

Motorcoach Census Update 2009



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Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Study Results	3
3. Study Methodology	5
Target Population	5
Survey Data Collection and Processing	6
Estimation	7

ILLUSTRATIONS

Tables

2-1. Summary Statistics for the Motorcoach Industry in the United States and Canada, 2007-2008	4
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1. Introduction

The American Bus Association (ABA) commissioned the comprehensive benchmarking study *Motorcoach Census 2008* by Nathan Associates to measure the size and activity of the motorcoach passenger transportation industry in the United States and Canada during the year 2007. Industry size was measured by the number of motorcoach carriers and the number of motorcoaches they operated. Activity was measured by the number of passenger trips provided, passenger miles, services provided, motorcoach vehicle and service mileage, fuel consumed, and employment. The study also reported on the competition experienced by motorcoach carriers from transit agencies, the age of motorcoaches, how motorcoaches were acquired, how fuel was purchased, the age of carriers, and other revenue-generating vehicles.¹

This follow-on study, *Motorcoach Census Update 2009*, was sponsored by ABA to update four key statistics for 2007 from *Motorcoach Census 2008* to the year 2008. The key statistics are

- the annual number of passenger trips provided by industry motorcoaches,
- the annual number of motorcoach passenger miles,
- annual motorcoach service miles, and
- the total number of motorcoaches operated by the industry.

The first two, passenger trips and passenger miles, are two common measures of service consumption for passenger transportation.

The estimates in this report are primarily based on a survey of motorcoach carriers that was conducted during the fall of 2009. The survey collected information on the four key statistics for the years 2007 and 2008 so that year-over-year percentage changes in the key statistics could be calculated for each carrier participating in the survey. We are grateful to the carriers that took the time to provide us with information about their firms on a confidential basis; their assistance was crucial to the completion of this study.

¹ Go to <http://www.buses.org/files/Motorcoach%20Census%202008%2012-18-2008.pdf> to access the study report for *Motorcoach Census 2008*.

In addition, we acknowledge and thank the following organizations that gave their support to the study: United Motorcoach Association, Motor Coach Canada, Trailways, International Motorcoach Group, Ontario Motor Coach Association, the Quebec Bus Owners Association, ABC Companies, Motor Coach Industries, Prevost Car, and Daimler Commercial Buses North America.

2. Study Results

Motorcoach Census 2008 found that in 2007 the motorcoach industry in the United States and Canada provided 751 million passenger trips, drove 65.496 billion passenger miles, drove 1.798 billion service miles, and operated 33,536 motorcoaches. In this 2009 update study, we estimated that in 2008

- motorcoach passenger trips were up 1.5% to 762 million,
- motorcoach passenger miles were down 0.6% to 65.088 billion,
- motorcoach service miles were up 1.6% to 1.827 billion, and
- the number of motorcoaches was up 5.0% to 35,217.

In addition, several motorcoach operating ratios were updated. The 2008 study found that, in 2007, passenger trips per motorcoach were 22,394, passenger miles per motorcoach were 1.953 million, service miles traveled per motorcoach were 53,614, passengers per service mile were 36.4, and the average length of a passenger-trip was 87.2 miles. We estimated that in 2008

- passenger trips per motorcoach were down 3.4% to 21,637,
- passenger miles per motorcoach were down 5.4% to 1.848 million,
- service miles traveled per motorcoach were down 3.2% to 51,868,
- passengers per service mile were down 2.2% to 35.6, and
- average passenger-trip length was down 2.1% to 85.4 miles.

The results of the study are summarized in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1*Summary Statistics for the Motorcoach Industry in the United States and Canada, 2007-2008*

	2007	2008	Percent Change
Key Statistics			
Passenger trips	751,000,000	762,000,000	1.5
Passenger miles	65,496,000,000	65,088,000,000	-0.6
Service miles	1,798,000,000	1,827,000,000	1.6
Number of motorcoaches	33,536	35,217	5.0
Selected Motorcoach Operating Ratios			
Passenger trips per motorcoach	22,394	21,637	-3.4
Passenger miles per motorcoach	1,953,000	1,848,000	-5.4
Service miles traveled per motorcoach	53,614	51,878	-3.2
Passengers per service mile	36.4	35.6	-2.2
Average length of a passenger trip in miles	87.2	85.4	-2.1

SOURCE: Nathan Associates Inc.

3. Study Methodology

Target Population

The target population of the study is the motorcoach passenger transportation industry in the United States and Canada in 2008.

