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## Baby Boomers boost tour bus business

Older riders like ease, affordability of letting someone else drive

*JENNIFER YOUSSEF*

*The Detroit News*

Tour bus business is booming as the first wave of baby boomers retire and increasingly choose motor coaches as a means of travel.

Many older travelers are opting to trade the hassle and expense of driving for the ease and affordability of group trips as they head to casinos, baseball games, shopping, fall color tours and plays, among other destinations.

Michigan tour bus companies say they have seen an increase in senior ridership in the past couple of years, which is part of a larger trend. In 2007, 31.6 percent of the motor coach riders in North America were seniors, up from 27.1 percent in 2004, according to the American Bus Association in Washington, D.C. Seniors spent \$17.4 billion on tour and charter buses in 2007, up from \$11.9 billion in 2004.

"The single largest demographic bulge in the population is comprised of baby boomers, and the leading edge of that age group is starting to retire," said Steve Yencich, president of the Michigan Lodging & Tourism Association. "We expect more and more retirees to take advantage of the camaraderie and affordability of group travel by tour bus."

### Bad economy aids ridership

There are many reasons seniors find motor coach travel appealing, such as convenience, ease and the fun of meeting new people, professionals said. But they agree the No. 1 reason for growing bus ridership is a bad economy.

"The economy is making people rethink how they're doing things," said Ken Budd, executive editor of AARP The Magazine. "People still have ambition to travel, without taking a hit to the wallet."

Seniors are boarding the buses at Michigan Charter Service in Novi more often now than in the past, said Bryan Budd, director of sales. The company offers scheduled bus tours to specific destinations and charter buses that groups can take anywhere.

Seniors prefer buses because it's a cheaper way to travel, Budd said. A 56-passenger bus can be rented for six hours for \$600, or about \$11 per person.

"It's steadier now," he said of the senior clientele. "That means they're taking trips more frequently."

For Lona Sweitzer, a 69-year-old retired social worker from Lansing, a tour bus is more than just fun and

economical -- it's peace of mind and pampering.

"Every little thing is taken care of," she said. "You feel taken care of."

Debbie Webber, director of the Romeo-Washington-Bruce Senior Centers, is seeing the trend. More Boomers and Generation Jonesers (born between 1954 and 1965) are signing up for bus trips the center organizes.

This year, the agency organized 25 percent to 30 percent more bus trips, compared to last year, she said.

"As our centers grow, our bus trips do too," she said. "A lot (of seniors) are afraid to fly, and to take a (long car) trip, that's really taxing. Bus trips are just more comfortable for them."

## **Seniors make new friends**

Ridership is down a little bit at Tours by Ruth in Lansing, which owner Ruth Diehm blames on a lackluster economy and some of her regular customers getting too old to travel.

But there are still plenty of older travelers who would rather take a motor coach than drive a car, she said. It's a good way for seniors to meet new people and make new friends, she said.

"Some aren't able to drive anymore, but more than that, it's fun," Diehm said. "It's a house party on wheels."