MAINTENANCE MATTERS

Planning ahead for preventative maintenance

In this day and age of rising expenses and tight profit margins, fleet managers, even those with just one bus, have more reason than ever to examine their preventative maintenance practices. That reason is good, old-fashioned value. You deserve to get what you pay for when you put your hard-earned dollars down on equipment, and good maintenance is the surest path. Here are a few suggestions:

First, have a preventative maintenance plan and make it your top priority to stick to it.

Take care of any urgent repairs, especially on older coaches. Preventative maintenance is most effective with a fleet that’s already in good shape.

Even new coaches need preventative maintenance, and ignoring the basics could void your warranty. Though rare, it’s not unheard of for engine, transmission and axle manufacturers to demand maintenance records if they see evidence of poor maintenance. The upside is that preventative maintenance will likely save you from many expensive repairs and breakdowns down the road — and definitely take you beyond your competitors who lack your diligence.

Good preventative maintenance goes much further than oil changes and lube jobs. Think of your bus as an active preservation project. Consider your equipment as irreplaceable, and take every step to treat it that way. A good case study is the U.S. Military. Ponder the B-52 bombers still in frontline service after more than 40 years. While the average coach owner does not have the same resources as Uncle Sam does, it illustrates the point.

So, now that you’re sold on the benefits of preventative maintenance, what does it take to make it work? A plan. That plan can take the form of a computer program, or it can be done using logsbooks, file folders and a simple chalkboard. Every maintenance action taken on every vehicle should be carefully recorded. Section 10 of MCI’s Maintenance Manual outlines much of what should be done, but to be thorough, one should consult with one’s engine and transmission distributors for the latest lubricant, coolant and preventative maintenance requirements. Consider using oil analysis at every oil change and taking advantage of technician training classes such as those offered by MCI.

Good intentions and organization are only a start. To succeed, a preventative maintenance initiative must be budgeted and funded, and the shop manager should be expected to furnish weekly or monthly staff reports detailing desired objectives or describing shortfalls. In smaller organizations, it may be helpful to farm out oil changes and lube jobs if workloads become oppressive, but an in-house employee should still inspect any outsourced work.

Every level and every leader of your organization will have to encourage and respect your preventative maintenance program for it to succeed. Managers need to be flexible and reasonable and work to accommodate group objectives. And, like good preventative maintenance, that requires dedication and vision.