The industry consists of private-sector organizations that lease/own and operate motorcoaches and offer motorcoach transportation services to the public, including to private- and public-sector organizations on a contract basis. The industry includes, for example, motorcoach transportation companies that are hired on a contract basis by state or city transit authorities to transport commuters on motorcoaches. The industry excludes, however, governments, transit agencies or other public-sector organizations that lease/own and operate motorcoaches and offer motorcoach transportation services to the public. The industry also excludes private- and public-sector organizations that lease/own and operate motorcoaches just for their own use, such as businesses that operate motorcoaches to shuttle their employees.

Motorcoach transportation services include motorcoach charter services, tour and sightseeing services using motorcoaches, and motorcoach passenger transportation over regular routes and on regular schedules, such as airport shuttle services, commuter transportation services, and scheduled intercity and rural transportation services. The seven types of motorcoach transportation service that were used in this study are defined below.

- **Charter.** Preformed group (organization, association, tour company, shuttle service, church, school, etc.) who hires a motorcoach for exclusive use under a fixed contract.
- **Packaged/Retail Tour.** Planned or prearranged trip offered for sale by a motorcoach transportation company (including a tour company that leases/owns and operates motorcoaches) at fixed price to leisure travelers. Price usually includes lodging, meals, sightseeing, and transportation.
- **Sightseeing.** Service offered by motorcoach or tour companies to view points of interest within a specified area.

- **Airport Shuttle.** Private motorcoaches used to enhance public transportation system service to and from airports.
- **Commuter.** Fixed route bus service, characterized by service predominantly in one direction during peak periods, limited stops, use of multi-ride tickets, and routes of extended length, usually between the central business district and outlying suburbs.
- **Scheduled.** Specified, ticketed, predetermined regular-route service between cities or terminals.
- **Special Operations.** Published, regular-route service to special events, such as fairs, sporting events, or service for employees to work sites.

A motorcoach, or over-the-road bus (OTRB), is defined for this study as a vehicle designed for long-distance transportation of passengers, characterized by integral construction with an elevated passenger deck located over a baggage compartment. It is at least 35 feet in length with a capacity of more than 30 passengers. This definition closely matches the definition of an OTRB written into U.S. law, namely “a bus characterized by an elevated passenger deck located over a baggage compartment” (Section 3038 of Public Law 105-178, 49 USC 5310 note). This definition of a motorcoach excludes the typical city transit bus, which is designed for urban and suburban routes, and city sightseeing buses, such as double-decker buses and trolleys.

Survey Data Collection and Processing

ABA e-mailed survey questionnaires with cover letters to 3,800 motorcoach carriers on September 11, 2009. A questionnaire requested, for 2007 and 2008, information about a carrier’s motorcoach operations, including fleet size, annual mileage, average passenger loads per motorcoach, and annual number of passenger trips. The carriers were instructed to submit their completed questionnaires to Nathan Associates by September 25, 2009. From late September to early December, twelve follow-up data solicitations were distributed by ABA via e-mail. In addition, ABA mailed follow-up data solicitations to 10 larger motorcoach carriers. The final submission deadline was December 16, 2009.

Carriers submitted completed questionnaires to Nathan Associates by e-mail, fax, and mail. The submitted questionnaires were reviewed for completeness and validity. Additional contact was made selectively to resolve unclear responses and to prompt for response to questions left unanswered. We consolidated the questionnaires into an electronic database. The data were tabulated and evaluated for inconsistencies, irregularities and respondent-specific values that were significantly different from average reported values, and survey respondents were contacted to clarify anomalous answers. The final survey database contained usable responses from 87 motorcoach carriers that operated a total of 5,365 motorcoaches in 2008: 11 carriers operated 50 or more motorcoaches, 44 operated 11 to 49 motorcoaches, and 32 operated less than 10. Of the 87 carriers, 48 had also submitted

completed questionnaires for the 2008 Census study and 39 had not. Missing values for 2007 were filled in, when possible, using surveys submissions from the 2008 study. Other missing values were filled in using cell-average imputation and regression imputation.

Estimation

Industry estimates for 2008 were derived using 2007 industry totals from *Motorcoach Census 2008* and average 2008 percentage changes calculated from the survey returns.

The estimated number of industry motorcoaches in 2008, for example, was derived by first calculating, for three carrier fleet-size categories (50 or more motorcoaches, 10 to 49 motorcoaches, and less than 10 motorcoaches), the 2007 numbers of motorcoaches and the average 2008 percentage changes in fleet size. Second, these figures were multiplied together to calculate the 2008 numbers of motorcoaches by fleet-size category. Finally the 2008 numbers of motorcoaches by fleet-size category were summed to calculate the number of industry motorcoaches in 2008.

Estimates for 2008 of passenger trips, passengers miles, and service miles were calculated in a similar manner, except six categories were used. The six categories were defined by the three fleet-size segments and two service segments. The first service segment included charter, tour and sighting services, and the second service segment included fixed-route services (i.e., airport shuttle, commuter, scheduled, and special operations).