly two dozen more destinations to its platform and continues its push to add more state-funded services to its platform. [A new daily service between Buffalo, NY and Pittsburgh](#), as well as more service from State College, PA, were also announced. America's intercity bus industry continues to have three major

booking platforms: those of Greyhound, FlixBus, and Megabus; along with prominent booking aggregator sites, like [wanderu.com](#) and [busbud.com](#), which serve roles akin to Expedia in air travel. Separately, Megabus began a Toronto-New York service, running via Albany, four or five times per week.



[Mid-State Express](#), a new publicly funded bus service [has launched](#) in North Carolina, connecting Winston-Salem to Fayetteville

with stops in High Point, Lexington, and Asheboro. Operated by [Sunway Charters](#), the new service is operated with support from the state's transportation department. This service is designed to connect with both Amtrak and local transit providers.



[FlixBus](#) has launched a [Palms Springs, CA - Las Vegas, NV](#) service and has added several Florida stops, including Key Largo on its Miami - Key West route. FlixBus is also offering weekend Chicago - Bloomington,

IN trips, catering to Indiana University students and gives them a second weekend departure between the Windy City and Indianapolis. The carrier also expanded in Canada, rolling out a new service linking Windsor, ON to Toronto and other points.



[Salt Lake Express](#) has launched a direct route connecting [Boise to Salt Lake City](#). Previously, travelers on this route made transfers, involving a 40-minute layover, in Pocatello, ID.

The service replaces a Greyhound route and includes stops in Twin Falls, IA and Utah's Brigham City and Ogden. Be sure to check out our [2022 Outlook for the Intercity Bus Industry](#) for other recent expansions and its FlixBus partnership.



First class operator [Vonlane](#), which boasts [on-board attendants serving snacks and drinks](#), has [expanded](#) in the Texas Triangle. The carrier, headquartered near Dallas Love Field, added two departures in each

direction on peak travel days between Houston and Fort Worth and Austin, giving it four daily trips on each route. Vonlane also offers eight peak-day departures from Houston to both Dallas and San Antonio as well as on the Dallas – Austin routes. The carrier hopes to relaunch its Oklahoma City service, suspended during the pandemic, this November.



**OurBus** has added a new service connecting Mohegan Sun Casino in Uncasville with both New York and Boston. OurBus also added a **connecting service between Albany, NY and Washington, DC**, via George Washington Bus Station in New York, with stops in Philadelphia and Baltimore.



Check out this [excellent article](#) by the Eno Center for Transportation on the growth of branded state supported bus lines, including Ohio's **GoBus**, Oregon **POINT**, Virginia **Breeze**, and Travel Washington.

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## Feature Podcast with FlixBus's Pierre Gourdain

### Talking Transportation Podcast

Check out [our podcast](#) (18 minutes), a conversation between Pierre Gourdain, CEO of FlixBus USA, and the *Intercity Bus E-News* team. Learn about FlixBus' growth strategy, the creation of Flix North America and electric-bus pilots, with some surprising twists.

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## Make a Presentation at Transportation Research Forum in April 2023



We welcome expressions of interest for presentations on intercity bus topics at the [Transportation Research Forum](#) International Conference April 20-21, 2023 **in downtown Chicago**. "TRF" boasts a compact day-and-a-half format, optional tours, and **affordable registration fees**. Regular rates are less than \$290, and even less for students and one-day attendees. These fees cover our

Awards Luncheon, coffee breaks, and mixers. We welcome **case studies**, **pilot programs**, and service experiments. There will be both lectern and poster presentations. Interested? Respond to this email. The conference typically attracts about 120 people.

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Also, check out our recent studies, briefs, and podcasts:

- Podcast: Talking Transportation: Public Transit's Ridership Recovery, A Glass Half Full? with Chris Kopp, HNTB (August 2022).
- Spring edition of Intercity Bus E-news (May 2022).
- Routes to Recovery 2022: Outlook for the Intercity Bus Industry (February 2022).
- Measuring the Evolving Status of Bus Lines Operating from Asian Neighborhoods in U.S. Cities (research poster).



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